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### Institutional disarticulation : the changing educational governance in post-handover Hong Kong

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Working Paper Series

Centre for Asian Pacific Studies

No. 138 (5/03) CAPS

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The Changing Educational Governance in  
Post-Handover Hong Kong

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Hong Kong

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June 2003

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# **Institutional Disarticulation: The Changing Educational Governance in Post-Handover Hong Kong**

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## ***Abstract***

*This paper reviews the educational governance in the post-handover Hong Kong SAR by using a five actor theoretical framework, namely colonization, de-colonization, neo-colonization, re-colonization and globalization. The paper argues that, similar to the overall political governance in Hong Kong, the educational governance has been encountering institutional breakdown since the handover in 1997. However, the resulting chaos in the education sector could be comprehended through the perspectives of re-colonization and globalization.*

## **Introduction**

The paper attempts to review the post handover educational governance in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by using a five actor theoretical framework. An historical and critical perspective in viewing educational governance in Hong Kong since it was ceded to Britain in 1842 would be adopted. The history of Hong Kong is delineated into five stages based on its economic, political and social development. The first section traces the development of educational governance in the colonial days, which will provide a platform for understanding governance in education in the post-colonial era. The second section discusses educational governance in post-1997 Hong Kong in the light of educational institutional and policy changes and practices of government officials. In the final section we will attempt to trace the forces that trigger the changes in educational governance in the post-handover Hong Kong.

## Theoretical Framework

As for the method of analysis, we adopt W.W.Law's three-actor framework (1997) and extend it to include four actors: colonization, de-colonization, neo-colonization and re-colonization. In addition to these internal political actors, we would also include an external economic actor - globalization – in the framework.

Initially, Law (1997) proposed a three-actor framework in analyzing the processes of transition from 1982 to 1997 in Hong Kong. The three major actors are de-colonization, neo-colonization and re-colonization. Law defines these three terms as follows:

De-colonization refers to the elimination of mechanisms, practice or traditions established to consolidate the rule of the Hong Kong Colonial Government, but deemed by the PRC as an infringement of its sovereignty. Neo-colonization is the adjustment of colonial mechanisms, practice or traditions or creation of new ones by the departing sovereign power or its allies to support the preservation of their interests in Hong Kong beyond 1997. Re-colonization is concerned with the institutionalization of national sovereignty among the subject people by the incoming sovereign power.

(Law, 1997, p. 42)

Law focuses, however, his analysis on the transition processes in the higher education sector between 1982 and 1997. Our concern is rather on the education sector as a whole since the colonial days and educational governance in particular in the post-1997 Hong Kong. We, therefore, would extend Law's framework to cover the process of colonization in the British colonial period in the analysis. Besides the four internal political actors of colonization, decolonization, neocolonization and recolonization, an external economic actor - globalization – is added in view of the enormous powerful force that sweeps across the world.

Governance in education refers to control of the education sector, which takes the forms of centralization and decentralization (Arnové, 1992; Bray, 1999; McGinn, 1990; Thomas, 1990). It involves 'who controls what and how'. Bray (1999) defines centralization and decentralization as "deliberate processes initiated at the apex of hierarchies" (p. 208). The former means processes of tightening

control of the centre over the periphery in educational matters whereas the latter refers to processes of delegating more power and autonomy to the periphery. There are three types of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation of authority and devolution. Deconcentration involves setting up branch offices and moving officials from central to local offices; delegation means the central authority turns over more power to local organizations while still withholding major ones; devolution involves turning over all responsibilities to local organizations including that of funding (Arnove, 1992; Bray, 1999).

Conceptually centralization and decentralization are distinct concepts. Nonetheless, at the level of practice these two processes are difficult to differentiate. Comparative studies in education across the world show that educational governance of a society seldom takes the form of either centralization or decentralization, but often a co-existence of various forms (Arnove, Altaback and Kelly, 1992; Arnove and Torres, 1999; Bray, 1999; McGinn, 1990; Thomas, 1990). Decisions on the form of educational governance of a country are made "in the context of political ideologies, historical legacies, and such factors as linguistic plurality, geographic size, and ease of communication" (Bray, 1999, p. 211). The case of Hong Kong, as an international city, is a good example to demonstrate the complexity and evolving nature of governance when various forces are at play in a transitional society.

### **Educational Governance in the Colonial Days**

Educational governance in Hong Kong underwent changes in four periods during the British colonial era (1842 - 1997): the early colonial days, 1914 - 1941, 1945 - 1960s, 1970s - 1997. Categorization of the periods is based on the economic, political and social development of Hong Kong, upon which largely hinges educational development.

In the early colonial days, Hong Kong's education system originated from Britain, albeit not an exact duplication. In the pre-colonial period there were village schools, schools affiliated to temples, and shu-yuan [academies], all of which were traditional Chinese schools, not 'schools' in the western sense. These schools were not subject to government scrutiny (Sweeting, 1990).<sup>1</sup> The first western school run by a European community, the Morrison Education Society, was established in 1842 with only 11 students.

From then on missionary schools, government-aided schools (the so-called 'government' schools then) and private schools run by local Chinese were gradually opened. In 1862 the first government school - the Central School - was founded (Bickley, 1997).

Governance in education in this period was highly centralised. The Education Committee was appointed in 1847 to oversee education in the colony. It was replaced in 1860 by a stronger Board of Education, which had control over all 'government' schools, including appointment, deployment, suspension and dismissal of school principals, and fixing of their salaries.<sup>2</sup> The Board of Education was dissolved in 1865. The Education Department was subsequently established. As Sweeting (1990 p. 153) points out, "This might be taken to mark the end of a period in which voluntarism held sway in education in Hong Kong and the opening of a period in which the newly established Department of Government Schools (later to be known as the Education Department), though very small, played a very significant part in policy-making." In 1873 the first Code of Grant-in-Aid, which covered all government-aided schools, was stipulated. In 1913 the first Education Ordinance was enacted, and for the first time private schools were put under the control of the government by means of inspection. One purpose was to eradicate political propaganda in schools because of the political climate in Mainland China.<sup>3</sup> In addition, compulsory registration of all schools was required. The enactment signifies that the Hong Kong government's control over schools was formalized.

