Perceptions of Hong Kong’s Primary School Teachers on ‘National Identity’ and ‘National Education’

Mr. Chong King Man, Eric
e-mail: kingman@ied.edu.hk

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Abstract
Since the return of sovereignty to China in 1997, national identification with China has been a priority in Hong Kong SAR government’s educational policy agenda. There are increasingly more National Education activities which aim at cultivating a Chinese national identity. Academic literature about national identity has pointed to identities change in relation to evolving events and circumstances. Based on perception studies in education, this study employs case studies with qualitative research method of in-depth interviews on target samples of Hong Kong’s primary school civic education coordinators, and examining National Education relevant school documents in their respective schools. This study analyzes how do primary school teachers perceive their national identity since 1997, and how do they teach National Education. The findings reveal that under the proclamation of a Chinese national identity, there are differences in emphases on their national identity, and they have got diversified teaching strategies on National Education. These findings have implications for understanding the meanings of national identity and teaching of National Education in Hong Kong in this globalized era.
I. **Introduction**
This is a study about the perceptions of Hong Kong’s primary school teachers on their national identity and the National Education, with the latter of which refers to the formal and informal education about fostering of national identity in Hong Kong’s educational context. It analyzes how Hong Kong’s primary school teachers perceive their national identity since 1997, and their perceptions on meanings of National Education. Thompson (2001) argues that the role of social interaction in producing and reproducing national identities is virtually obscured. Despite there are taken-for-granted assumptions about the existences of nations and national identities, ‘the form, content, and meaning of these categories remain open to individual interpretation and negotiation.’ (Thompson, 2001: 24)

This study intends to make explicit how national identity and National Education are thought and felt by the interviewees. The findings reveal that under the proclamation of a Chinese national identity, there are differences in emphases on their national identity, and they have got diversified teaching strategies on National Education. Meanwhile, academic literature about national identity has pointed to identities change in relation to evolving events and circumstances. Therefore, this study also looks into how evolving events and circumstances shape their perceptions on their national identity. These findings have implications for understanding the meanings of national identity and teaching of National Education in Hong Kong in this globalized era.

Since the return of sovereignty to China in 1997, national identification with China has been a priority in Hong Kong SAR government’s educational policy agenda. The post-handover government tended to be far more interventionist than its colonial predecessor (Vickers, 2005). School text books, especially those about teachings of history, have been changed to give another view of Hong Kong and China’s past (Vines, 1998). There is also an increasing trend of National Education activities which aim at cultivating a Chinese national identity. This can be ranged from school-based National Education activities or programmes, exchange tours to China’s cities and rural areas, to those National Education activities organized by the Moral and Civic Education Section of Education Bureau.

Based on perception studies in education, this study employs case study method. It uses qualitative research tool, i.e. in-depth interviews on purposive sampled (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) Hong Kong’s primary school civic education coordinators, and examining relevant National Education school documents. The research purposes concerns the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and tended to find out deep understanding and interpretation. Therefore, the data collected is primarily qualitative in nature, and intends to reflect the realities are complex and interconnected.

II. **Review of background literature**

*Nation, Identity, and National identity*
Dating back to previous century the sociologist Weber (1864-1920) argued for the importance of political action for ethnic formation and persistence. Weber went on to suggest that ‘It is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially
organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. (Smith, 1991: 26) Later, identity was originated from psychology, and it refers to the bio-psychological needs of facing difference. An identity helps to reduce unclearness and insecurity, and making life having meanings and manageable (Erikson, 1963). Then, identity was used in other disciplines such as sociology, politics, anthropology.

