

Introduction

This chapter aims to critically review the context and features of bureaucracy during the colonial period from 1842 and 1997, and then examine whether the bureaucracy under the administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government has continued the colonial practices substantially, or made an adaption in face of the changing political and socio-economic contexts. By deploying the education reforms introduced and enforced by the HKSAR government, this chapter argues that the bureaucratic system founded by the British, with the aim to dominate the process and outcome of the public administration and public policy, has no fundamental changes after 1997. Departing from a purely economic and official discourse and perspective, education reforms are reviewed analytically in light of how the authoritarian bureaucratic system, under the absence of a democratic and participatory polity, has been shaped the stakeholders and then manipulated the policy content. In sum, this study will evaluate holistically and critically the strengths and limitations of bureaucracy to achieve good governance in connection with accountability, transparency, responsiveness and participation, or to enforce political hegemony and manipulation in the name of reform, excellence, and professionalism.

Context

Colonial period (1842–1997)

During the colonial rule from 1842 to 1997, except for an interval due to the Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945, the British experience dominated the bureaucracy of Hong Kong, shaping the beliefs, forms and manifestations of policy formulation and implementation. Before the 1980s, the British fully dominated the senior positions of the local administration, and the local Chinese (i.e. Hongkongers) could only serve in subordinate positions, following instructions for the execution of policy and without engaging in the decision-making arena. This condition changed incrementally from the 1980s, given the fact that Hong Kong would return to the rule of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997. Localization was introduced and undergone in the face of political transition where the experienced civil servants were promoted to, and then engaged in, the process of decision-making. The appointment of Anson Chan as the first Chinese Chief Secretary in 1993 symbolizes the undertaking of localization in the civil service.

The historical features of the Hong Kong bureaucracy in engaging in the policy-making and decision-making process can be synthesized as follows:

Executive-led governance: This describes the politically dominant position held by the executive in the government of Hong Kong in general, and in executive-legislature relations in particular. Derived from the power distribution and institutional articulation under the colonial rule between 1842 and 1997, and continued in the post-1997 administration, the dominant position of the executive, led by the governor in the pre-1997 period and then the Chief Executive from 1997, was supported by the fact that the executive was vested with the power to constitute the Legislative Council. In this connection, government-initiated bills and budgets were never seriously challenged in the Legislative Council (Li, 2007: 31-2). Also, the

government could make and implement policies in the form of administrative instructions or measures without needing to seek the approval of the legislature, then providing another influential channel to penetrate its power in policy implementation.

Pure administrative polity: Under the leadership of the governor, prior to 1997, many major public policy decisions were actually proposed and articulated by civil servants who served as policy secretaries. With such a systemic arrangement, the political system was actually a bureaucracy-dominated system, with only bureaucrats but no politicians; or bureaucrats became politicians in all but name. The bureaucracy was a single and critical agent within the institution. The deliberate absence of ‘politics’ was often taken as one of the key features of the governance of Hong Kong (Wong, 2007: 76). It has been asserted that Hong Kong was a ‘pure administrative state’ – a state with only administration and without ‘politics’, according to Harris (1988) – or a ‘bureaucratic polity’ – a political system run mainly by the bureaucrats (Lau, 1982). This political practice served two purposes: (1) the establishment of a depoliticized society in which power and politics were not ‘existent’ or ‘actualized’ in the administration, thereby articulating a positive and professional image in which the government operated and governed purely based on efficient, economical and effective management, not on the contestation and bargaining of various political forces and stakeholders within the policy field, and (2) politics and administration should be separated because the former only shapes the public and collective interest in policy formulation and implementation negatively. The public administration, in contrast, was depicted as neutral, impartial and impersonal.

Top-down consultation: The government set up a number of advisory and/or consultative committees in different policy areas, including representatives of outside interests with whom the government found it necessary to cooperate, in order to make it work better and to provide a more efficient service for the public. Despite the increasing number of such advisory committees from the 1980s, they were of minor importance and had little to do with influencing government policy. In terms of functions, they served (1) to tap expert advice in the area where the government sought to exercise control, (2) to stimulate action by businesses and other outside interests in directions which the government considered desirable, (3) to take politically embarrassing decisions for which the government preferred to avoid direct responsibility, (4) to ensure the cooperation of voluntary agencies which provide services on the government's behalf, (5) to satisfy the public that the government was concerned about a particular problem and doing something about. The appointment of a committee gives an excuse for postponing any action, and there is always the possibility that by the time the committee reports public interest will have shifted elsewhere and nothing need be done (Miners, 1995: 106-107). The consultation, on the whole, was manipulative, and symbolic in agenda setting and operation.

In terms of the nature of the civil service, the generalist administrative system, which was adopted in Britain in light of the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms introduced gradually in the period 1854–1920, was employed in Hong Kong. This set up a competitive written examination, which aimed to distinguish between clerical and intellectual grades on the basis of holding a university degree, to provide for a unified civil service in which individuals could be transferred from one department to another, and to assess the grounds for promotion based on merit. A hierarchical structure was

also deployed to clearly define and bound the various functions. At the top was the administrative class who were normally expected to have university degrees and who were concerned in their day-to-day work with policy and finance. They were assisted in the implementation of policy by the executive class, whose members had usually completed secondary school, and by a clerical class which provided support services to both groups (Scott & Burns, 1988: 19-22). Since the 1990s, the executive officers also tend to hold undergraduate degrees, given the expansion of the tertiary education during that period. The logic of the generalist system, in this light, was that those selected for the administrative grade should have the qualities of good ‘all-rounders’. They were not expected to have any specific knowledge, but they were expected to have the ability to find out anything they needed to know and to make intelligent policy decisions on specific matters (Scott & Burns, 1988: 30).