From 1914 to 1941 was a period between the two World Wars. Education in this period was affected by the tidal waves of the times. Mainland China had just undergone a political metamorphosis. The revolution in 1911 turned China from an ancient imperial empire to a modern (or quasi modern) republic. The subsequent nationalistic and cultural renaissance movements in China in the 1910s and 1920s also had a great impact on Hong Kong in general and in education in specific. For example, the structure and curricula of Middle Schools (i.e. Chinese-medium schools) in Hong Kong were influenced by the propaganda of the Chinese Nationalist Government.

People could then travel freely between Hong Kong and Mainland China. The struggles between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Mainland during this period caused an influx of inhabitants from the Mainland to Hong

Kong. Because of the increasing population from 501,304 in 1914 to 1,639,377 in 1941, the school sector flourished and numerous schools were set up. The Education Department maintained its control over all schools in Hong Kong. Educational governance in this period was still highly centralized. While Hong Kong was occupied by Japan during 1941 and 1945, schools were closed down and education came to a halt.

From the end of the Second World War to the 1960s, the population boomed from 600,000 in mid-1945 to 2.5 million in 1954. It was partly due to the 'baby boom' in the 1950s and mainly due to political instability in the Mainland.<sup>4</sup> As the revolutionary regime intensified political campaigns in the Mainland, hundreds and thousands of mainlanders fled to Hong Kong for shelter. Education was thus in greater demand than before. The Hong Kong government had been looking for possibilities of expanding primary education in the 1950s and 1960s, which was the main theme of the Fisher Report (1951) and the Marsh and Sampson Report (1964). The policy paper entitled Education Policy (1965) stipulated that free and compulsory 6-year primary education would be provided with effect from 1971.

Meanwhile, governance in education had decentralized from Britain to the Hong Kong government. For example, starting from 1948 the British Treasury would no longer take care of Hong Kong's finances. This was in line with the decolonization policy of Britain after the Second World War, and Hong Kong was moving towards *de facto* self-government. In 1952 a circular telegram from the Colonial Office to the Hong Kong governor as well as other British Colonial Governors in South-East Asia and the Far East explicitly said, "... The overriding aim of British educational policy in the colonies is to prepare Colonial people for self-government" (Sweeting, 1993).

Nonetheless, within Hong Kong educational governance was still very centralized and schools were highly controlled by the Education Department. According to the colonial government, both the KMT and the CCP wanted to infiltrate into schools in Hong Kong in order to exert their ideological and political influence on young people. The Education Ordinance enacted in 1913 was still being observed and served to safeguard political infiltration in schools. Teachers were forbidden to talk about politics in class. For a long time the syllabus for modern Chinese history evaded the period after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>5</sup> In

the wake of the CCP's taking over the Mainland, the Hong Kong government took immediate measures to revise the Education Ordinance, and a new Education Ordinance was enacted in 1952. The Director of Education was assigned even greater power than before, for instance, keeping registers of the school, the sudden closing down of schools, replacing directors in the School Council, and canceling the registration of teachers.

Funding was another direct mechanism to exercise control. Prior to the mid-1960s, there were more private primary schools than government and government-aided primary schools. Because of the implementation of compulsory primary education, private primary schools were forced in 1965 either to close down or to be subsidized by the government, and thus under the Education Department's direct control. In addition, primary schools were forced to change to half-day schools in order to cater for the sudden expansion of primary education.

Control over schools also took the form of using the central curriculum and assessment. In 1952 a Standing Committee on Syllabuses and Textbooks was established within the Education Department. All schools were required to adopt the same curriculum issued by the Education Department as well as the textbooks recommended. Politically motivated, the government was anxious about possible anti-British propaganda being purveyed in Hong Kong schools (Sweeting and Morris, 1993). Likewise, assessment was centralized. All students undertook the same public examinations at the end of primary, secondary and matriculation education. The first joint Primary 6 examination was enforced by the Education Department in 1949. The secondary school certificate examination evolved during the late 1930s from the earlier school leaving certificate examination. The matriculation examination screened students for the University of Hong Kong, the first university in Hong Kong established in 1912.

In sum, educational governance within the territory during this period continued to be highly centralized owing to the intense political and ideological struggles between the KMT and the CCP in Hong Kong. On the other hand, Britain's decolonization policy had begun and Hong Kong was delegated authority to set up self-governing mechanisms.

From the 1970s to the Handover in 1997 was the period of decolonization. The 1970s were a turning point in Hong Kong's

social, political and economic development. The student movements in Europe and the United States in the 1960s, and the Cultural Revolution in China had great impact on the intellectuals and university students of Hong Kong. The awakened younger generation, who were mostly locally born after the Second World War, became the backbone of the social movements in the 1970s, such as in the Chinese as Official Language Movement, Defend Tiao Yu Tai Movement, the Anti-Corruption Movement (Chan, 1985; Choi, 1990; Wong, 2001).

The colonial government was thus forced to respond to the popular demands of the mass especially after the riots in 1967.<sup>6</sup> Britain's decolonization policy in Hong Kong became one of the contributing factors to the democratization process in the 1980s and the 1990s (Lau, 1990; Lo, 1997; So, 1999). Furthermore, the late 1970s also saw the advent of the Hong Kong sovereignty issue which galvanized various societal and political forces that were pushing for democracy (Wong, 2002b). Politically Hong Kong was to change from a colonial government to a representative one (Cheng, 1985; Hong Kong Government, 1984, 1988). Setting up District Offices for home affairs in the early 1970s signifies a deconcentration of administration from the Home Affairs Department in the central government to the districts. Structurally to establish a three-tier system - viz. the District Boards,<sup>7</sup> the Municipal Councils<sup>8</sup> and the Legislative Council<sup>9</sup> - in the administration is an act of decentralization. Creation of the advisory body - the District Boards - suggests delegation of authority from the central government to the districts. The Urban Council was originally responsible for municipal matters for the entire colony including the urban and rural areas. The Regional Councils, which were established in the mid-1980s, took over that part of the job related to the rural areas. This is another example of de-concentration.

