

# Education and Colonial Transition: the Hong Kong experience in comparative perspective

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**ABSTRACT** *While in some respects the nature of Hong Kong's colonial transition seems unique, several parallels exist with transitions elsewhere. This paper begins by identifying major differences and similarities in the macro-framework. It then turns specifically to the education sector, noting that the parallel operation of multiple education systems within the boundaries of a single country is quite common and, therefore, that models already exist for continued plurality of the type that might be envisaged for Hong Kong and the rest of China. Examining changes at various points in time, the paper observes that some reforms were made in Hong Kong's educational provision well ahead of the commencement of colonial transition and far in advance of parallel points in the history in other colonies. The paper then turns to specific changes which occurred during the period 1984–1997 and to commentary on the further changes that may be expected in the continuing period of transition that commenced in 1997. Analysis of the currents and counter-currents makes Hong Kong an important case to study, both in its own right and as a case to compare and contrast with patterns elsewhere.*

## Introduction

Much of the field of comparative education is devoted to finding and explaining patterns. In the process, comparativists frequently encounter cases that do not fit existing frameworks and which seem paradoxical. These cases require adjustment of conceptual schema to accommodate variations.

In several respects, Hong Kong's colonial transition and its associated implications for education is a case which does not fit standard frameworks. An analysis of the Hong Kong patterns within a comparative framework also exposes many paradoxes. However, the Hong Kong case is not unique in all aspects and it is the task of comparativists to identify the commonalities as well as those which appear distinctive.

This paper begins with the broad literature on colonial transition, to identify some ways in which the Hong Kong pattern does and does not match experiences elsewhere. It then turns specifically to the education sector, beginning with a commentary on the phenomenon of one country with multiple education systems and then turning to changes at various points in time. The paper also notes some continuities and observes that, as in other parts of the world, the processes of colonial transition are likely to last long beyond the change of sovereignty. Experiences elsewhere assist comprehension of the Hong Kong case, but, at the same time, analysis of the Hong Kong case can add to a broader conceptual understanding.

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## Patterns of Colonial Transition

A substantial literature focuses on the patterns of colonial transition in different parts of the world and at different points in time (e.g. Hargreaves, 1988; Ansprenger, 1989; Betts, 1991; Füredi, 1994). This literature displays wide variations in the experiences of particular territories and particular eras, but it also shows extensive commonalities. Among the commonalities was that the majority of colonies moved to sovereign independence. The governments of the newly sovereign states had to undertake major tasks of nation building and, seeing education as a major instrument for this task, embarked on both the reorientation and expansion of their education systems. Other commonalities included the fact that most post-colonial states retained at least some links with their former colonial powers, in many cases fostered through financial aid from the metropolises. In addition, while some states moved to socialist regimes, the majority remained in the capitalist mode with the same basic forms of economic production.

Hong Kong's reintegration with China rather than a transition to independent sovereignty is perhaps the most striking feature which distinguishes its situation from that of most other colonial territories. Some observers (e.g. Scott, 1995) perceive the new arrangement as another form of dependency and external control and, thus, argue that Hong Kong's transition is not one of decolonisation so much as recolonisation [1]. Parallels could be drawn with Goa (which became part of India in 1961) and with West Irian and East Timor (which became parts of Indonesia in 1963 and 1976, respectively).

Yet even within a subcategory of territories which have not moved to sovereign independence, Hong Kong's transition must be set apart from most others. Both Goa and East Timor were integrated with their neighbours abruptly and by force [2]. West Irian's transition was slower and in this respect perhaps resembles the patterns in Hong Kong more closely. However, the economic and social framework in West Irian was much less sophisticated than that in Hong Kong and while some people in West Irian may have had misgivings, the political mood was not characterised by public disquiet of the type seen in Hong Kong.