Accordingly, the values embedded in such generalist administrative systems can be described as procedural and instrumental, aiming to deploy bureaucrats to promote and facilitate the policy-making process. Table 1 shows the values and structures common to generalist-dominated administrative systems.

Table 1: Values and structure in generalist-dominated administrative systems (Scott & Burn, 1988: 21)

Administrative values	Structural means and personnel practices used to achieve values
Innovation: new policy ideas, better ways of realizing old policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of graduates with good university degrees who are potentially innovative. • Rotation of generalists between departments, and

	<p>especially in top positions, to bring fresh ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further training/education for ‘mind-broadening’ purposes
Coordination (of agreed policy)	Rotation of generalists to expose them to different policy areas. The award of high status to generalists within the bureaucracy in order to facilitate coordination. Contacts between generalists in different departments to mobilize resources for policy implementation. Committee of high-ranking generalists to coordinate policy at the top.
Communication (of policy to society)	Recruitment of articulate graduates. Formal recognition of the generalist’s role in explaining policy and defending it from critics.
Centralized political control	Fostering of a service-wide <i>esprit de corps</i> rather than narrow departmental loyalties. The location of generalists in departments to enforce central (Treasury, Secretariat) goals and policies.

In order to establish and maintain the *esprit de corps* of such generalists when they were assigned to various bureaus and departments, common norms were articulated and internalized, including efficiency, neutrality and hierarchical loyalty (Lui, 1988: 137-40).

- Efficiency: This entailed the most economical use of resources to achieve the maximization of results, and followed the classic conception of administrative responsibility, focusing more on how resources were acquired and deployed than

on the impact of bureaucratic actions and decisions on society. However, the bureaucracy's concern for cost-efficiency was often accompanied by an ignorance of the unintended outcomes of public policies and administrative capacities, and readily led to the deployment of a managerial and even manipulative approach to operations.

- **Neutrality:** This required civil servants to put aside their political allegiances and moral views in the execution of their duties, lest their prejudices deflect them from their public assigned responsibilities. In Hong Kong, there have been strict prohibitions on civil servants' involvement in such political activities, as individual civil servants were not allowed to run for public office under the current system. They could not canvass support for any candidate during elections. Comments on public policies can only be made with official permission. During the late 1980s, in contrast, civil servants were permitted to express their concerns and worries over the post-colonial administration, without fear for their job security or working environment.
- **Hierarchical loyalty:** Except for the few officials at the apex of the system, the majority of civil servants in Hong Kong were not encouraged to exercise reflective choice in their daily work. Individual moral judgments had little place in a bureaucracy whose operations are bounded and defined with rules. Even when discretion might be required, officials generally preferred to observe departmental regulations rather than risk their careers by making controversial decisions. The readiness of civil servants to accept orders from above was largely attributable to conventional Chinese attitudes of respect for authority and avoidance of conflict. Worrying that their career advancement may be adversely affected, most officials would naturally perceive compliance with their superiors as being in their own

interests. As a form of socialization, training induces employees to look at their jobs from a conformist perspective, thereby subtly modifying their views and beliefs to conform to those of the organization. The proverb: 'Do more and make more mistakes, do little and make few mistakes, do nothing and make no mistakes' has been a lively description of the mentality of civil servants in face of this working environment.

The above values reflect the fact that civil servants are instruments within the mechanism, with the purpose of following strictly the stance and ideas of the government to design, formulate and implement policies in a top-down approach. In this regard, they can perform effectively when the institutional and political environment is generally stable without any challenges and criticisms from the public. Also, the emphasis on efficiency reinforces a commitment to small government and the provision, until the 1970s, of only minimal and limited social services, the need to maintain fiscal frugality and to obtain 'value of money' (Scott, 2005: 36). In other words, the government saw policy implementation as a matter of targets which had to be met on time and within budget. It was not particularly concerned with the process of how these targets were achieved. Those opposed to its proposals were regarded as obstacles to implementation (Scott, 2010: 9).

However, the changing social, economic and political contexts since the 1990s due to the question of Hong Kong's political future, and the unprecedented economic turbulence due to globalization and economic downturn, to a certain extent, imposed a challenge to the mentality and practice of transitional bureaucratic system after 1997.

Post-colonial period (1997–)

According to Scott (2010: 11), the structure and functions of the government and civil service remained largely unchanged after the handover. Most of the top civil servants retained their positions as Policy Secretariats (later called Directors of Bureaus) and the civil service was promised conditions of service no less favourable than before 1997. However, the civil service was also facing challenges arising from economic instabilities at global and local levels.

Economic downturn and globalization

After returning to China in July 1997, Hong Kong experienced an economic downturn under the Asian Financial Crisis. As the economy began to stagnate, property prices dropped significantly and unemployment rates increased steadily: the heyday of Hong Kong during the colonial rule disappeared. In order to buttress the economy of this city-state so as to revitalize it and even cope with the competition from neighbouring areas, notably Mainland China, the newly established government put forward a series of reforms in different policy areas, including the downsizing of the civil service and undertaking of education reforms. In this chapter, these education reforms are deployed as a case study, with a focus on how bureaucracy defines, interprets, implements and manipulates various policies so as to legitimize the state hegemony over the educational field in the name of improving the quality of education and of achieving excellence.