The first direct elections for the District Boards in 1982 and for the Legislative Council in 1991 were milestones of political democratization in Hong Kong. In addition, an advisory system that widely invites experts in different fields to sit on various advisory committees, whose jobs are to inform government policy making, is a further evidence of decentralization in the process of democratization. The purpose is to legitimize its governance, which was colonial in nature and thus constantly facing the challenges of

legitimacy (Cheng, 1992; Scott, 1989).

The success of the export-oriented strategy had earned Hong Kong the name of one of the East Asian dragons. With the open door policy of the PRC in the late 1970s, Hong Kong economy was given a further boost. The boom in the 1980s transformed Hong Kong's economy from manufacturing industries to service industries. Hong Kong subsequently evolved from merely an entreport to an international centre of finance and trade. Economic prosperity not only created a broad middle class, who were strong supporters of democratization (Chan, 1989; Chang, 1989 a, b; Lui, 1989 a, b; So, 1999), but also, subsequently, provided a solid financial ground for educational development.

Education was dramatically expanded from the 1970s to the 1990s, covering all sectors, from primary to tertiary. Free and compulsory six-year primary education was in force in 1971, subsequently followed by nine-year free and compulsory education in 1978. The UGC (University Grants Committee)-funded tertiary institutions jumped from two in the 1960s to eight in the 1990s. The number of age-appropriate students entering first degree programmes surged from approximately 2% in 1981 to 18% in 1997.

With the expansion of the education sector and democratization of the political system, governance in education was bound to change, albeit its pace not en par with political development, which started at least a decade earlier. Following a similar line of thought, the colonial government postulated that decision-making in education had to seek legitimacy through the consultative and advisory system (Cheng, 1992). Decentralization in educational governance in terms of decision-making formally started during the 1980s and took the form of delegation of authority to various advisory bodies. In addition to the UGC, which was established in 1965 to take care of the university sector, two high power advisory bodies were set up in 1982 – the Education Commission (EC) responsible for the school sector, and the Vocational Training Council (VTC) in charge of the vocational education sector. Although the final decision lay with the Governor-in-Council<sup>10</sup> by nature of the autocratic dimension of Hong Kong's colonial status (Cheng, 1992), UGC, EC and VTC were *de facto* though not *de jure* decision-makers in their respective arenas. As Hong Kong gradually evolved into a more open society during this period as a result of democratization, the impact of civil society such as the media,

pressure groups, stake holders of education (e.g. parents, schools, teachers) and even political parties was also felt.

Apart from decision-making, attempts were made during this period to decentralize other aspects of education. De-concentration of administration of the Education Department took place in the 1970s. District offices were set up for handling administration of schools in their respective districts. The Education Department continues to have a firm grip over schools registration and teacher certification. On the other hand efforts were expended within the profession in exploring possibilities for setting up a General Teaching Council to oversee qualifications, professional ethics and the professional development of teachers (Education Commission, 1997; Education Commission, 1998; Lam, 2001; South China Morning Post, 22 December 2001).

For decades all schools have been obliged to follow the curriculum set by the Curriculum Development Council. In the 1990s, there were calls for changes in the curriculum by the teaching professionals. Targets and Target-Related Assessment was then introduced in 1990 and later re-named as Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC) in 1993. The focus was, however, on the approach and content of the curriculum. All schools were encouraged to adopt the new curriculum. In other words a central curriculum was still in vogue in this period.

It was not until the late 1980s that the Education Department started to look into administration and management in schools, which were still very closed and dominated by principals. Decision-making in most schools then was top down, and decisions were mostly the principal's personal decisions.<sup>11</sup> Principals were accused of being autocratic, and some were nicknamed as 'feudal lords'. It was the Lau Kam Lung case<sup>12</sup> that pushed the Education Department to take action against the 'feudal lord', and subsequently reform school management. School Management Initiatives was introduced in 1992, and later developed into the School-Based Management that was in force in 2000.

To sum up, governance in education lent itself to changes as a result of the interplay between political, social and economic forces during this period of decolonization. Decentralization was evident in certain areas in education, for instance, in decision-making and school administration and management. There existed, however, other areas that remained rather centralized, such as teacher

registration and certification, the curriculum and the assessment. A mix of two modes of governance, i.e. centralization and decentralization, co-existed in this period.

### **Institutional Changes after the Handover**

Being a public sector, education governance is bound to be affected if there is a change in the entire governance of the administration. The Hong Kong polity has undergone structural changes since its reversion to China. The advisory system, a well-established and extensively-used mechanism, played an important role in the process of policy-making in the Hong Kong government before 1997.

Nonetheless, the system has been breaking down under the new leadership of the Hong Kong SAR government. Institutional disarticulation had occurred.<sup>13</sup> Similar to the politics arena which has seen democratization measures rolling back, key advisory bodies such as the Housing Authority and the Education Commission, whose members are professionals and prominent social figures representing views of different sectors, have lost their significance. Decision-making is becoming more centralized and executive-led, especially with the new ministerial accountability system<sup>14</sup> in place since 1 July 2002. Likewise, the civil servants, who used to be the backbone of the government in decision-making and implementing policies, are now relegated to a secondary role.