A much closer parallel to Hong Kong's case is that of Macau. The latter is a territory under Portuguese administration which is geographically close to Hong Kong. It has only 400,000 people compared to Hong Kong's 6.3 million, but it is also mainly populated by people of Chinese ethnicity and its economy is also heavily dependent on trade, light industry and tourism. Even more relevant is that Macau is scheduled for reintegration with China, in a model which is very similar to that for Hong Kong, in 1999. Hong Kong and Macau therefore seem to exist in a class of their own and to provide particularly fertile ground for comparative studies (see, e.g. Yee, 1988; Bray, 1992; Ghai, 1995; Tan, 1995).

Contrasting with the majority of colonial transitions, another marked difference in the Hong Kong case (and also that of Macau) lies in the period of history in which it is taking place. One result of the fact that Hong Kong's transition was begun at the end of the twentieth century rather than earlier has been that its base of human capital has been much stronger than that of earlier territories undergoing colonial transition. Even in 1981, 15.8% of the population aged 15 years and over had senior secondary or higher qualifications and 3.4% had tertiary education; by 1991 the respective proportions had risen to 21.5 and 5.7% (Government of Hong Kong, 1993, p. 203). This may be contrasted with Zambia, for example, which gained independence in 1964 with barely 100 African university graduates in its population of 3.2 million (Alexander, 1983, pp. 205–206). Like earlier colonies in transition, the Hong Kong Government has faced some issues of localisation of the senior ranks of the civil service (Cheung, 1994; Lee, 1994). However, by the 1990s the remaining number of expatriate officers was very small and, even after the loss of many skilled locals due

to emigration, all sectors of the economy and administration remained well endowed with human capital.

The duration of the timetable for the change of sovereignty is another aspect in which Hong Kong's colonial transition has differed markedly from the majority of other such exercises. Even taking the starting point of the transition as September 1984, when the Sino-British Agreement was signed [3], the period leading up to the change of flags was set at nearly 13 years. This duration far exceeds most patterns elsewhere. Perhaps the most striking contrast in the Asian region was the abrupt termination of Japanese rule over Taiwan and Korea at the end of the Second World War in 1945. India's move to sovereignty was also accomplished at great speed in 1947 and a comparable pace was maintained in Ceylon and Burma, which gained sovereignty from the British within 5 months of India. Rapid timetables for transition were also implemented in Indo-China in the early 1950s and in French West Africa and the Belgian Congo in 1960. In Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, the Portuguese Government devoted resources to resisting rather than facilitating decolonisation, but, after the 1974 revolution in Portugal, events moved very swiftly in those colonies too. In the South Pacific and a few other parts of the world the pace was more measured, but in very few places did the timetable allow anything like the duration arranged in Hong Kong [4]. Some implications of this long period of transition will be drawn out below.

### One Country, Many (Education) Systems

The basic model for the era from 1 July 1997 of 'one country, two systems' means that Hong Kong will again be an integral part of China, but that its capitalist system in the Special Administrative Region (SAR) will co-exist with the socialist system in the rest of China. Many constitutions permit diversity in the ideology of subnational governments, but no other country in the world has formal provision which quite matches this arrangement.

However, the concept of one country with two or more education systems is quite common. Within the UK, for example, the education system in Scotland has always differed in structure and emphasis from that of England and Wales (Grant, 1981; Whitburn, 1995) [5]. Most countries which operate federal structures, such as Australia, Germany, India and the USA, have even more education systems within single national frameworks (Rideout & Ural, 1993).