Case Study: Education Reforms and Teacher Engagement in Policy Formulation and Implementation

Background

In the policy address given by Tung Chee-hwa, the first Chief Executive, at a meeting of the Provisional Legislative Council, an *ad hoc* legislature supported by the Beijing government in order to handle the local affairs before and after Hong Kong returned to China, in October 1997, he emphasized that in order to keep up with the fierce competition arising from globalization and increasing economic strength, it was necessary for the newly established government to restructure the existing educational system. Tung's ambition to reform the entire educational system in order to face the above-mentioned challenges gave the educational bureaucracy a forceful excuse to fundamentally alter the whole system. The official orchestration of the entire process of consulting and implementing educational policies, in the main, manipulated the stakeholders and the public in the sense that they unconditionally accepted and supported the official ideology, such as the adoption of the slogans of catching up with a knowledge-based economy, increasing competitiveness, and meeting the global requirement of reforming the educational system.

During the process of education reforms, the Education and Manpower Bureau (restructured and renamed the Educational Bureau in July 2007) dominated and managed the consultation, formulation and implementation of policy, and was then supported substantially by such official-dominated advisory committees as the Education Commission, the Advisory Committee on School-based Management, and the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualification.

Developments

Large-scale symbolic consultation

In 1998, the government of Hong Kong SAR issued a number of documents for public consultation, covering various fields such as school management, the school system, curriculum, teaching and learning, and advisory mechanism, including *Consultation Document on the Review of the Education-related Executive and Advisory Bodies* (May 1998), *Consultation Document on the Information Technology for Quality Education Five-Year Strategy 1998/99 to 2000/03* (June 1998), *Consultation Document on Outstanding Teacher and School Awards* (July 1998), *Consultation Document on the Establishment of a General Teacher Council* (July 1998), *Education Blueprint for the Twenty-First Century – Review of the Academic System: Aims of Education* (January 1999), *Education Blueprint for the Twenty-First Century – Review of Education System: Framework for Educational Reform* (September 1999), *School-based Management Consultation Document: Transforming Schools into Dynamic and Accountable Learning Communities* (February 2000), and *Education Blueprint for the Twenty-First Century – Review of the Education System: Reform Proposal* (May 2000).

At the same time, the Education Commission, a key advisory body for formulating local educational policies since the 1990s, also issued documents concerning reform of the local educational system: *Consultation on Aims of Education, Revised Draft Proposal on the Aims of Education* (January to March 1999), *Consultation on the Framework for Educational Reform* (September to December 1999), and *Consultation on Proposals for Educational Reform* (May to July 2000). The issue of such a large number of consultation documents within three years (1997–2000) caused confusion, along with the uncertainty of (1) whether an open, transparent, accountable and predictable mechanism was established and operative in tapping the

public views; (2) whether divergent opinions and views were categorized, analysed and presented systematically and openly during consultation, or the entire consultation was only a political show where the public views had a limited influence or were deliberately selected for those in favour of the official stance, and (3) whether different stakeholders, notably teachers, had equal status in the consultation, or the politically disadvantaged groups like teachers and parents were virtually excluded, marginalized and ignored during the consultation exercise.

Bureaucratic interpretation of teacher professionalism

In formulating educational policies, the role and status of teachers within the profession is of key concern. However, given the fact that the educational bureaucracy defines the nature and features of teacher professionalism, teachers are supposed to observe and even meet the official requirements in order to be deemed professional.

Teacher professionalism is a concept that has been subject to divergent, controversial interpretations over time. Sweeting (1992: 1) noted the existence of ‘a lack of clarity in much educational discourse about the concept of professionalism, which tends to float uneasily between claims about attitudes, aspirations towards a collective solidarity, and the emergence of an ideology’. Rizvi and Elliot (2005) propose four dimensions of teacher professionalism, notably (1) teacher efficacy (focusing on teachers’ adoption of new classroom strategies), (2) teacher practice (referring to the actual teaching experience), (3) teacher collaboration (collaborating in teaching and planning), and (4) teacher leadership (meaning that teachers should undertake and enhance leadership roles in formulating policies and making decisions). In other

words, the first two dimensions focus on enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers, whereas the last two recognize the institutional and social engagement of teachers in school settings.

In the Hong Kong context, teacher professionalism is deliberately defined to be technical and instrumental. Lee (1993) critically reviewed the concept of 'teacher professionalism' and found that the official discourse on teacher professionalism is narrowly equivalent to 'professional development', which is defined as (1) training and development, (2) knowledge and skills, (3) competence, and (4) guidance. Under the monopolistic interpretation advocated by the educational bureaucracy, Lee severely criticized the Education Commission's domination of the development of teacher professionalism in its top-down approach. He said the Commission has intentionally defined and articulated the types of professional development, qualifications, and training; the needs of the school environment; and career opportunities for teachers. In addition, Lee criticized the Commission for resisting teachers' initiatives, participation, and professional autonomy. According to Lee, professional autonomy should be based on the genuine participation of teachers in shaping teaching, learning, and administrative affairs. Overall, the SAR government basically follows, and even enhances, the colonial heritage of manipulating teacher professionalism. Both governments have endorsed the practice of rigidly imposing the definition, scope and nature of teacher professionalism under educational reform.

The government's official document does not endorse teacher empowerment, which is further eroded by the introduction of education reforms. In September 1997, the Education Commission released *Education Commission Report No. 7*. Focusing on

teacher professionalism, the report suggested that teachers employ an assertive approach under education reforms, noting that

Teachers should broaden their participation in various school activities in a professional way, and contribute to the educational, school management, and decision-making process . . . and should engage more actively in conducting school-related research, for example, improvement of the teaching and learning environment. In this connection, adequate support services, training, and research time off should be provided to the teaching staff. (The Education and Manpower Bureau, 1997).¹

Viewing from the power context, teachers seem to be empowering themselves under official advocacy, but the educational bureaucracy does nothing to articulate a set of concrete measures to substantially contribute to the decision-making process, develop professional autonomy, call for legislation protecting teacher participation in school affairs, or encourage school-related research by reducing the number of lessons and introducing subject expertise. In addition, referring to a document entitled *Towards a Learning Profession: The Teacher Competencies Framework and Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*, issued by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualification in November 2003, the Commission has interpreted teacher professionalism as lifelong learning, focusing on (1) participating in continuing professional development, (2) contributing to the collective intelligence

¹ *Education Commission Report No. 7: Quality School Education*, at

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeid=563>, accessed on 11 September 2012.

of the whole school, (3) catering to both personal and school developmental needs, and (4) reflecting teachers' unique professional and personal interests.