With the introduction of the new ministerial system, the political structure was nearly overhauled. Consequently, change in overall governance definitely impacts on educational governance, as evident in educational structure, policies and practices of government officials. Firstly, changes in educational institutions have been obvious since the Handover. The Education Department and the Education and Manpower Bureau were merged in January 2003. The new Secretary for Education and Manpower was thus delegated more power than before. The Education Commission, which used to be a *de jure* advisory body and *de facto* policy maker of education in the school sector, is losing its 'power' and independence. The UGC, another *de jure* advisory body which oversees the development of higher education, and *de facto* policy maker, is facing the same crisis of becoming more under the command of the Education and Manpower Bureau since 1997. The UGC used to be very

independent and served as a buffer between the government and Universities. The Education and Manpower Bureau seldom stepped into the internal affairs of universities except for financial resourcing. Nevertheless, about three months after his appointment, the new Secretary for Education and Manpower, Arthur Li, made an *impromptu* announcement about merging the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Sing To Daily, 5 October 2002). He also proposed integrating the Hong Kong Institute of Education into the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Making such proposals suggests structural changes empower the SAR government, which now directly intervenes in decision-making in the higher education sector. The autonomy of the UGC and universities is at stake (Wong, 2002a; Yeung and Hui, 2002).

The above examples demonstrate amply that educational governance is now taking a different paradigmatic course, from decentralization back to centralization. Education policies since 1997 provide further examples to substantiate our analysis. With the sidelining of the advisory system, policy-making is increasingly more top down (Mok and Lee, 1999). The process of the Education Reform initiated after 1997, for example, is apparently open and democratic. Three stages of public consultation were launched before the policy paper entitled *Reform Proposals for the Education System of Hong Kong* (Education Commission, 1998, 1999, 2000) came out. Ironically, however, the voices of schools, teachers and parents still cannot find their ways to reach the ears of the policy makers. Several policies that definitely have a far-reaching impact on the stake-holders of education were in force without proper consultation. For example, school sponsoring bodies were not consulted pertaining to the drastic change of the admission systems of Primary 1 and Secondary 1 starting in the academic year 2001-02. Neither were the teachers and their largest trade union, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union, consulted in formulating the policy of language benchmark tests for teachers, which started in March 2001.<sup>15</sup> The sudden change of the medium of instruction policy in the wake of the Handover also took the stake-holders by surprise. The issuing of 'Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools' by the Education Department (Education Department, 1997) in September 1997 gave a halt to the Streaming Policy, which was in full swing then. Despite strong protests from

societal sectors, the new medium of instruction policy - the Chinese medium teaching policy - was subsequently implemented in September 1998 (Poon, 1999, 2000).

As mentioned previously, continuous efforts spanning over 10 years were made by professionals in education to set up a General Teaching Council to oversee matters pertaining to teacher registration and certification, professional ethics, professional standards and professional development of teachers. The attitudes of both the colonial government prior to 1997 and the SAR government after 1997 are dubious. They changed their positions several times at different points in history.<sup>16</sup> The reason behind the shifting positions is that neither government would like to see the establishment of another centre of power in education (Lam, 2001; South China Morning Post, 22 December 2001). Therefore, teacher certification and registration continue to be in the firm grip of the Education Department, which means still very centralized.

Alongside re-centralization moves, some secondary aspects in education have been decentralized since 1997. As discussed previously, School Management Initiatives, which was introduced by the Education Department in 1992, started to change the 'one man' management in schools. Although the principal is still the decision-maker in most schools today, teacher participation in decision-making and school management is increasingly common. School Management Initiatives subsequently evolved into School-Based Management, which was introduced to schools in 2000. In other words, principals are given more power and autonomy in managing schools.

Devolution is also evident. The Direct Subsidy Scheme<sup>17</sup> as implemented after 1997 is a sign of devolution especially in view of the financial implications for the government. Based on the rationale of the Education Reform, schools should be diversified and there should exist different types of school in addition to the current government-aided mode. The Direct Subsidy Scheme was revised after 1997 so that schools joining the scheme will have greater autonomy and flexibility including budgeting, admission of students, medium of instruction and the like. Traditional elite schools, which are the victims of the new admission system in the Education Reform, are targeted by the SAR government as possible applicants for the shift. To date only two elite schools have joined the scheme while many are still hesitating. Besides traditional elite schools, new

schools are also the government's targets. Nowadays projects to build Direct Subsidy schools stand a better chance of getting an approval than the others that build government-aided schools. The hidden agenda for promoting the Direct Subsidy Scheme is that the SAR government wants to pull itself out of the education sector, in particular financially, through devolution. This hidden agenda is evident in other educational policies implemented recently, such as forcing existing Higher Diploma courses offered by the two Polytechnic Universities and institutes run by Vocational Training Council to go self-financed, setting up self-funded Associate Degree programmes, suspending the subsidy for all taught Masters courses starting from 2005, further cutting back of university budgets, calling for the amalgamation of departments within universities and the merging of universities (Sutherland, 2002; Sing To Daily, 5 October 2002).

Apart from the above-mentioned structural and policy changes, practices of some government officials in recent years support the claim that since 1997 governance in education has been re-centralizing while decentralizing in certain aspects. Prior to 2000, Anthony Leung, Chairperson of the Education Commission then, spoke in public about reform in the school sector more often than the then Secretary for Education and Manpower, Joseph Wong. However, after Fanny Law assumed the post of Secretary for Education and Manpower in 2000, she grabbed the limelight and became the spokesperson for all matters related to school education. Rosanna Wong, the new chairperson of the Education Commission appointed in 2001, keeps a very low profile, unlike her predecessor, Anthony Leung. Fanny Law's high profile was also evident in other respects. She attended the meetings of ACTEQ (Advisory Committee on Teacher Education Qualifications), which her predecessor, Joseph Wong, seldom did. As Secretary for Education and Manpower, her attendance definitely impacted on decision-making of ACTEQ - another example of government interference on advisory bodies.

Fanny Law's row with traditional elite schools in 2001 is the tip of an iceberg. On 30 January 2001 she sent a letter to the chairperson of the Grant Schools Council,<sup>18</sup> Rosalind Chan, requesting them to "review critically existing practices and keep up-to-date with community aspirations" because "T[t]here is a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the traditional elite schools which is echoed in the attached article in Ming Pao today" (Law, 2001). The fury of the

grant schools and their counter-attack, which became talk of the town then, was beyond Law's estimation. Based on current policies and practices pertaining to the Education Reform, we argue that the government is not in favour of the traditional elite schools and therefore wants to do away with them. Law found it an opportune time to attack the traditional elite schools since that newspaper article included a few sentences complaining about one traditional elite school (Ming Pao, 9 February 2001). On the other hand, the grant schools, which were highly regarded by the colonial government, feel that they are now being undermined by the SAR government and that they are not consulted on important policies such as the new admission systems. It was against this background that their clash surfaced. This incident serves to demonstrate the top-down approach of senior government officials and their mentality.