The international treaty of ‘Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933) Article 1’ stipulated that ‘The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states. The declarative theory of statehood defines a state as a person under international law that meets certain structural criteria, no matter whether or not the state has received the recognition of other states. On the other hand, in academic literature, a ‘nation’ can be referred as a human cultural and social community, and in as much as most members never meet each other, yet they feel a common bond, it may be considered as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Meanwhile, According to Smith (1991), historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic virtue and ideology are the components of the standard, Western model of the nation. In recent decade, Billig(1995) suggests we are facing ‘banal’ reminders, or ‘flaggings’, of our nations and our national identities. It can be ranged from the language in national newspapers or bulletins on the national news which appeal to ‘us’ as its imagined audiences, to the speech by national politicians and even to the descriptions of the ‘national’ weather. Thompson (2001) noted that there is an assumption that ‘the world is divided into discrete, culturally distinct nations. Nations exist and that individuals routinely identify themselves, and others, as belonging to our nation or, in the case of ‘foreigners’, to other nations.’ (2001:22)

Although ‘nation’ is commonly used in informal discourse as equated with ‘state’ or ‘country, it is not identical to a ‘state’. A useful differentiation would be the people in a nation-state consider themselves as a ‘nation’, united in the political and legal structure of the ‘state’. With the widespread influence of the West in the modern times, the conceptions of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ have remained vital elements, although in somewhat altered form, in most non-western conceptions of national identity. Especially in Eastern Europe and Asia, these conceptions of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ ‘challenged the dominance of the Western model and added significant new elements, more attuned to the very different circumstances and trajectory of non-Western communities.

As for the linkages between nation and national identity, Gellner(1983) suggested that the appeal of the ideas of nation and national identity is that they seem so straightforward having a national identity seems to be we just seem to have them. However, Thompson argued that nations and national identities are ‘fundamentally sociological categories with which each of us as individuals work in order to make sense of our social world’ (2001: 24), and they are not naturally occurring. The social interactions that produce and reproduce national identities are always obscured. Thompson (2001:20) further argued that ‘opinions about why the ideas of nation and national identity hold such an appeal, abut why it is right to defend one’s nation or about why it is proper, even natural, to be proud of one’s national identity, are themselves underpinned by a belief in the existence of entities called ‘nations’. Thus, an important consequence of these understandings is that the nation is ‘objectified’.
people can learn their nation’s history, remember their national identity and they can express this national identity (Thompson, 2001).

Callahan (2006) noted that in China, the nation does not arise from the political leaders alone. It also arises from the cultural governance of less official sites in art, film, literature, and public holidays. Take the National Humiliation Day in China for example, it goes beyond producing and containing nationalism; the Chinese people also consumes nationalism as part of a symbolic economy that can give rise to identity.

In Hong Kong, the conception of ‘nation’(民族) is always problematic, as it is sometimes affected by its Chinese translation, which can be equated with ‘country’(国家) and ‘state’(政府) in literal meanings. Meanwhile, there were a few studies about the ethnic identity and national identity of Hong Kong people in the 1980s and 1990s (Lau and Kuan, 1988:178-87; Lau, 1992:152-153; Lee and Leung, 1995), which largely found that Hong Kong people placed a stronger ethnic, cultural, and historical, rather than a political – national identity orientation.

National identification in Hong Kong
Just before the return of sovereignty in 1997, Hong Kong people were seen as having a strong indigenous ethnic identity before 1997, showing high ethnic pride (Wong, 1996; Wong, 1997). The Chinese national identification was found to show a weaker tendency, yet they were strong in emphasizing the Chinese historical-cultural past. Tensions were thus formed between the indigenous ethnic identity and the national identity. Hong Kong people were said to raise their ethnic identity above their national identity (Wong, 1996). Hong Kong people’s Chinese identification lack the national-political formation dimension. They saw themselves as more “Hongkongese” than Chinese, and defining China from the perspectives of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, they still had a clear conception of Chinese nationality and Chinese sovereignty, and were willing to strengthen their National Education. Finally, those who value freedom and human rights, prefer self-determination or will consider leaving Hong Kong are less likely to identity with China (Wong, 1996).

Education and national identification
Education is always charged with the mission of cultivating citizens’ loyalty to a nation. In the U.K., dating back to the early of 20th century, the official needs an education that emphasized citizens’ loyalty and responsibility to the nation (Jiang, 2003). Furthermore, history teaching was commonly infused with the mission of instilling a sense of respect and proud to the political system in the U.K. In the U.S., civic education takes the loyalty to the nation as one of its aims, among other aims like understanding about the historical and political system, an active attitude to political authority, and belief in equality, political participation and analytical, communication skills (Yu, Liu, 2003).