In light of Lee's criticism of the official discourse on teacher professionalism, the above features interpret teacher professionalism as continuous learning, but they ignore professional autonomy, a key component for empowering teachers. The above features reflect the emphasis on efficiency in the teaching profession, meaning that teachers serve as tools to ensure the success of education reforms (Choi, 2003: 637-9).

School-Based Management: Illusion of decentralization?

In 1991, the colonial government introduced the School Management Initiative (SMI) scheme. The scheme offered a school-based management (SBM) framework to improve the quality of primary and secondary schools.² The *Education Commission Report No. 7* issued in 1997 proposed that all public sector schools should implement SBM by the year 2000. To facilitate the development of SBM, the government set up an Advisory Committee on School-based Management (ACSBM) in 1998 and conducted a two-month public consultation in 2000. Afterwards, the government proposed a governance framework that was discussed at the Education Panel of the Legislative Council. The government suggested that the Education Ordinance be revised to legalize the formation of an incorporated management committee (IMC) that would be responsible for managing the school, enjoying legal rights, and bearing liabilities in its own name. In order to carry out the recommendations made by the

² *Introduction of School-based Management* at

http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_1951/introduction10_e.pdf, accessed on 11

September 2012.

ACSBM, the government drafted an Education (Amendment) Bill 2002. The Bill aims to give formal legal grounds to the practice of SBM by forming an IMC. The ultimate goal set by the government was to require all schools, except the direct-subsidy schools, to establish their own IMCs. A heated debate on the IMC arose between the government and school-sponsoring bodies. Finally, the Bill was passed in the Legislative Council in July 2004, and is presently referred to as the Education (Amendment) Ordinance 2004.

In the process of reforming the management system undertaken by the educational bureaucracy, it is arguable that without a fundamental change of power structure within school settings teachers, as one of the salient stakeholders in teaching and learning, have no grounds to empower themselves. In the document entitled *Transforming Schools into Dynamic and Accountable Professional Learning Communities: School-based Management Consultation Document*, issued by the ACSBM in February 2000, the committee advocated the need to increase the level of participation of stakeholders through the establishment of the School Management Committee. However, the following description shows that teachers, indeed, play no role in such a setting. The committee wrote:

In order to react proactively to those challenges, schools must have the freedom to make decisions on the delivery of educational services, and the flexibility to deploy resources in ways which will best meet the particular needs of the students. They also have to work in partnership with parents and the wider community in order to harness their support and tap their resources

in providing every student with learning experiences suited to individual aptitudes and needs. (ACSBM, 2000:1).

However, it is questionable whether the above goals can be fulfilled, in the sense that the roles and responsibilities of such managers are deliberately defined and constrained to the education and development of students only. The roles and responsibilities of individual managers are to serve primarily as supporters of the school management and administration without the genuine power to deal with and supervise such key issues in resource allocation as recruitment, promotion and removal of teachers, development of the school, and deployment of funds. Therefore, consultation is purposely distorted to be the single and legitimate mode of participation. In fact, the management committee is only a consultative mechanism without enhanced participation in school affairs. Decision-making power is restricted by the composition of school management committees, in which up to 60% of the managers are nominated by the school-sponsoring body. Teachers occupy only one or two seats within the committee. Therefore, the transparency of school management and the level of public accountability depend primarily on whether managers nominated by the school-sponsoring body deal with queries from teachers, parents, and alumni in an accountable manner.

From a critical perspective, without management setting explicit rules or concrete mechanisms on how to defend teachers' rights and ensure their participation, teacher empowerment cannot be genuine. The principal still holds absolute decision-making power in the recruitment, promotion, and work allocation of teachers. It is difficult for teachers to adopt critical perspectives in their participation in school affairs when

securing their jobs must be their first priority. Teacher participation, in this context, is only a *form* without substance, because teachers face a number of interpersonal and institutional constraints. The document proposed the foundation of ‘teacher managers, numbering two or more, to be elected from the teaching staff’ (ACSBM, 2000:12). Teacher managers are responsible for (1) bringing their teaching experience to SMCs, (2) improving student learning and school management, and (3) serving as a bridge between SMCs and teaching staff (ACSBM, 2000:17). However, teacher managers merely serve as representatives who express teachers’ voices in the management committee. They are powerless to deal with cases related to abuse of power by principals or misconduct by school authorities. Therefore, teacher participation in Hong Kong is only symbolic. Teachers have achieved little success in strengthening their rights and abilities under an authoritarian, undemocratic type of leadership.

Furthermore, the educational bureaucracy still has a certain degree of power to restrain teachers without convincing justification. According to the *Education (Amendment) Ordinance*, Permanent Secretaries may refuse an applicant as a manager of a school if it appears that ‘the applicant is not a fit and proper person to be a manager’.³ In addition, the ordinance does not remove the ambiguous yet absolute power exercised by Permanent Secretaries, stating that they may refuse to register an applicant as a teacher if it appears to them that the applicant ‘is not a fit and proper person to be a teacher’.⁴ Furthermore, Permanent Secretaries may cancel the

³ ‘Grounds for refusal to register a manager’, *Education Ordinance*, Chapter 279, Section 30, at <http://www.legislation.gov.hk/eng/home.htm>, accessed on 10 June 2005.