In addition to school matters, Fanny Law also intervened in the higher education sector, which her predecessors never did. In response to the high unemployment rate, the Financial Secretary, Anthony Leung (appointed in 2001), proposed that those unemployed middle-aged middle class join the teaching profession since their English is good. To follow up her superior's suggestion, Fanny Law asked the universities to reserve some quota of their Diploma in Education courses for the unemployed middle-aged middle class. The act itself is revealing. The government official is weakening the power of the universities, which used to have full autonomy over admitting students. Now, universities are required to *listen to* and *carry out* the instructions of senior government officials. A number of recent incidents indicate that this is not an isolated case, and that a culture of governmental interference is being developed. For example, foreseeing that the number of qualified English teachers may drop in the next few years with the language benchmark test in force in March 2001, the Education and Manpower Bureau suddenly requested the universities to increase their quota of English majors for pre-service Postgraduate Diploma in Education courses (PGDE) for 2001-02. The initial plan was to assign an additional number of 500 places to all four education providers, but later reduced to 60 only for the academic year 2001-02 because universities could not take in such a great increase, and the quota was increased to 300 for the academic year 2002-03. Based on the same reason and the fact that English proficiency of

English teachers is declining, the government decided to send pre-service English teacher trainees overseas for immersion courses for 6 - 8 weeks. The decision was relayed to the universities concerned for action through the Education and Manpower Bureau. In a similar vein, the universities were told in 2002 that an English exit test would be mandatory with effect from 2003 in order to enhance the English proficiency of their graduates.

Above all, the Robert Chung incident is the most threatening and devastating. Robert Chung, a researcher in charge of a survey programme at the University of Hong Kong, has been conducting periodic opinion polls on the popularity of the Chief Executive since Tung Chee Hwa took office in office in 1997. Observing the sliding popularity ratings in 2000, Lu Cheung On, the Chief Executive's personal assistant, directly intervened and sought the help of Patrick Cheng, the then President of the University of Hong Kong. Cheng then signalled Chung to halt his polls. The impact of this scandal was immense and far-reaching. It finally led to the demise of Cheng. This incident is a naked example of the SAR government's direct interference with university academic freedom. A precedent has thus been set in the history of Hong Kong.

Apparently the SAR government has not learnt any lesson from the Robert Chung case. Re-centralization in education continues to deepen. Some of the incidents cited previously pertaining to the Education and Manpower Bureau's interference with university affairs actually took place after the Robert Chung case. In the university merger row discussed previously, the way Arthur Li, the new Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau, handled the case was described as dictatorial and manipulative. It is his arrogant and oppressive style that has earned him the nickname 'Tsar' (Ming Pao, 6 October 2002). He said, "The power [to decide the merger] always lies in the government, and I have the final say." When asked how he would handle it should the staff of the two universities concerned were against the proposal, he responded, "[I will] treat them politely first. [If they resist, I will] then use force." (Ming Pao, 6 October 2002). According to Li, he had received the consent of the two Presidents of the universities concerned, before announcing a specific timeline for the merger. To everyone's surprise, Li's words were repudiated by the two Presidents concerned. In an email to his colleagues and students, Professor Paul Chu, President of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology wrote, "... I would like

to let you know that no formal agreement regarding the merger has been reached, nor any timeline been discussed. Only discussion at a preliminary stage has been held to explore the idea of a merger." (South China Morning Post, 12 October 2002). The autocratic attitude of the senior government official is, after all, rooted in a particular soil and culture, viz. a bureaucratic system and centralized governance.

From the above structural and policy changes, and practices of senior government officials, we can conclude that educational governance since 1997 has on the main been re-centralized with certain aspects taking an opposite path of decentralization.

### **The Social-Political Context for the Changes**

Changes are inevitable when there is a change in the political centre. The nature of change depends, however, on the philosophy of governance of the new SAR government. Institutional educational governance may continue its post-1997 decentralizing path and decentralize all aspects of education, including teacher registration and qualifications, assessment and the like, which have remained very centralized until now, or instead it could go in another centralizing direction. Examining what kind of government the SAR government is will throw light on the changes in educational governance in Hong Kong after 1997. Besides the internal factors that are Hong Kong specific, we will also look beyond Hong Kong and see whether any external force is influencing governance in education.

As discussed previously, governance in education prior to the 1970s was highly centralized. It was consonant with the process of colonization. Britain started decolonizing its colonies in the early 1950s. The process in Hong Kong was lengthy and a slow one at the beginning. Decolonization in the form of democratization in politics did not start until after the riots in 1967. Decolonization in education began more than a decade later in the early 1980s with a view to decentralizing decision-making through the establishment of an extensive network of advisory bodies such as the Education Commission. There are primarily two forces operating on post-1997 Hong Kong: re-colonization (Vines, 1998) and globalization. The former is political, internal and Hong Kong specific whereas the latter is economic, external and world-wide.

The de-colonization process was replaced by the neo-colonization process when Hong Kong entered its final phase of

transition in the 1990s. The colonial government launched new policies pertaining to the academic structure at university level, medium of instruction and assessment with a view to hopefully maintaining the British link in Hong Kong after 1997. As a result of the recommendation of the Education Commission Report No. 3 (ECR 3) in 1988, the academic structure of the universities had to be made uniform, i.e. three years of study only. The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist College (later re-named as Hong Kong Baptist University in 1994), which used to adopt the American system of four years, were forced to change to the British system of three years in order to be in line with other local universities. Hong Kong Baptist College was willing to comply because it was fighting to be upgraded to university status. Similarly, to join the university status, the traditional Lingnan College 2-2-1 structure was streamlined to 2-3 tiers and ultimately to a three year curriculum. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, however, strongly opposed the change, but eventually succumbed and completed the process in 1996.