Moreover, even in unitary states the dominant education system is rarely the only one and this was evident even in the pre-1997 arrangements in Hong Kong and China. Thus, even within what may be called the Hong Kong education system, schools have operated in subsystems differentiated by their sponsoring bodies, languages of instruction and various other factors (Government of Hong Kong, 1994) and parallel to the Hong Kong education system has long existed a diverse collection of international and other schools (Bray & Jeong, 1996). Mainland China has had more uniformity than Hong Kong, but has also had some diversity. For example, while many parts of the country have for several decades operated a 6 + 3 + 3 + 4 system (i.e. 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education), other parts have operated a 5 + 4 system at the primary/junior secondary levels, a 4 + 2 + 3 system or various other combinations. Hu *et al.* (1991, p. 111) indicated that in 1988 approximately 40% of pupils attended 6 year primary schools, but that the others were in schools following a 5 + 4, 5 + 3 or 9 year integrated structure. Recent years have also brought diversification through an increasingly vigorous private sector (Mok & Chan, 1995; Wang, 1995). Recognition of this diversity makes it easier to envisage how Hong Kong and the rest of China might continue to co-exist with different education systems.

The expectation that substantial diversity in educational systems will continue within the national framework is evident from the wording of Hong Kong's Basic Law for the Special Administrative Region. Article 136 of this document (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1990) states that from 1 July 1997

On the basis of the previous educational system, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall, on its own, formulate policies on the development and improvement of education, including policies regarding the educational system and its administration, the language of instruction, the allocation of funds, the examination system, the system of academic awards and the recognition of educational qualifications.

Analysts who focus on local issues without a comparative analysis might underestimate the significance of this statement. In most political transitions and in particular those involving socialist regimes education is one of the starting points for reshaping societies and is considered by the leadership which has just gained sovereignty far too important to be left outside their control (see, e.g. Buchanan, 1978; Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). During the decade prior to Hong Kong's change of sovereignty, the nature of educational provision certainly went through various fundamental changes, some of which are documented below and others will emerge in the post-1997 period. However, almost none of these changes so far have been the result of overt direction from Beijing and, during the period leading up to the change of sovereignty, the education sector was given nothing like the attention devoted to such matters as the new airport, financial reserves, land reclamation or the Court of Final Appeal. Officials in Beijing undoubtedly exercised some influence on the developments in the education sector, but they cannot easily be said to have exercised control. Moreover, the influence was to a large extent vicarious, taking the form of changes decided upon by the people of Hong Kong acting on what they themselves felt would be most favoured by the authorities in Beijing, rather than according to explicit statements of what those authorities actually did favour.

### **Autonomy and Educational Decolonisation Prior to the Transitional Period**

Before turning to the transitional period commencing in 1984, it is instructive to note two examples of autonomy and change in Hong Kong's educational provision which occurred long before the timetable for colonial transition was announced. In most comparable settings, parallel changes of these types only occurred towards or even after the end of colonial rule. The fact that the Hong Kong patterns were different underlines the complexity of the picture and also exposes some paradoxes.

The first example concerns public examinations at the secondary level. In most colonies, such examinations were operated by bodies in the metropole. In British colonies this chiefly meant the examination boards operated by the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford and/or London. Secondary form 5 pupils commonly sat either school certificate or O level examinations and form 7 pupils sat either higher school certificate or A level examinations. The examining boards did commonly adjust the content of the examinations to fit local conditions, but the colonial ties to the metropole were very clear.

Hong Kong, by contrast, has a long history of examinations set and administered within the territory. Cambridge Local Examinations were introduced in 1886 and replaced by Oxford Local Examinations in 1889; however, in 1937 a genuinely local Hong Kong school certificate examination was established by the government's Education Department (Sweeting, 1990, pp. 212–213 and 358). In 1977 the government established a separate Hong Kong

Examinations Authority (HKEA) to take over this role, together with the 'H' level examination which was being operated by the Chinese University of Hong Kong for secondary form 6 students and the A level examination which was being operated by the University of Hong Kong for form 7 students (Sweeting, 1995b, p. 64). This picture contrasts with the fact that in 1981, for example, the main secondary school examinations in seven post-colonial African states were still set by the University of Cambridge (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1992, p. 10) [6] and, even today, Singapore continues to use Cambridge Local Examinations, despite having been a sovereign state since 1965 (Chong, 1996) [7]. In this respect, therefore, Hong Kong may be seen to have developed some autonomy well ahead of the general pattern.