⁴ ‘Grounds for refusal to register a teacher’, *Education Ordinance*, Chapter 279, Sections 46 and 47.

registration of a teacher based on their own discretion and judgement.⁵ In other words, Permanent Secretaries hold the absolute power to remove a teacher if they believe that the teacher is lacking in professional abilities or cannot meet moral standards without a set of explicit guidelines. There is no mechanism for appeal. In sum, official surveillance of teachers still persists, even in the face of school-based management.

Administrative surveillance: Self-evaluation and external evaluation

Under the SBM, the EDB requires all schools to conduct a self-evaluation exercise, which is a process appraising the school's own performance, a critical point for enhancing the school development and accountability framework. Schools *can refer* to the performance indicators articulated and recommended solely by EDB, and *may also develop* additional criteria to assess their own specific features (Education and

⁵ Ibid. 'The Permanent Secretary can cancel teacher registration for the following reasons: (1) if it appears to the Permanent Secretary that the teacher is incompetent; (2) if the teacher has contravened any provision of this Ordinance; (3) if it appears to the Permanent Secretary that the teacher has behaved in any manner which, in the opinion of the Permanent Secretary, constitutes professional misconduct; or (4) if it appears to the Permanent Secretary that the teacher has behaved in any manner which, in the opinion of the Permanent Secretary, is prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline in the school in which the teacher teaches. In addition, the Permanent Secretary may refuse to register an applicant as a teacher if it appears that the applicant (1) has been convicted of an offense punishable with imprisonment; (2) is a person in respect of whom a permit to teach has previously been cancelled; (3) is medically unfit; (4) does not possess the prescribed qualifications; (5) has attained the age of 70 years; or (6) in making or in connection with any application for registration as a manager or a teacher; or to employ a person as a permitted teacher in a school, has made any statement or furnished any information which is false in any particular material, or by reason of omission of any particular material.' 'Grounds for cancellation of registration of a teacher', *Education Ordinance*, Chapter 279, Section 47.

Manpower Bureau, 2004a: 9). In addition, when schools are required to conduct self-evaluation as an internal quality assurance process, the EDB conducts inspections as an external quality assurance mechanism.⁶ Schools are required to submit annual school plans and reports to the EMB, with reference to the EDB-issued *School Performance Indicator (2002)*. Based on the performance indicators framework, a set of key performance measures is adopted to support school self-evaluation (Education Department, 2002). Such administrative work not only significantly increases the burden on teachers, but it also provides a legitimate channel for the official intervention of school affairs on the grounds of public accountability. However, the framework virtually only entails *upward* accountability rather than *downward* accountability, because the indicator is articulated solely by the educational bureaucracy.

Politics of funding

In *Transforming Schools into Dynamic and Accountable Professional Learning Communities: School-based Management Consultation Document*, the government proposed that a school would have flexibility over the deployment of its funds and would receive a block grant to provide for both salary and non-salary expenses (ACSBM, 2000: 17). In addition, the school would ‘decide its own personnel policies, including the establishment, mix of staff, recruitment, deployment, professional development, rewards and compensation, performance management, and dismissal’

⁶ *Enhancing School Development and Accountability through School Self-Evaluation and External*

School Review, EMB Circular No. 23/2003, dated 12 June 2003,

http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_6470/circular0612_eng.pdf accessed on 11

September 2012.

(ACSBM, 2000: 6). The official discourse emphasizes that a flexible arrangement of expenditure is pertinent to making the self-management of school affairs possible. However, teacher managers are only responsible for (1) bringing their experience in curriculum development, classroom instruction, student activities, and educational enrichment to SMCs; (2) providing professional expertise for the improvement of student learning and associated school management; and (3) being a solid link between SMCs and school staffs (ACSBM, 2000: 17). Teacher managers, judging from the above description, have almost no say in the expenditures of school authorities under the management framework, because they are only responsible for ‘student’ issues, and the SMC only ‘informs the stakeholders of the approved budget’ (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2004a: 8). In fact, the introduction of a block grant entails a drastic alteration of the present funding allocation and arrangements for aided schools, because teachers’ salaries would be fully arranged and determined by their school (Leung, 2003: 31). In response, the Professional Teachers Union (PTU), a leading teacher union in Hong Kong, argues that such a practice encourages the misuse of expenditure by school authorities; salary cuts of teachers are possible within school administration and supervision, in the absence of democratic governance. School administrators have a certain degree of discretion on how to deploy funds without scrutiny, leading to distrust among teachers, as the PTU insists:

The school authorities have the power to deploy funds, including salaries of staff; this leads to the over-concentration of power in the decision making body. Since a mechanism for scrutiny within the framework is lacking, the situation will become worse, meaning that a non-professional body (i.e., school-sponsoring body) leads the professionals. The patron-client relationship will

be cultivated in this regard. Unlike in commercial firms, performance is not easy to evaluate objectively; jealousy and distrust would emerge among teachers, hampering unity and trust. Therefore, the PTU does not agree to the proposal to fully determine the personnel issue and salaries policy by the school authorities.⁷

The abortive attempt to form a General Teacher Council (GTC)

Following a recommendation made in *Education Commission Report No. 7*, the government provided for the formation of the GTC in 1999, with the following functions: (1) formulating policies of teacher registration, (2) dealing with the misconduct of educators, (3) shaping teacher education programmes, and (4) promoting professional education.⁸ A Preparatory Committee was set up to facilitate the formation of the GTC. During the consultative period, controversies arose in relation to the scope of the GTC, which might conflict with the Education Department. A discrepancy surfaced surrounding the power of teacher registration and de-registration. In fact, as mentioned above, the power of registration/de-registration is a

⁷ 'A response to the document entitled *Transforming Schools into Dynamic and Accountable Professional Learning Communities*, issued by the Advisory Committee on School-based Management', at <http://www.hkptu.org/education/newsdgrd/news3.htm>, dated 30 April 2000, accessed on 11 June 2005.