Medium of instruction is an unresolved thorny issue in Hong Kong (Johnson, 1994; Poon, 2000; So, 1987, 1989, 1992). Whether to shift the medium of instruction from Chinese to English at secondary level is controversial. Supporters of Chinese medium instruction are of the view that students express themselves better in their mother tongue and thus Chinese medium instruction is beneficial to students' educational development. The other camp argue, however, that Hong Kong being an international city badly needs bilinguals who are proficient in both Chinese and English. Hong Kong has been trapped in this 'classic dilemma' (Llewellyn *et al.*, 1982) for decades. This is not a mere educational issue, but a social and political one because parental choice, which reflects social values, as well as nationalism are involved. The issue is thus rendered more complicated. Prior to 1990, the government adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards the medium of instruction. There was no detailed plan to carry out any specified medium of instruction policy, albeit mother tongue teaching being stipulated as a policy in the White Paper on secondary education in 1974 (Hong Kong Government, 1974). The streaming policy advocated in the Education Commission Report No. 4 in 1990 was by far the most comprehensive medium of instruction policy that took into consideration the interests of all parties concerned (Poon, 2000).

Primary 6 students were streamed and allocated to three different types of secondary school, namely English-medium schools (approximately 30%), two-medium schools (approximately 50%) and Chinese-medium schools (approximately 20%) (Education Commission, 1990). Of course, this model was claimed to be research-based, and thus educationally sound and strategically well-balanced and acceptable to different stake-holders. On the other hand, if we put it in the context of neocolonization, the streaming policy is superior to the Chinese medium teaching policy proposed in 1974 in serving the purpose of maintaining the British link. The latter, if implemented, meant all secondary schools would use Chinese as the medium of instruction. The former, on the contrary, still values English and approximately 80% of secondary schools would use either all English or some English as medium of instruction.

In connection with the streaming policy, an assessment scheme called Targets and Target-Related Assessment (TTRA), which originated in the United Kingdom, was proposed in 1990 to be an instrument to stream students into English-medium schools, two-medium schools and Chinese-medium schools (Education Commission, 1990). Neocolonization is evident in this example too. But the situation was not ripe and the development of TTRA could not meet the time frame of the streaming policy. TTRA was subsequently abolished as an assessment instrument for the streaming policy.

According to our five-actor framework, subsequent to neocolonization is the process of recolonization, which may have even started before the Handover. In April 1997, just two months prior to the Handover, the Director of the Education Department, Helen Yu, issued a consultation paper entitled *Arrangements for Firm Guidance on Secondary Schools' Medium of Instruction* (the 'Firm Guidance') to all schools, which called for implementation of compulsory Chinese medium teaching policy (Education Department, 1997a) with effect from September 1998, the year in which the streaming policy was scheduled to be fully implemented. The 'Firm Guidance' caught people by surprise, and if implemented, would have completely turned the path of Hong Kong's education from bilingual education to monolingual education.<sup>19</sup> It was faced with strong opposition. A revised document entitled *Guidance of Medium of Instruction in Secondary Schools* (the 'Guidance') was

subsequently issued in September 1997 (Education Department, 1997b), pressing for implementation of compulsory Chinese medium teaching policy but with exemptions granted to some schools that were allowed to maintain English medium instruction.<sup>20</sup> Putting the whole thing in perspective, one should not be surprised with implementation of the compulsory Chinese medium teaching policy because this is part of the process of recolonization.

In addition to the thorny issue of the medium of instruction, a review of the education system was high on the agenda for the SAR government, in whose eyes the current education system originated from Britain and therefore needs overhauling. As soon as the SAR government was formed, Tung Chee Hwa, the Chief Executive, announced that education was one of the most important policy areas that he would look into (Tung, 1997). Anthony Leung, chairperson of the UGC between April 1993 and March 1998, was appointed chairperson of the Education Commission in 1998. His first and foremost task was to launch an Education Reform process to change the entire education system including the academic structure, the admission systems, the curriculum, the assessment and the like (Education Commission, 2000). It was proposed to change the academic structure of the school from 6 + 5 + 2 (which follows the British system) to 6 + 3 + 3 (which is American and also adopted in Mainland China). It was also announced that the university would be changed from three years (which is British) to four years (which is American and also adopted in Mainland China). One should not forget that the Chinese University of Hong Kong had just completed its change in academic structure involuntarily from four years to three years in 1996 as mentioned previously. Recolonization seems to be the only possible reason that could account for the sudden reversal. Likewise, one suspects whether the motive behind the proposed new admission systems for Primary 1 and Secondary 1 is to abolish the traditional elite schools, which symbolize the British legacy, and replace them by the Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, which are potential new elite schools. This fits in with the concept of new elitism postulated by Tung (Tung, 2002).<sup>21</sup> The recent proposed merger of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology by Arthur Li, the new Secretary for Education and Manpower, also gives people the feeling that the proposed merger would pose a threat to the traditional elite university – The University of Hong Kong, which has a very strong

colonial tradition.

To probe into the essence of the SAR government would inform us of its philosophy of governance, and explain why recolonization adopts a centralizing path in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong SAR obtains its legitimate power from its sovereign state, the PRC. Although Hong Kong is bestowed with the Basic Law that presumably guarantees 'One Country Two Systems', the PRC is known as a Leninist dictatorship. It would indeed be surprising if the SAR's governance is not influenced by the PRC polity in one way or another, especially when the Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, was handpicked by the Chinese leader and 'elected' in an un-democratic manner.<sup>22</sup> The process of recolonization is quickened because of interference of the local communist fellow travellers and the pro-Beijing league.<sup>23</sup> For a long time in the history of Hong Kong the local communists have been suppressed and ignored by the colonial government. It is natural that they want to exercise their power and influence over the governance of the SAR after the Handover.