In Hong Kong’s educational context, the understanding of ‘nation’ would be compromised by the inadequate education about what constitute ‘nation’ in the formal curriculum. It is commonly referred as ‘country’ instead. There is always confusion of terminologies between ‘country’, ‘nation’ and ‘nation-state’.
III. **Research methodology**

This case study is a qualitative research. The researcher is more interested in the quality of a particular activity than in how often it occurs or how it would otherwise be evaluated. This type of research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials are frequently referred to as qualitative research. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). It seeks to understand how people make sense out of their lives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

A special interest of qualitative researchers lies in the perspectives of the subjects of a study. This aims at exploring how the respondents perceive the question, issue or concept as such. Therefore, the kind of data collected would be mostly qualitative in nature, and the methods would include interview transcripts and, if applicable, examining school documents (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

IV. **Research samples**

This study has employed purposive sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), which intends to solicit grounded descriptions from expert informants of Hong Kong’s primary school teachers. They are responsible for National Education in their schools. The target samples come from different sponsoring body background in Hong Kong’s education system, and different regions of Hong Kong. This is intended to reflect an adequate coverage of the type of primary schools in Hong Kong. Experiences in the civic education or National Education in their respective schools enable them to provide informed opinion on the questions being asked. The sample matrix of teachers used in this study is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>School sponsoring body</th>
<th>Religion/Background</th>
<th>Geographical location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Catholic Diocesan</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Kowloon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Methodist Church</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>New Territories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Hong Kong Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Lok Sin Tong</td>
<td>Local charity group</td>
<td>Kowloon (East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>Buddhist HHCKLA</td>
<td>New Territories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6</td>
<td>A local Chinese organization</td>
<td>Traditional Pro-Beijing Chinese government</td>
<td>Hong Kong Island</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. **Data analysis**

In this case study, it assumes the speciality and uniqueness of each mini-case involved, but also the commonality across cases (Stake, 1996). As the target sample shows, this study involves six mini-cases, and each one tries to capture some characteristics of primary schools in Hong Kong. This is not intended to generalize any finding from this case study, but their uniqueness and speciality can generate research findings that are significant in understanding national identity and National Education in Hong Kong.

This study pays particular attention to the role which individuals themselves play in taking account of national identity and National Education. It addresses how individual actively employ their ‘common stock of knowledge’ about national
identities and National Education. It emphasizes the practical aspects of the reproduction of national identities and National Education (Thompson, 2001).

VI. Research findings and discussions

• Meanings of ‘national identity’
Interviewees defined national identity in diverse ways, and these cover concepts like birth and origin, identification, nationality, proud, reciprocal of rights and responsibilities, members of a nation, obligations, history and culture. This can reflect a multiple ways of defining national identity. The interviewees have used these concepts to ‘locate themselves in relation to others by reflecting on what it is that makes us belong. (Thompson, 2001: 24)’

‘I agree with having that particular identity if I am a citizen of that country. However, you are not supposed to have a national identity of your place of living and origin is a city but not a country. The national identity includes my own identity, sense of identification to the country, be proud of my country, and think about what areas can be improved for the country.’ (T1)

‘I will think of my nationality and what I can do for my country. I also consider how much do I know about my country.’ (T2)

‘It is when I think of my identity and feel proud of being a citizen of my home country.’ (T3)

‘It refers to the members of a nation but not the residents of a city. One has the rights of being protected by the laws of the nation, and has the rights of acquiring properties and accommodation. In return, he or she has the obligation to serve the nation.’ (T4)

‘A person care about China’s history and culture, and have a mind to understand China and inherit the Chinese tradition, and feel proud of this, then it is national identity. Feeling proud of being a China and a sense of belonging to it’ (T5)

‘A person’s homeland which is also the motherland of one person.’ (T6)

• Defining their national identity before 1997
Interviewees defined their national identity before 1997 mostly in terms of ‘Hong Kong people.’ The British colonial rule had left Hong Kong people no where to identify but a local ethnic identity (Wong, 1996; Wong, 1997). A strong sense of ‘Chinese national identity’ only appeared in two responses. The followings are some typical extracts from their responses.