⁸ Education and Manpower Bureau, 'Chapter 1: Introduction', in *Establishment of a General Teaching Council Consultation Document*, at <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=429>, accessed on 25 March 2004.

key means of manipulating teacher professionalism.⁹ Second, the role of the GTC in influencing teacher education programmes, enforcing codes of professional conduct, and verifying qualifications could affect the official manipulation of teacher professionalism.¹⁰ The third controversy was about the composition of the GTC, focusing on the proportion of teacher and non-teacher members. Representatives from school sponsors, teacher education providers, employers, parents, other professionals, and government officials are included in the category of non-teacher members. Whether or not school principals fall into the category of teacher members is debatable.¹¹ However, the EMB shelved the establishment of the GTC due to the chilly reaction from teachers (*Council of Professional Conduct in Education Newsletter*, September 2004: 1).

⁹ Education and Manpower Bureau, 'Chapter 3: Powers and functions of GTC', in *Establishment of a General Teaching Council Consultation Document*, <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=450>, accessed on 25 March 2004. Four options concerning the power distribution of registration were offered by the GTC and Director of Education (DE): (1) GTC to make recommendations over registration/de-registration, DE to exercise the power; (2) GTC to assume all powers of registration/de-registration once it is established; (3) to adopt (1) for a limited period of time as a transitional arrangement, with the ultimate aim that GTC would assume all powers of registration/de-registration; and (4) registration/de-registration power to be given to GTC, with DE being the Register.

¹⁰ Education and Manpower Bureau, 'Chapter 3: Powers and functions of GTC', in *Establishment of a General Teaching Council Consultation Document*, <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=452>, accessed on 25 March 2004, Parts V and VI.

¹¹ Education and Manpower Bureau, 'Chapter 4: Governance arrangements', in *Establishment of a General Teaching Council Consultation Document*, <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=454>, accessed on 25 March 2004.

However, according to surveys conducted by the Council of Professional Conduct in Education in 2001 and 2002, over 90% of the respondents agreed to the formation of the GTC with the aim of fulfilling teachers' professional autonomy. The same proportion of respondents also supported the educational field forming a council of its own, even though the EMB took no action to support it. Over 96% of respondent teachers (not including principals) agreed teacher should hold over half of the seats within the council, and 75% of them supported the idea that the council should replace the EMB in dealing with professional misconduct of teachers and principals. The above figures refuted the official view that the formation of the GTC was immature because it lacked the support of teachers (*Council of Professional Conduct in Education Newsletter*, September 2001: 2; September 2003: 2-5).

Top-down approach of curriculum reform: The introduction of Liberal Studies

After the introduction of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education in 2009, Liberal Studies, which had been introduced in the Advanced-Supplementary Level Examination in 1994, became a core subject implemented in the New Senior Secondary Curriculum. The aims of the subject are to broaden students' knowledge base and boost their social awareness. Employing an issue-enquiry approach, it helps liberate students' minds by having them study a wide range of issues. The course encourages students to find out information for themselves and develop their own opinions (Education and Manpower Bureau, October 2004b: 51).

However, the introduction and articulation of the new subject manifests manipulation by the educational bureaucracy and school administrators in three ways: First,

teachers have no say in deciding whether they are eligible to teach the new subject. Two options usually prevail concerning the teaching arrangements for the new subject. First, the principal recommends that certain teachers take the training programmes, implying that they will teach Liberal Studies; however, no accountable mechanism and open criteria exist to select those who can teach the subject. Second, the principal will withdraw some 'unpopular' subjects and ask those subject teachers to take the training programmes and teach the new subject in the future. The educational bureaucracy pays lip service to offering the appropriate training programme, with concrete support. Some teachers have to wait nine months before being enrolled in the course and then there is no relief from their usual heavy workloads for training, even though the EMB said a surplus teacher may be recruited for taking up their duties. In addition, many teachers criticize the setting of the sample examination paper, saying that some questions are problematic. The teachers cite ambiguous wording and complain that candidates' different interpretations of the question present difficulties to objective marking. Despite the fact that content was cut after it attracted severe criticism from the public, most teachers still question the suitability of adopting the examination format to assess students' performance, because it is difficult to establish an objective format to assess the scripts efficiently.

Analysis and Discussion

Reflecting upon Hong Kong's experience, education reforms have produced an adverse effect on engaging stakeholders, notably teachers, in policy-making and decision-making arenas. The government has adopted strategies of de-democratization and centralization, to be implemented by school-sponsoring bodies

that serve as catalysts with both covert and overt intentions of excluding teachers personally and politically.