In addition to recolonization, another force - globalization - does have an impact on the governance of the SAR. As Hong Kong evolved from a small manufacturing port to an international centre of finance and trade in the 1980s and 1990s, it was inevitable that Hong Kong became susceptible to the influence of globalization in many respects. Because of the emphasis on "greater efficiency and value-added production" and an "increase in demand for more skilled managers and technologists" (UGC, 1996), the Hong Kong government proposed in 1988 a significant expansion in higher education in the 1990s. Sir David Wilson, the then Hong Kong Governor, speeded up the process in his Policy Address delivered in 1989. Instead of increasing the first-year first-degree places from 7% in 1989 to approximately 13% in 1995, the government decided to revise the increase rate to 18% (UGC, 1995). Subsequently four UGC-funded tertiary institutions would need to be upgraded to university status.

The dramatic expansion in the higher education sector lent itself to changes that have had a great impact on governance in higher education. The role of the UGC underwent some changes in the 1990s. Prior to the 1990s, the UGC played the role of a mediator and "buffer" (UGC, 1965) between the government and the five tertiary institutions. Since Anthony Leung took up the chair of UGC in 1993,

the UGC has expanded its power through re-structuring and introducing a series of mechanisms presumably to monitor the quality of eight UGC-funded tertiary institutions. 'Quality assurance' is a catch-phrase used in the reform of higher education worldwide in the last two decades under the currents of globalization (Cheng, 2002; Mok and Lee, 2002; Polster and Newson, 1988; Torrance, 1997; Vidovich and Currie, 1998). The quality assurance mechanisms introduced to the higher education sector in Hong Kong in the 1990s were: Research Assessment Exercise (RAE),<sup>24</sup> Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review (TLQPR),<sup>25</sup> and Management Reviews.<sup>26</sup> These initiatives have, on the one hand, empowered the UGC, and on the other hand limited the autonomy of the universities and academics. 'Cost-effectiveness' (or its equivalents like 'greater efficiency' or 'value-added production') is another catch-phrase used in recent education reforms world-wide (Currie and Vidovich, 1998; Tjeldvoll, 1998; UGC, 1996). Linking quality assurance with cost-effectiveness would easily lead to the pegging of funding and quality assurance. The funding mechanism of the UGC has been moving in this direction. Prior to 1992, the funding method was "based primarily on input measures (student and staff numbers, staff salary and benefits level) and certain *a priori* assumptions about staff:student ratios, senior:junior staff ratios, etc." (UGC, 1995, p. 19). The historically-based input measures method was replaced by a more performance-based method in 1992. The quality of research in the light of international experience as reflected in the RAE would inform funding to universities directly while the quality of teaching as reflected in TLQPR would inform funding indirectly (UGC, 1995, p. 19). Hence the UGC has gained more control over universities, and governance in higher education is more centralized.

Since the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the grip of the SAR government has been even tighter. In 2002, Hong Kong has had a fiscal deficit of more than HK\$70 billion. A new funding method by credit units was proposed in the recently released higher education reform proposal (Sutherland, 2002). Universities would be funded "with respect to a student base to be expressed in credit units" and students could transfer across institutions under the proposed 'Credit Accumulation and Transfer System' (Sutherland, 2002). In other words money would move with the students. The implication of this new funding method is far-reaching: less popular

departments may run the risk of being closed down or being merged with other departments, and likewise small universities may need to be amalgamated with other universities. Downsizing, merging and managerialism are the current trends of globalization, under which universities and academics are losing their power and autonomy (Berman, 1998; Currie and Newson, 1998; Currie and Vidovich, 1998; Mok and Welch, 2002). With a huge deficit, the reduction of the government's subsidies to the higher education sector in future is to be expected.

The market-driven education reform takes place not only in higher education, but also in schools in Hong Kong. As soon as he was appointed as chairperson of the Education Commission after completing his terms as the chair of UGC in March 1998, Anthony Leung launched a 'revolution' in the school sector. The rationale behind the Education Reform is: "Hong Kong is facing tremendous challenges posed by a globalized economy" (Education Commission, 2000, p. 3). The traditional examination-oriented mode of education no longer meets the demands of a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, the old system ought to be uprooted and a new system that realizes the following vision needs to be established: "to build a lifelong learning society, to raise the overall quality of students, to construct a diverse school system, to create an inspiring learning environment, to acknowledge the importance of moral education and to develop an education system that is rich in tradition but cosmopolitan and culturally diverse" (Education Commission, 2000, pp. 4-5). While sharing "a common wish for Hong Kong to be a diverse, democratic, civilized, tolerant, dynamic and cultivated cosmopolitan city" (Education Commission, 2000, p. 3), the SAR government ironically adopts a top-down approach in launching the Education Reform. Despite a year-long public consultation, the decision-making process and the manner in which policies are implemented as mentioned previously further affirm that governance in education is reverting to a centralizing path.

## **Conclusion**

In tracing the development of educational governance in Hong Kong during the four periods in colonial days (1842 - 1997), we have detected a decentralizing trend mixed with elements of centralization, which started in the early 1980s as a result of decolonization and neocolonization. The decentralizing trend in

educational governance has been reversed since the change of sovereignty in July 1997 as evident in changes in educational structures, policies and practices of senior government officials. We further argue that the trend of re-centralization, which is mixed with elements of decentralization, is inevitable because of two forces: recolonization and globalization. The extremely centralized political structure of the PRC has obviously impacted on the philosophy of governance of Hong Kong SAR government despite the PRC's 'one country two systems' policy. Recolonization is the outcome of such impact. On the other hand, globalization as a powerful world-wide force also plays a part in reversing the trend in educational governance. Deng Xiaoping, the late supreme leader, promised Hong Kong people that Hong Kong would remain unchanged for 50 years after the Handover. It is merely six years now after 1997 but the education governance has already encountered a total overhaul.

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<sup>1</sup> Data in this section are taken from Sweeting's chronicles (Sweeting, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Until now the Education Department still has full control of government schools in terms of appointment and deployment of principals and teachers.

<sup>3</sup> A revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen successfully overthrew the rule of the Ching Dynasty in October 1911. Monarchy ended, and the Republic of China was subsequently founded.