The second example of early structural change related to schools for expatriate children. A major issue for the governments of many territories undergoing colonial transition concerned the future of schools serving the families of the colonisers. These schools operated in the colonial language, followed metropolitan curricula and were mainly staffed by teachers recruited from the colonising country. In Papua New Guinea, for example, 'A' (Australian) schools were in effect metropolitan institutions operating on Papua New Guinean soil, in contrast to 'T' (territory) schools for local children (Smith, 1987, p. 271). Similar differentiation was evident in other colonies, sometimes with further classification for different races. In most cases, the schools for non-indigenous children were resourced much more lavishly than the schools for locals. In Uganda, for example, in 1959 the government spent £186 on the education of each European child, compared with £38 on each Asian child and just £11 on each African child in school (Ball, 1983, p. 251). The gaps were even wider in Kenya, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa (Mulusa, 1992, p. 160; Maravanyika, 1995, p. 7) and, in Singapore, the grants-in-aid paid by the government in 1955 were \$219 per pupil in English schools, \$94 in Asian schools and \$70 in Chinese schools (Wilson, 1978, p. 210).

The Papua New Guinean mechanism for tackling this matter was to some extent typical of the model used in other settings. Two years after Papua New Guinea attained independence in 1975, the government, on the one hand, permitted private schools to be founded for those who were prepared to pay for alternative curricula and, on the other hand, established an International Education Agency (IEA) to take over the existing government schools for expatriate children (Smith & Bray, 1985, pp. 120–121). The IEA schools were funded by the government according to the same formula as local schools, but were permitted to charge fees in order to supplement their resources and employ expatriate teachers on higher salaries.

The Hong Kong Government adopted a similar strategy, but did so long before the closing years of the colonial era. The body created to take charge of the government's schools for expatriates was called the English Schools Foundation (ESF) and was established in 1967. The creation of this body permitted the government to meet what it considered to be its obligations to the children of expatriate families while avoiding accusations of distorted priorities and excessive funding for a racial minority (Bray & Jeong, 1996). The move was a far-sighted initiative which avoided some of the tensions which, in the absence of such an arrangement, would probably have later become considerable [8].

### **Educational Changes between 1984 and 1997**

To these long-standing examples of adjustment and reform may be added examples of educational changes between the signing of the 1984 Sino-British Agreement and the 1997 change of sovereignty. Most strikingly, perhaps, the transition from the status of colony to that of SAR has required major changes in the curriculum. These have included the addition of new subjects, the adjustment of existing subjects, an emphasis on civic education and revised policies on the medium of instruction. Some dimensions of these matters have already

been examined in the literature (e.g. Morris, 1992a,b; Sweeting, 1995a,b; Tan, 1995; Lee, 1996) [9]. The following paragraphs summarise some salient points and relate them to the comparative focus of this paper.

Among the new subjects in many schools were Putonghua, government and public affairs and liberal studies. Putonghua became of obvious increased significance as the national language of the PRC (Kwo, 1992, p. 203; The Education Commission, 1995, pp. 27–28) and government and public affairs helped students to understand the political processes in Hong Kong, the PRC and other parts of the world (Morris, 1992b, p. 129). Liberal studies explicitly included among its major aims an understanding of China and of Hong Kong's colonial transition. For example, one of its six modules aimed to help students 'to appreciate the special relationship that H.K. [Hong Kong] and China enjoy and the mutual advantages that flow from that relationship, and to understand better the contribution that H.K. is making, and can make, to China's modernization' (Hong Kong Examinations Authority, 1994, p. 446).