‘I was a Hong Kong citizen before the return of sovereignty to China. Yet, I asked myself whether I am just a Hong Kong citizen or a Chinese Hong Kong citizen in the post-1997 era. Up to this point, I still have reservations of calling myself as Chinese. I recognized that I am a Hong Kong citizen because I was very much influenced by the British education system when I was young.’ (T1)

‘I considered myself as a Hong Konger rather than a Chinese. As I was born under the rule of the British Hong Kong Government and I was influenced by the British
culture. I admitted that this was the reason why I was not willing to recognize myself as a Chinese.’ (T2)

‘I regard myself as a Hong Konger owing to the absence of National Education before 1997. I knew very little about China when I was in secondary school, such as the ceding of Hong Kong to the British. I had an inclination to tell other people that I was a Hong Konger.’ (T3)

‘I regarded myself as ‘Hong Kong people’ because the Chinese government did not want to take back Hong Kong before 1997, and that the British did not want to treat us as nationals.’ (T5)

There are two interviewees who had a strong sense of Chinese national identity even before 1997. This can be traced to their personal educational and family background.

‘My identity was influenced by teachers and the educational system. In the 1950s, the political environment influenced the thoughts and ideas among my teachers. They were very clear about their national identity since most of them were born with political and military backgrounds. With the economic growth in the 1970s, the younger generations seldom aware of their identities. They had a strong sense of Hong Kong as a city identity, rather than a national identity. In the 1980s, the Education Department began to implement civic education, and because I belonged to the first generation of teachers in schools with a strong sense of national identity, I took up the post of coordinator of civic education in my school.’ (T4)

‘Before 1997, I already thought that I am a Chinese, since my motherland is China. Hong Kong is part of China. I had a strong sense of Chinese because I was born in a family’ (T6)

• Defining their national identity after 1997
After 1997, however, there are some significant changes in their perceptions of national identity, with some respondents mentioned that they have a stronger sense of national identification. But first let’s recall that two interviewees (T4, T6) had a clear sense of Chinese national identity both before and after 1997. The followings are extracts of their responses.

‘I was very clear about Chinese holidays, and I was not used to have Christian names. As I was born in Kowloon City and studied History later, I was knowledgeable about my national identity, the outlook of China, and the Chinese national flag.’ (T4)

‘I don’t see any significant changes to my national identity before and after 1997. I am a Chinese throughout all these years. There is no reason for me because of the British rule that I should define myself other than a Chinese national identity.’ (T6)

Meanwhile, there was one respondent has got reservation to call herself as a ‘Chinese’. She preferred to describe herself as ‘Hong Kong Chinese’.

‘I am a Hong Kong Chinese citizen after the return of Hong Kong’s sovereignty from the Great Britain to the People’s Republic of China, and that the People’s Liberation Army took over the local defence. ‘Hong Kongers’ consider themselves as Chinese
when there is positive news coverage. They are proud to be Chinese when the Chinese athletes won medals in the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. In contrast, I have reservation to say I am a Chinese when there are negative news, such as the incidents of poisonous dumplings, counterfeit money, and drugs.’ (T1)

The rest of 3 interviewees replied that they have increasingly identified themselves with a Chinese national identity since 1997. They mentioned some developments which affected their perceptions of national identity. This may reflect a clearer and stronger sense of perceptions of Chinese national identity among them.