<sup>4</sup> The CCP founded the People's Republic of China and the KMT withdrew to Taiwan and continued its rule of the Republic of China. The struggles between the two parties continued to this date. The PRC still claims sovereignty over Taiwan.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to 1975, the syllabus of Chinese History for the Hong Kong Certificate Examination covered up to the Sino-Japanese War only.

<sup>6</sup> As influenced by the Cultural Revolution in the Mainland, the local leftists launched territory-wide struggles against the colonial government. Demonstrations, strikes and bombs were used as the means of their struggles. The life of the entire Hong Kong was affected.

<sup>7</sup> The District Board is not a decision-making body, but an advisory body that advises the government on matters in the district, e.g. transport, environment, sanitation, recreation, cultural activities. Its members are all directly elected. This structure was created in 1982. It was re-named as District Councils in 2000.

<sup>8</sup> The Municipal Councils refer to the Urban Council and the Regional Council. Unlike the District Board, the Municipal Councils were decision-making bodies. The Urban Council was established in 1935, and the Regional Council was established in the mid-1980s. Direct elections were introduced in the 1980s. The job of the two Municipal Councils was to handle municipal, recreational and cultural matters in both the urban and regional areas. This structure was abolished in 2000 under the new leadership of Tung Chee Hwa. The move was widely perceived to be targeted at the Democratic Party which exerted enormous influence over these two bodies through elections.

<sup>9</sup> A central legislative body responsible for legislation and approval of budgets for the government. Direct elections of the Legco members were introduced in 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Distinction was made between the Governor of Hong Kong prior to 1997 as a person and the Governor as the chair of the Executive Council, which was the highest decision-making body in the colony.

<sup>11</sup> This is still common today.

<sup>12</sup> A school teacher at Madam Lau Kam Lung Secondary School was dismissed by the principal on political grounds that the teacher was trying to usurp the power of the principal in an event pertaining to the pro-democracy movement in 1989. The fact was that this was a notorious principal, who could not tolerate whoever tried to challenge his supreme power. A precedent of a principal being able to dismiss a permanent teacher on no valid grounds would have been established if the teacher had not struggled hard to reverse the accusation. The implications of this case are far-reaching. The power of school principals was too great. Management in many schools was not properly monitored by the Education Department. The most important of all, action ought to be taken to quicken the process of democratization in the school sector.

<sup>13</sup> The term 'disarticulation' is borrowed from Ian Scott (2000), "The disarticulation of Hong Kong's post-handover political system", in *China Journal*, no.43, pp.29-54. The term simply means disjoint or breakdown.

<sup>14</sup> According to the ministerial system, the new Secretary for Education and Manpower is an ex-officio member of the Executive Council, the highest decision-making body in the SAR government. Hence, he is delegated more decision-making power on one hand but on the other hand is to be accountable to the public. The former Secretary for Education and Manpower, Fanny Law, is re-named as Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower, who is a civil servant and whose job is to execute the decisions made by the new Secretary for Education and Manpower.

<sup>15</sup> The Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union, which has a membership of approximately eighty thousand, strongly opposes the test. Six thousand teachers went to the street and protested in June 2000 when the proposal was first out.

<sup>16</sup> Proposals have been made to establish a General Teaching Council (GTC) within the teaching profession in the last two decades. Such proposals were turned down several times by the colonial government (Education Commission, 1984; 1992). In 1995 the government changed its position and set up a Working Group to study the formation of GTC. It was decided to establish one in May 1997 (Education Commission, 1997). Tung announced in his maiden policy address in October 1997 that a GTC would be set up by the end of 1999 with a budget of \$20 million. However, to date its fate is still uncertain (South China Morning Post, 22 December 2001).

<sup>17</sup> This scheme was first initiated in 1988 and introduced in 1991. It was not popular and attracted only 24 private local schools and international schools. Subsidy from the government is provided in the form of a lump sum based on the number of students in the school, unlike government-aided schools, which are subsidized by the government in all respects regardless of student intake.

<sup>18</sup> The Grant Schools Council represents 22 grant schools in Hong Kong, which are traditional elite schools established at around the turn of the twentieth century.

<sup>19</sup> For more detailed analysis, see Poon(1998).

<sup>20</sup> It was announced in December 1997 that 100 secondary schools out of less than four hundred were eligible for English medium instruction. After reviewing the appeals, 14 more schools were approved.

<sup>21</sup> In his speech addressing the gathering celebrating The University of Hong

Kong's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2002, Tung put forward the concept of neo-elitism. He attacked old elitism, which was embodied in The University of Hong Kong prior to the nineteen fifties when it accepted only rich people. Neo-elitism, according to him, should include people from all walks of life, and, therefore, should be advocated in the SAR. His speech attracted lots of criticism.

<sup>22</sup> The Chief Executive was indirectly elected by an electoral college of 400 pro-Beijing local people in 1997. The size of the electoral college increased to 800 in the second term in 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Political parties such as the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Progressive Alliance and other members of NPC and China's People's Political Consultative Conference.

<sup>24</sup> The first round of RAE was conducted in 1993. "The purpose of the RAE ... was to assess the research output performance of the UGC-funded institutions by cost centre [at intervals of three years], primarily as an input to the funding model" (UGC, 1995, pp. 19-20).

<sup>25</sup> The first round of TLQPR was conducted between 1996 and 1997. TLQPR refers to "external reviews of quality assurance and improvement processes at all UGC-funded institutions (process audits) [at intervals of five years]. Process audits ... referred to external reviews of the institutions' quality assurance and quality improvement processes, attitudes and performance" (UGC, 1995, p. 20)

<sup>26</sup> The first round of Management Reviews was conducted in 1998. The objectives of the Management Reviews are to "support the institutions in enhancing the quality of management; discharge the UGC's accountability for ensuring that devolved funds and resources are managed appropriately; focus attention on and to enhance the effectiveness of institutions' internal resource allocation, planning and financial processes" (UGC, 1998, p. 25)

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