Concerning existing subjects, significant changes were made in the syllabuses for history and social studies. In 1988 the secondary school history syllabus, which had previously only covered China up to 1949, was amended to permit study up to the year 1970. Morris (1992b) commented that the new syllabus provided pupils with 'a more politicised historical framework than was previously the case, and one more relevant to Hong Kong's future' (p. 129). Tan (1995) added that the degree of Anglocentricism was reduced with the deletion of British colonial history from the school certificate syllabus and noted that in the 1994 A level syllabus the commencement date for the study of Hong Kong history was set at 1800 rather than 1841, to emphasise that the territory was part of China before colonisation and that the colonial period can be seen simply as an interlude. The social studies syllabus, which is taken by secondary students in forms 1–3, was also adjusted to give a much greater focus on China than had previously been the case (Morris, 1992b, p. 131).

Civic education in Hong Kong is primarily seen as a co-curricular and cross-curricular input rather than as a school subject. In 1985, 1 year after the signing of the Sino-British Declaration, the government issued *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* (Civic Education Committee, Education Department, 1985). The document was directly tied to initiatives to develop representative government, which were themselves part of the transitional arrangements initiated by the colonial authorities. In many institutions, implementation of the guidelines was half-hearted (Chan, 1993; Leung, 1995); but in 1996 a new set of guidelines revitalised attention (Education Department, 1996). The new guidelines made an explicit link between civic education and the political transition, suggesting for example that

the civic learner needs to know the cultural and political identity of Hong Kong as a Chinese community, as a British colony for a certain period, and as the HKSAR of China from July 1997. At a time of political transition, we need our citizens to actively adopt a new national identity, and to be participative and contributive to bring about smooth transitions, to sustain prosperity and stability and to further improve the Hong Kong society. (Education Department, 1996, p. 21)

Questions about the medium of instruction were also closely related to issues of political transition. In 1990, 91.7% of secondary schools claimed to offer instruction through the medium of English, while the remainder taught in Cantonese (Lee, 1993, p. 206). The demand for English chiefly reflected the economic benefits that parents perceived their children to gain from having a command of the language and the proportion of secondary schools claiming to operate in English had risen steadily from 57.9% in 1960. However, many students had great difficulty learning through English and a substantial proportion of

schools which claimed to teach in English actually taught either in Cantonese or in mixed code. This situation was addressed in a series of official and semi-official documents (e.g. The Education Commission, 1990, 1994, 1995) and the government sought ways to encourage schools, pupils and parents to shift from English medium to Chinese medium (Sweeting, 1991; Johnson, 1995). To some extent the rationale was pedagogical, but it was also political. Although the main moves were to Cantonese rather than Putonghua, the shift was seen as a move to at least one form of Chinese and away from the colonial language. In addition, many schools ensured that Putonghua was taught as a subject in either the main or the supplementary curriculum. By 1994–1995, approximately 40% of primary and secondary schools were offering Putonghua as an optional subject and, following the launch in 1996 of a new Putonghua curriculum for primary form 1 to secondary form 5, this proportion was expected to increase markedly (Kwok, 1996, p. 5).

Placing these developments in a comparative context, several features stand out. First is that, as in most other territories undergoing colonial transition, a major goal was to excise elements which could be identified as explicitly colonial. However, in most territories that had undergone transition the colonial material was replaced by a content which sought to build self-confidence within the youth as part of a newly independent nation. In Hong Kong, much of the emphasis of the added content was not so much on the Hong Kong identity as on the ways that Hong Kong students should see themselves as part of the larger country of which they were becoming part. This resembled the patterns in West Irian, Goa and other territories which had been integrated with neighbouring states (see, e.g. Varde, 1977; Beeby, 1979).