‘After 1997, with the opening up of the mainland Chinese education system, I began to know more about what is happening there. Also, my trips to China also enhanced my understanding about Hong Kong people as a Chinese. My feeling towards China became much better. I don’t have much resistance to China. I am a Chinese.’ (T2)

‘The return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 gave me a sense of ‘going home’. I take the national identity seriously after 1997, especially when I stay in other countries. I am willing to tell foreigners that I am Hong Kong people from China...I have a stronger sense of national identity to China as I am responsible for organizing activities in relation to Moral and Civic Education. (T3)

‘After 1997, there was a great change in my identification. A Chinese national identity began to emerge, especially with a strong China emerging in the international scene. There is a great change in my perception. I began to develop a sense of belonging. In fact, before 1997, we didn’t’ seek for help from China, while the British did not treat us as their citizens. This made us feel not knowing what to do.’ (T5)

The above perception changes of national identity is an interesting finding when we compare this to other national identification studies on the general public done in the early years after 1997, in which Hong Kong people were found to sustain a clear ‘Hong Kongese’ identity in the early years after 1997 (Lau and Kwan, 1988; Choi, 2001).

- **Significant events informing their national identity**

The respondents mentioned some significant social and political events which have informed their perceptions on their own national identity. These significant social and political events help to shape their developing perceptions of ‘national identity’, especially since 1997 handover. In short, they are mostly the kind of pomp-and-ceremony events which can be conventionally understood as ‘national’ events and are emotionally-laden with references to ‘the nation’(Thompson, 2001). These significant events help to increase understanding about China among them, and cultivate belonging and proud of a Chinese national identity. Here are some typical responses.

‘With the open door policy of China, and the athletic and sports achievements of China, I felt belonging to China. Knowing that Chinese athletes won medals in Beijing Olympic Games, I was very proud to be a Chinese. Similar, I am very excited and willing to say I am a member of Chinese when the Chinese National Flag is hoisted.’ (T2)
‘My national identity is influenced by the matters happened to me. People usually think about their relationship with their home country when there are more propaganda about their nation and national anthem. Although I am not a politician, I pay attention to the news about China nowadays. One example is the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games.’ (T3)

‘The establishment and development of China played an essential role in shaping my national identity. I am pleased to see China’s economy grows so fast. The leaders have got insights on the development of the whole nation. The Sino-British Joint Declaration signified the restoration of our national identities. Also, after 1997, I had chances to teach in mainland China, and this gave me a chance to know about my home country. As a Chinese, I am proud of all these’ (T4)

‘The 1997 handover was an opportunity for a change in my national identification. There was a call for cultivating national identity. It became stronger, and our school had organized more opportunities for our students to learn more about China. ...The increasing power of China is significant to me. In 2003, there was the first astronaut. In 2008, there was Beijing Olympic Games. This year (note: 2009) there was 60th National Anniversary with the grand military parade. All these made me feel excited.’ (T5)

‘There are numerous events which make one should be proud of Chinese. Not to mention the significant economic achievements taken place since the Open Door Policy, China has got achievements in sports, aero-space technology, and infrastructure. Furthermore, our country has successfully held the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. They let the world to see what a great nation China is!’ (T6)

**How do they perceive negative events**

During the interviews, some teachers mentioned negative events happened in China, and they either have a deep thought or apply critical thinking on these negative events. Although these negative events may create unfavourable feelings towards China among the interviewees, the effects were nonetheless not long-lasting on their perceptions of the national identity. Also, they point to the needs of thinking about how to improve these areas and taking these as something useful to teach their students.

‘If I heard a negative news report about China, I will think deeply about what areas can be rectified. I am not ashamed of being a Chinese even if there is a negative news report. I do believe that the news can be used as teaching materials to suggest areas for improvements.’ (T3)

‘Of course, some events also need our critical thinking: the tainted milk incident which led us to learn something about chemical substances. Also, there were bribery and corruption happened in the local governments. All these require us to have critical thinking skills. I have the confidence on the central government, but as the policies implemented in the local level, they always led to failure and weakened people’s confidence on them. The Chinese press always only covered the good news, and as a teacher, I always reminded my students to be careful about this. I guide my students to think about how China can do better. For example, the shaky
infrastructure in China which was found in 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, I will guide my students to think about the problems beneath.’ (T5)

‘If you take those negative events seriously, they just show that how big our country is, and differences is normal. What we must do is let our students to know about them, and to guide them to think about where we can improve this.’ (T4)

- Defining National Education

One teacher noted the thinking and ideas changing powers of National Education. She thought that National Education is a tool to change people’s minds, and orients one towards political aspect of China.