With regard to the definition of teacher professionalism, the educational bureaucracy imposes a number of ‘professional requirements’. Teachers are expected to be passive, and fully and unconditionally to accept, support, and implement measures orchestrated by the EDB. The case of the introduction of Liberal Studies under the newly introduced school system implemented in 2009 illustrates this point. Not only are teachers required to receive intensive training without alleviation of their existing workload, but they must also follow official orchestration regarding how to approach subject knowledge and teaching strategies. A teacher who teaches integrated hum and valid support. Problems included the over-coverage of topics, absence of clear guidelines, and lack of a successful teaching model to help conduct teaching and enhance learning (*South China Morning Post*, 26 November 2005: EDU3). A common joke currently circulating is that ‘liberal studies’ means ‘knowing everything’ (*Tongshi dengyu Tongtong doushi*) (Lee, 28 July 2005: A30). The most severe situation is that the educational bureaucracy has succeeded in creating a negative image of teachers, labelling them as ‘unprofessional’ and ‘lazy’ in cases where they resist and cannot afford to implement the reform measures, while sweeping their grievances, notably teachers’ stress, under the carpet (*Hong Kong Economic Times*, 13 January 2006: A29).¹²

¹² According to a survey of teachers’ stress conducted by the Department of Psychiatry, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2,000 teachers were interviewed. Adopting a 10-point scale (point 10 is the most severe), teachers assigned 7.8 to the overall education reforms, 7.6 to the overall assessment of

The introduction of school-based management does not mean any apparent increase in the participation of stakeholders in school affairs. Under the hierarchical school system, teachers are expected to serve the reform unconditionally without formalizing and institutionalizing their power in policy- and decision-making processes under the current managerial framework within schools, which is an important indicator of de-democratization. Even though the government might acknowledge the severe pressure upon it, it only pays lip service to improving the situation. In its consultation document entitled *Review of Education System: Framework for Education Reform – Learning for Life*, issued by the Education Commission, the government identifies the practical need to create more room for teachers. However, the expression ‘room’ is ambiguous and even meaningless. In a section on urgent issues for consideration, teachers serve primarily as tools for education reforms, under the heading of changes in teacher education. The review does not touch on the issue of enhancing teacher participation in school affairs by changing the authoritarian style of management.¹³

An investigation of whether teachers can be influential under SBM would focus not only on the availability of opportunities for participation, but also on whether SBM enhances teachers’ capacity to participate by ensuring the transformation of the fundamental power structure of school management from an authoritarian to a democratic style. This change would mean that teachers are no longer restrained

the teaching profession, 6.8 to administrative duties, 6.7 to continuous studies, and 6.2 to the managerial pattern of a principal, showing that education reforms increasingly disempowered teachers.

¹³ *Review of the Education System: Framework for Education Reform – Learning for Life* (Hong Kong: Education Commission, HKSAR, 1999), at http://www.e-c.edu.hk/eng/online/on4_2nd2.html, accessed on 12 April 2005.

under an authoritarian structure within the school. A formalized and institutionalized mechanism should be established to ensure that teachers can share the power in formulating policies, enjoy considerable professional autonomy, make decisions, and deal with cases of misconduct and power abuse by school administrators, principals, and educational bureaucrats. Furthermore, school authorities, including principals and school administrators, should be accountable not only to school-sponsoring bodies and the educational bureaucracy, but to teachers and parents, as well. The power of principals and school administrators should be checked after the introduction of SBM. Finally, the educational bureaucracy should be restrained from intervening in school administration, in order to respect and recognize the autonomy of school authorities.

However, the educational bureaucracy adopts the term ‘teacher empowerment’ and defines it partially in the following ways: (1) adoption of a strategic plan for professional development, (2) equipment with knowledge and skills, and (3) support of teachers’ individual and collaborative learning.¹⁴ In this connection, teacher empowerment is arbitrarily interpreted by educational bureaucrats as the acquisition and accumulation of skills and knowledge through continuous learning – which is synonymous with professional development. To fulfil the above goals, the government issued its ‘Teacher Performance Management’ in February 2003 to develop formal procedures and resources for staff appraisal and development according to teachers’ needs (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003: Foreword). Using the supervisory approach, teacher appraisal is ‘a continuous process for identifying, evaluating, and developing the performance of teachers, so that the goals

¹⁴ *Teacher Empowerment*, at http://www.emb.gov.hk/EDNEWHP/school/sbm/main/English/Su_theme/Empowerment.htm, accessed on 22 August 2003.

and objectives of schools are more effectively achieved, while at the same time benefiting teachers in terms of recognition of performance, professional development, and career guidance' (Ibid.: 1). Throughout the examination of the teacher appraisal mechanism, it should be noted that accountability is not understood by answerability to teachers, the willingness of authorities to explain their actions and decisions, and political responsibility in which authorities accept the consequences of their mistakes (Scott, 2005: 20). Instead, it is narrowly defined as setting targets for assessing teachers' performance, identifying those who are underperforming so that schools can collect teachers' records for promotion and review (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003: 3). The implementation of self- and external evaluation legitimizes the centralization of official supervision of school administration on the grounds of enhanced school accountability. School accountability, in turn, is selective and discriminatory in the sense that the appraisers 'should be of a higher rank than those appraised' and they can determine the contents and areas of appraisal (Ibid.: 5). The appraisal, in this context, becomes a political process of who gets what, when, and how. Even though complaint procedures may be available, their usefulness will be doubtful because the whole appraisal mechanism is operated in a top-down approach with no concrete, enforceable procedure on how effectively it is operated (Ibid.: 12, 15). Teachers have no professional or legal shelter under such a platform throughout the whole appraisal process, except for making complaints to the union in cases of maladministration. Overall, selective and discriminatory accountability becomes a powerful tool that disempowers teachers under closed, top-down supervision.

Another interesting point is the role of principals in education reforms. Serving as street-level bureaucrats, principals, not teachers, are crucial in implementing policies

on the grounds that they perceive, articulate, and implement the state's policies in the school context. However, the fact remains that teachers shape very few policies in the new consultative framework introduced by the educational bureaucracy. Even though teacher participation was intended to legitimize their decisions, teachers have no real say in the overall framework of SBM. School authorities might consult teachers for their views in order to portray the image of 'democratic' governance, but that fact does not imply teacher empowerment. Educational and school bureaucrats expect teachers to implement their policies diligently and unconditionally, thereby showing that teachers enjoy professional autonomy.