Second, the fact that Hong Kong had a long preparatory time scale permitted the revision of curricula well in advance of the change of sovereignty. Ongoing work will of course be required for some years, but the fact that so much has already been accomplished is in sharp contrast to the experience of most other colonies, where major qualitative reforms could only be undertaken after the change of sovereignty (see, e.g. Hawes, 1979; Morrissey, 1990). Attention to qualitative matters was facilitated by the fact that Hong Kong had had universal enrolments up to secondary form 3 since the late 1970s. This contrasts with Nigeria, for example, where qualitative reform in the late colonial period was made impossible by the pressure for expansion. As recounted by Abernethy (1969)

the rapid expansion of the educational system in the 1950's precluded simultaneous reform of the system; administrative energies were spent duplicating existing buildings and materials rather than encouraging innovation, and thousands of untrained teachers could hardly be expected to handle an ambitious new curriculum, even had one been devised. (p. 225)

A similar remark about Third World countries in general has been made by Bacchus (1992, p. 103).

Concerning civic education, the fact that the government made a push for democratisation at the end of the colonial era to some extent matched patterns in other parts of the world during parallel periods of history (von Albertini, 1982, pp. 88–90). However, the situation had various problems, among which were that the efforts were viewed with considerable misgiving by the PRC Government (Ghai, 1995, p. 279; Miners, 1995, pp. 22–28). Far from promoting a smooth transition as envisaged, it seemed that many aspects of the push for democratisation, including elements of civic education that were linked with it, made the period more turbulent than it would otherwise have been.

The language issue also contained many complexities and ironies. The first was that parents continued to favour instruction in English, despite the fact that it was the language

of the colonisers and that the colonial period was coming to a close. Their reasons, of course, were pragmatic rather than political: the fact that English was the colonial language was incidental and its more important features included its usefulness as an international language for trade and general communication. A second irony was that the Hong Kong Government, which was still a colonial regime albeit in its sunset phase, itself favoured education in Chinese rather than in English [10]. Thirdly, despite the non-elected and ostensibly authoritarian nature of the colonial system, officials were unwilling to issue direct instructions and make teaching in Chinese compulsory. This reflected the fact that the colonial regime did not consider itself to have sufficient strength or legitimacy to undertake an unpopular move of this nature.

As with other dimensions, the Hong Kong situation shows some instructive similarities and differences from other parts of the world in the language issue. Many former colonies have retained colonial languages for reasons of national unity in the face of competing claims from indigenous languages (Watson, 1994). This has not been a factor in Hong Kong, where 98% of the population are of Chinese ethnicity and where Cantonese is by far the most widely spoken language in the territory. In Singapore, English has achieved dominance not only because of the linguistic pluralism of the population but also because of the importance of international trade to the economy. Had Hong Kong moved to sovereignty rather than to reintegration with the PRC, it seems likely that the demands of international trade would have held greater sway against the linguistic homogeneity of the bulk of the population and that accordingly English would have been given greater emphasis. In the event, the reunification with China has added weight to the arguments for Chinese-medium schooling. Yet still the twist remains that almost all schools have moved to Cantonese rather than Putonghua as the medium of instruction. The move thus symbolises a form of continued self-determination and distinctiveness for Hong Kong within the new national framework.

One final observation on language is that because Hong Kong's transition was negotiated rather than unilaterally determined, a continuing role for English has been secured for at least the next 50 years. The Basic Law, which is the principal statutory result of the negotiation, enshrines an ongoing role for English with the statement (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1990, Article 9) that

In addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Since English is perceived so widely as a useful international language, perhaps this statement is less striking than the almost exactly parallel clause for Macau (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1993, Article 9), which assures a continued role in that territory for Portuguese. Had sovereignty over Macau been seized rather than negotiated, as was the case for Goa and East Timor, no such ongoing official place for the colonial language would have been retained. A parallel point presumably applies to Hong Kong.