‘It aims at changing one’s thinking and ideas by means of National Education at young age. This will affect out minds from educational areas to political as well as society level. It mentions the good news reported in China, introduced the national anthem and national symbol, and influence local politics.’ (T1)

Other teachers focus on telling the belongingness, imparting knowledge about different aspects of China to the students, and cultivating proper manners towards China. Furthermore, cultivating critical thinking of telling right and wrong of a nation is needed in National Education.

‘It tells children which nation they belong to, the political system and the leaders of their country, and the relations between China and Hong Kong, the rights and responsibilities of the citizens, the culture and history of the nation. It is important to tell our students about the historical events in China, including both sensitive and non-sensitive issues, such as the June 4th event in 1989. Besides, it is about getting familiarized with their own country, differentiating the right and wrong of a nation, and to learn about the proper manners during flag-raising ceremony.’ (T2)

‘It is about realizing what has happened in China, understanding the relationship between a citizen and his/her nation, identifying the role of a citizen, and giving students the chance to feel the success of the nation.’ (T3)

Apart from understanding, one teacher also emphasize on responsibility, doing good for others, and belongingness when defining National Education.

‘...I would also think of identity and identification, responsibility, love of country, love of oneself so that one can do good deeds, and to acknowledge a Chinese national identity. The belongingness is important because it refers to a sense of being proud as a Chinese.’ (T3)

One teacher tries to differentiate between Civic Education and National Education. This subject contents differentiation serves teacher’s needs of clarifying the overlapping of contents.

‘It is about serving the country, and to know about the country... We should also distinguish between Civic Education and National Education...while Civic Education talks about citizens in a region, National Education mentioned about the people of a country in origin...the ultimate goal, of course, is to cultivate dedicated and loyal
students.’ (T4)

Finally, one respondent stress he love and pride of being a Chinese. The description gives a sense of patriotic education.

‘National Education is about the love and pride of being a Chinese. It is about understanding and sympathy of the current developments of China, however they lack behind of other developed countries. It is an imperative to carry out such kind of education in schools.’ (T6)

- **Aims of National Education**

Cultivating students’ proud and belonging as Chinese and recognize themselves as Chinese are commonly found responses. National Education should also aim at enhancing students’ recognition and reflection about their Chinese identity. The followings are some typical responses.

‘I think it is important to let our students recognize that they are Chinese. They should be proud of their home country. Students should pay attention to both positive and negative news coverage. They should give suggestions for improvement.’ (T1)

‘By visiting China, students can expand their horizons towards the culture and the characteristics of China. We should also let our students know that China stands in the world. They should develop a sense of being proud of Chinese, their loyalty and a sense of belonging to China. On attitudes, we want them to develop a touch of the mainland Chinese affairs.’ (T4)

‘National Education is for the benefit of future generations, so that they can develop a sense of belonging properly... It should aim at furthering students’ affection. We also hope our students to reflect upon their experience in China, and be proud of being a Chinese after understanding the wisdom of living in China.’ (T5)

National Education is also related to altruism, or caring about people’s living in China. A teacher aims at fostering kind and helpful attitudes among the students:

‘If one cares about the living of people in mainland China, then one will help the people who are in need. Only when you get a stronger sense of national identity can you help people from your heart.’ (T3)

- **Teaching of National Education**

The pedagogies of National Education deserve much attention, since it is still developing in Hong Kong. Sampled teachers use different methods in teaching National Education, such as taking advantage of current news and events in China as discussion issues, acquiring historical knowledge about China, on-line communications, engaging in project learning, immersing in exchange tours to China and the subsequent reflection, etc. These are multiple teaching methods of National Education. The followings are their typical responses.
‘I often think about how to engage students’ attention in joining the National Education activities. It is my responsibility to construct the learning message of the National Education for the students, like flag-hoisting. After that, the flag-raising patrol members are given chances to share their feelings to other students and teachers in order to share their reflections.’ (T3)