Most importantly, centralizing power in principals' hands facilitates the popularity of *guanxi*, the cultivation of personal networking connections through material (e.g., money, gifts) and non-material (e.g., appointment, promotion, job assignments, threats) means. These connections have the following goals: establishment of leadership, expansion of personal influence over the domain, consolidation of mutual benefits within the bureaucracy, hiding deficiencies collectively, and marginalization of opposition within the organization. The cultivation of *guanxi* can be regarded as a manifestation of expanding power within the given domain through consolidation of personal, organizational, and factional networking.

In Hong Kong's case, principals are regarded as 'local emperors' (*Tu Huangdi*) because an authoritarian mentality persists, meaning that principals enjoy absolute power in their schools without checks and balances. Despite the presence of school management boards, most board members are not educationalists and are involved on a part-time basis, with little experience in managing school affairs. Therefore, power

falls into the hands of principals. Under such circumstances, most teachers have no choice but to cultivate *guanxi* with principals to earn a position, survive, or receive promotions. These means are especially necessary because teachers find it difficult to change jobs within the tight, declining job markets. It is not surprising that concentrating power with principals leads to maladministration or misconduct in some schools. One secondary school principal in Tai Po, the New Territories, recruited his wife as school librarian with no teaching duties, and favourably arranged for his son, who studied at the same school, to be granted early admission to a local university (*Apple Daily*, 21 June 2005: A08).

Under these circumstances, teachers exert weak influence in the administration. Arthur Li, Secretary for Education and Manpower, mentioned that the government offers a subsidy for school development. The extra funding can be used to recruit surplus teachers and teaching assistants to share the workload, but it is questionable whether the funding will be spent on alleviating teachers' burdens, given the fact that teachers have no say in its allocation and deployment (Au, 17 January 2006: A31). In January 2006, the situation had become so severe that two teachers committed suicide in response to the ceaseless pressures of their disempowered work environment (*Hong Kong Economic Times*, 13 January 2006: A29). In response to these tragedies, Fanny Law, Permanent Secretary for the Education and Manpower, remarked callously, 'If their death is related to education reforms, then why did only two teachers [commit suicide]?' (*South China Morning Post*, 11 January 2006: C1). In fact, Li and Law adopted an authoritarian approach in putting forward the education reforms that disregarded teachers' opinions and grievances arising from education reforms. For example, both Li and Law rejected an open dialogue with teachers in any public

platform, and Law only utilized the mainstream media to promote education reforms and criticized teachers who resisted making adaptations in face of official requirements. Therefore, Law regarded teachers' grievances and criticisms of education reforms to be the anti-reformist force, with the collaboration of HKPTU, aiming to maintain vested interests without considering the public interest. Overall, teachers' voices are unable to influence the policymaking arena and they are assumed to dispose themselves fully and unconditionally to meet the official requirements without challenging the authorities. Both Li and Law instead looked for the pro-governmental and conservative groups supporting the education reforms such as Education Convergence, the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, and the Hong Kong Association of the Heads of Secondary Schools, and coopted them to the consultative committees subsequently so as to represent the educational sector. In this regard, teachers, as one of the key stakeholder groups, have been marginalized politically and professionally. In short, education reforms can be regarded as powerful tools to manipulate teachers by imposing unending demands on them and offering strong criticism, to keep them submissive to the educational bureaucracy.

Conclusion

This chapter delineates in detail how the educational bureaucracy in Hong Kong follows the colonial practice of efficiency and then transforms it to a hegemonic and manipulative approach to reform the educational system in the name of striving for excellence and of getting rid of the problems arising from the colonial system. Basically, there were no fundamental changes of approach before and after 1997, as reflected in how the educational bureaucracy, by adopting the administrative

hegemony and executive-led governance, designed and implemented the educational policy based on the economic and social context, regardless of the introduction of vocational education in face of rapid industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s, the professionalization of teachers in the 1990s in connection with the development of the financial and trading centre, and the undertaking of education reforms since 1998 in order to buttress competitiveness. Of course, the changing political environment after the return to Mainland China has politicized the education policy. This is shown in the introduction and promotion of national education in order to buttress the Chinese identity amongst students, whereas the colonial government tended to depoliticize the civic education without promoting civic consciousness and political participation. Reflecting upon the above discussion, the power of educational bureaucracy remains intact after 1997 under the persistence of the hegemony in policy discourse and formulation so that no forceful stakeholders, such as unions or teachers, can challenge the official propaganda and undertaking. This was reflected in how the introduction of a General Teacher Council was efficiently rejected by the government on the excuse of efficiency and uncertain policy outcomes.

In the policy dimension, teacher engagement in policy formulation and implementation under education reforms achieves very little towards empowering teachers; instead, the official discourse on teacher professionalism becomes a powerful tool to manage and even manipulate them. It is interesting to question the manipulative approach of education reforms with reference to two remarks. First, without the introduction of a democratic framework in school settings, the idea that teacher participation in professional development can refresh and enrich their professional knowledge, skills, and experiences, and contribute to the collective

intelligence of the whole school, is unfounded. These ideals cannot be realized under an authoritarian setting. Second, even though teachers are professionalized, it does not mean that their professional status is fully defended and respected under the persistence of the top-down, *guanxi*, authoritarian style in school management endorsed by the educational bureaucracy. Hence, ‘professional disempowerment’ is proposed to delineate the dilemma faced by teachers: The more teachers become professional, the more they are disempowered under the official definition with the manipulation and orchestration of professionalism.

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