### **Continuing Transition beyond 1997**

During the decade leading up to 1997, the focus on the preparations for the change of sovereignty so strongly dominated professional and popular consciousness that consideration of the ongoing changes likely to occur after that date was generally neglected. Yet while in a constitutional sense the timetable made 30 June 1997 a specific watershed, a change of sovereignty cannot bring so abrupt a change of structures and processes—and even less can it bring a sharp change of values. One strong lesson from the literature is that colonial legacies



are long enduring. Clammer's comments about Fiji (quoted by Tagupa, 1987) have some applicability to many societies, including Hong Kong:

Colonialism has profoundly influenced the Fijians' perceptions of their traditional polity and its sustaining beliefs.... [But] the recent de-colonisation of Fiji has been more apparent than real, for while the official demise of colonialism has meant the rejection of its overt influence and apparatus, its mental creations have not vanished with them. (p. 100)

One question arising from this comment is what Fijian society would have looked like if the mental creations of colonialism *had* disappeared with its official demise. Clearly it was unrealistic to expect Fijian society to have returned to the structure existing in the nineteenth century pre-colonial period. Moreover, societies decolonised to sovereignty presumably have a right to self-determination which includes deliberate choice to perpetuate structures established during the colonial era. Thus, the fact that the Singapore Government has chosen to retain the services of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate instead of creating its own school certificate examination does not necessarily mean that Singapore should still be considered a colonised society. Instead, the Singaporeans may be recognised to have considered their options and then actively used their powers of self-determination to have chosen the mechanism that seemed to them to serve their interests most appropriately.

The Hong Kong case is more complex because of the role of the government in Beijing and because of influences in the rest of the PRC. Hong Kong may be expected to have more autonomy than West Irian and East Timor, because such autonomy is explicitly built into Hong Kong's Basic Law, whereas Indonesia is a highly centralised, unitary state. However, even though Article 136 of the Basic Law indicates that 'the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall, on its own, formulate policies on the development and improvement of education' a question remains about the basis on which the SAR Government will proceed with this formulation. Since Hong Kong is expected to continue to be financially self-sufficient for the foreseeable future (and, indeed, will probably subsidise other parts of China), it seems unlikely that financial instruments will be used by the authorities in Beijing to influence changes. However, a wide range of other formal and informal mechanisms will still be available and much will depend on the attitudes of the dominant powers not only in Beijing but also in nearby Guangdong. Decisions are likely to be based on pragmatic factors, such as access to jobs through mutual recognition of degrees and other qualifications, as well as on ideology.

Meanwhile, it must also be noted that in some ways education may act as a vehicle for resistance to decolonisation. Ever since the early stages of Hong Kong's colonial history, individuals, families and classes have used the Western-style education system to achieve higher social status and economic reward. The continuing demand for English-language qualifications is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the ways in which large segments of the population continue to see the education system, with all its imported attributes, as a vehicle for achieving higher social status and economic reward. While the resistance to change might be disappointing to many proponents of localisation in education (O'Brien Friederichs, 1992, p. 172), it does not seem likely that patterns will change radically in the near future.

## Conclusions

The literature on education and colonial transition in different parts of the world displays

both commonalities and diversity. Elsewhere, the author has pointed out that analysis of education in the remnants of an empire, which include Hong Kong, requires paradigms which are slightly different from those commonly used to analyse decolonisation of the main body of an empire (Bray, 1994). The present paper elaborates on that theme with particular reference to Hong Kong. Among the differences are that the transition is not to sovereign independence, the lead up time to the change of flags is long and the base of human capital is substantial. In addition, the change of sovereignty is not being resisted by the colonial power, which is primarily concerned with securing an exit which is smooth and honourable. Whitehead (1981) has been among scholars calling for 'more detailed case studies of educational development in individual colonies' (p. 79), so that the literature can advance away from 'glib generalisations'. Concentrating on the Hong Kong case, this paper can perhaps meet part of what Whitehead (1981) had in mind.

Hong Kong's Basic Law promises considerable autonomy within the reunified framework. It remains to be seen how well the formula of one country, two systems can work, but educators may find it reassuring to note that the operation of multiple education systems within a single national framework is far from uncommon in the world. This paper has pointed out that the fact that the arrangements for Hong Kong's transition were negotiated rather than unilaterally imposed by the PRC makes a substantial difference to the structures and processes. In particular, at least the structures exist for autonomy in decision making. The question then becomes how far the decision makers will be permitted and will feel keen to use that autonomy.