‘It is recommended that our students take part in some exchange activities to mainland China. Visits to Beijing Olympics and the Exhibition of Space Walk were some learning opportunities. I also arrange my students communicating with the mainland Chinese students through the internet. This can expand their social networks and enrich their knowledge about Chinese culture. But we have also considered the difference between the mainland and local students in our schools. It is interesting to examine provincial identities of the students.’ (T4)

‘We educate our students understanding about recent history of Hong Kong, and carried out mainland exchange tours. Our students learn about historical developments of Hong Kong in a systematic way through historical line. We also use both project learning and exchange tour to enhance our students understanding and feelings about China. They had to adapt to the lives in China during the trip...Through comparing the cultures between Hong Kong and China, they learn about the differences.’ (T5)

‘We provide many chances of exchange to China throughout a school year. This is effective because they can see and feel about China by themselves. They will be motivated to do their best when they come back to Hong Kong.’ (T6)

Yet, one teacher noted that although she has got some activities related to raising students understanding about China, she had no idea on how to teach National Education in a proper way. Here is her comment.

‘In my school, students are expected to identify the location of their ancestral Chinese provinces. They are also taught to write simplified Chinese characters...But I try to find out how to teach National Education from the Education Bureau. The Bureau should consider the linkages between education policies, the curriculum, teaching and learning activities, and the schools environment. Instead of superficial National Education activities, I hope implementation guidelines can be developed by the Bureau.’ (T1)

•  Evaluating National Education

While most of them admitted that it is not easy to assess students’ experiences of national education programmes and identification of ‘national identity’, they still have developed some assessment methods of learning in National Education. Questionnaires, interviews, observations, examination of students’ works are some assessment methods, with focus on both knowledge and attitudes. This may reflect a practical need of Hong Kong teachers to ascertain the effectiveness of National Education.

‘It is always not easy to evaluate students’ understanding in National Education. Small scale evaluation questionnaire can be given to the students to measure if there
is any change in their national identities. Besides, teachers can observe students on whether they have different attitudes and perceptions towards China after National Education activities.’ (T2)

‘It is usually assessed by means of questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. Pupils are asked whether there are significant changes in the level of national identity.’ (T3)

‘We can evaluate students’ knowledge about China and their attitudes.’ (T4)

‘As for the effectiveness, since the exchange tour went to the Chinese mountain areas, so they have deep feelings and thoughts because they learnt what are farming and cooking there, as well as the living conditions over there. We can tell their understandings from their participation during the tour.’ (T5)

‘We can observe how the students behave in National Education activities. We can ask them some reflective questions. I think what matters most is students’ attitude in National Education activities.’ (T6)

VII. Conclusion
This study has revealed that perceptions of national identity and National Education are not simple as one who would think. Just as what Thompson(2001) has argued, contrary to some nationalist discourses, the commonly-held assumption about the national identity is not a unitary entity. Each of us may engage in, as this study has shown, different ways of making sense of their national identity.

This study shows that teachers’ perceptions on their own national identity evolve and change over time (i.e. before and after 1997) as the macro-social and political environment change. While two respondents had got clear sense of a Chinese national identity throughout the years before and after transition, others point to an increasingly identification with a ‘Chinese national identity’, and one respondent still prefer a ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ identity. The social and political events have exerted impacted on the interviewees’ perceptions on their national identity. On defining ‘National Education’, the respondents mentioned different meanings, multiple aims, and teaching methods. Therefore, it is a multiple conception of ‘National Education’ in the case study here. Also, some respondents mentioned there should not be any avoidance of negative events in teaching ‘National Education’. As for evaluation methods in assessing their national education programmes, the responses also exhibit different orientations.

This study hopes to shed on the complexities of perceptions of national identities and National Education, and argue for a need to understand national identity and National Education in a complex and grounded way. Therefore, this study would have implications for any policy or curriculum initiatives that are related to national identity and National Education.

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