Dividing the discussion into several time periods, this paper has pointed out that some major changes in Hong Kong's education system, in contrast to patterns in other parts of the world, were undertaken long before the close of the colonial period. Further changes were initiated after 1984 and as the 1990s progressed the pace of reform began to quicken as decision makers at all levels sought to make adjustments prior to what they perceived to be the deadline for the change of sovereignty (Lee & Bray, 1995, p. 370). Yet one major lesson from the literature is that the transition will not end with a simple change of sovereignty. Further changes are inevitable and may be at least as radical as those witnessed during the decade leading up to 1997. Some observers will see them as changes for the worse, but other participants, even within Hong Kong, will see the reintegration with China more as an opportunity than a threat. For example, the fact that to some extent Putonghua will take over from English as a high-status language for discourse with non-locals will favour those groups within the population who have stronger fluency in Putonghua.

On the other hand, Hong Kong is unlikely to resemble other post-colonial societies which have found their sovereignty compromised by foreign aid and the strings attached (Avalos, 1982; Watson, 1982). Indeed, the fact that Hong Kong's economy has in recent years been rather more dynamic than that of the UK itself has meant that even during the period of formal ties the relationship in the UK has been rather different from that between other colonies and their metropolises. The UK Government will undoubtedly wish to maintain at least some economic ties with Hong Kong and will probably continue to promote exchanges in tertiary education and among policy makers. However, after 1997 the centre of gravity is likely to shift markedly towards Beijing as well as, to some extent, Guangdong Province, Shanghai and other parts of the PRC.

However, the changes will not be clear-cut and comparative study highlights the likelihood of many ongoing ambiguities. Should the Hong Kong Government, either of its own volition or under pressure from the authorities in Beijing, undertake unpopular changes in the public system of education, many middle-class families will turn to the private sector. Of course it is possible that the Hong Kong Government would clamp down on the private

sector too. However, given that the private sector has begun to flourish in mainland China itself, this does not seem very likely. Pluralism is likely to prevail and to some extent this will facilitate covert resistance to the dramatic changes which would otherwise sweep through the post-colonial society.

Amidst these currents and counter-currents, for the academic community one certainty remains. The certainty is that the Hong Kong case will continue to deserve detailed attention, both as a study in its own right and as a case to compare and contrast with patterns in other parts of the world.

## NOTES

- [1] See also Law's article in this issue.
- [2] It may also be noted that Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor is not recognised by all governments or by the United Nations (UN) itself (United Nations, 1992, p. 192).
- [3] An alternative starting date would be April 1982, when Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping met with a UK delegation and confirmed the intention of the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to reclaim sovereignty over Hong Kong. However, September 1984 is the more commonly accepted starting date for the transition.
- [4] Macau again provides the closest parallel, with a 12 year period between the signing of the 1987 Sino-Portuguese Agreement and the 1999 change of sovereignty.
- [5] By coincidence, this pair of systems has at least one parallel with the pair formed by mainland China and Hong Kong: the basic length of university degree courses in Scotland, as in mainland China, is 4 years, whereas the basic length in England and Wales, as in Hong Kong, is 3 years.
- [6] The seven countries were Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- [7] See also the paper by Jason Tan in this issue.
- [8] It is worth noting in passing that no parallel move was made in neighbouring Macau, where even in the mid-1990s schools for Portuguese children comprised a major share of the institutions operated directly by the government (Governo de Macau, 1995).
- [9] Some themes are treated in considerably greater detail by Morris and Chan and Adamson and Auyeung Lai in this issue.
- [10] This was not a new stance for the colonial authorities and had been a feature of various earlier policy pronouncements (see Sweeting, 1991).

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