Nationalistic Education in a Post-colonial Age: the Impact of Study Trips to China and the Development of Hong Kong Students’ National Identity

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Abstract

With the return of its sovereignty to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 July 1997, Hong Kong attained a new political status as a Special Administrative Region. Hong Kong students, under British rule, had long been receiving de-politicised education, and a sense of belonging to China was limited to the cognitive domain of Chinese history. The ideal of promoting national identity, underpinned in the current civic education curriculum, is proving to be a difficult task. While much literature has documented how curriculum-based educational practices fail to instil students with such an identity, little study has been undertaken to suggest effective alternatives and to examine how they work. This paper reports a study investigating the impact of study trips on developing students’ national identity. Through observation and interviews, it takes an in-depth look into students’ experience, into how they identify with a Chinese identity. Results indicate that though the study trips help to nurture the cognitive and affective dimensions of national identity, there are limits and possibilities involved. This paper concludes with reminders which teachers should have taken into account when thinking of using co-curricular activities to address the legitimate need of fostering nationalistic education.

Introduction

On 1 July 1997, Hong Kong returned its sovereignty to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and was given a new political status as a Special Administrative Region (SAR). The particularity of post-1997 (or post-colonial) Hong Kong, however, lies not only in its special social, political and economic position among other

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Chinese cities under ‘one country, two systems’, but also in the twists and turns in the identification with the motherland among the populace over a century. Under British colonial governance, Hong Kong citizens were generally found to be ‘apolitical’, since they were ‘socialised’ to stay away from politics. This is due partly to the Chinese traditional thought that decent people should never get into trouble with governmental agencies, but is mainly due to the rationale and philosophy of the government policies. Before the signing of the Sino–British Joint Declaration in 1984, ‘de-politicisation’ was the underlying principle of those policies (Chiu, 1996). This could be seen as a calculated political choice of the colonial government because among the repertoire of strategies for social cohesion and social control, de-politicisation did generate the greatest positive difference between the total benefit and the total cost of its outcome. Such a de-politicising strategy also affected the education system, which serves as the principal means to develop human knowledge, skills, psychological and physical health, moral incentives and humanity, and to help the educated to learn social norms, values and behaviour. As pointed out by many curriculum theorists, the Hong Kong government was very sensitive to political issues in education and tried hard to keep them under control (Morris, 1990; Morris and Chan, 1997; Lee, 1999; Tse, 1999). Civic education was never a core learning area in contrast to other subjects, and nationalistic education was untouched. The only information and experience students had with respect to China were limited to Chinese history, the cultural aspect of heritage, customs and traditions, and thus their sense of Chinese identity was more ‘cultural’ than ‘political’ (Luk, 1991: 663). The knowledge and feelings they had about the Mainland were bound up with a cultural rather a political sense of belonging (Lee and Leung, 1995; Wong, 1996). On the contrary, they were fostered with an identity of ‘Hongkongese’ or “Heunggôngyâhn” (Matthews, 1997), which was associated with individualism, human rights and democracy. This certainly hindered the development of the national Chinese identity or identification with China, which puts a strong emphasis on collective wills, patriotism and even monocracy.

Under this scenario, students had been educated with the belief that they did not belong to the nation of China but to a city, Hong Kong.

The situation, however, changed in 1984, right after the signing of the Sino–British Joint Declaration. The need to develop students with a sense of national identity or love for the nation and pride in being Chinese was first officially mentioned in the 1985 Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools issued

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2In this paper, nationalistic education refers to all learning and teaching practices which aim to develop students with a sense of national identity, love for the nation and pride in being Chinese.

3Following Lau’s (1997) articulation, the term identity here “refers primarily to the way the Hong Kong Chinese define their relationship to Hong Kong and to China” (p. 1).

4According to the analysis of Lau (1997) and Ma (2000), for Hong Kong Chinese, the image of the FRC government as a monocracy was indicated in both the large-scale political activities after the June 4 incident in 1989 and the way some political parties were being criticised by the Chinese leaders as ‘anti-communist’ parties.
by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) of the Education Department (now known as the Education and Manpower Bureau) of the Hong Kong SAR (Curriculum Development Council, 1985: 30). Its revision in 1996 put even stronger emphasis on the development of students' national identity within the scope of civic education. It stated that:

Politically speaking, one's civic identity is defined by one's national identity. The national community therefore constitutes the ultimate domestic context for one's civic learning. Such national spirit as nationalism and patriotism is essential not only for one's national identity and sense of belonging, but also for the cohesion and strength of one's own nation. (Curriculum Development Council, 1996: 23).

The more the comprehensive conceptual framework and instructions for implementing nationalistic education provided, the more extensive was public attention and discussion.5 People examined the way the civic education curriculum changed, traced elements for cultivating a 'proper' sense of national identity and recommended different modes of implementation (Chan, 1993; Fok, 1997; Leung and Print, 1998; Hughes and Stone, 1999). Their concern was of fundamental significance because worldwide experience — from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) study of civic education issues across 24 countries on the way young people view and define their identity — had clearly shown how meaningful the task is, especially during times of political and/or social transitions.6 For reasons of having better political achievement, social order and economic progression in a post-colonial age, promoting students with appropriate national knowledge as well as the attitudes, values and behaviours expected has become as important as the goal of education itself since the handing over of the city to Chinese rule.

Since the signing of the Declaration, a number of empirical studies investigating topics relating to Hong Kong Chinese people's national identity have been initiated. The most interesting one was a large-scale longitudinal survey, conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, exploring Hong Kong Chinese political attitudes (Kuan and Lau, 1997). Research findings showed that people generally preferred to identify themselves as 'Hongkongese' rather than Chinese. Although over a decade, less would like to identify themselves as Hongkongese, the percentage of those claiming a Chinese identity did not increase.7 Ma (2000)

5These guidelines also acted as an important reference for later consultation documents addressing national identity, which included the 1998 Secondary School Curriculum Outline for Civic Education in Form One to Form Three (Curriculum Development Council, 1998), the 2001 The Way Forward in Curriculum Development (Curriculum Development Council, 2001) and the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2002).

6In mapping the common features of civic education in 24 countries, Torney-Purta et al. (1999) put forward clearly the claim that "a sense of national identity [. . .] has provided social resources invaluable in coping with transitions in many countries" (p. 31).

7From 1985 to 1995, the percentages of Hong Kong Chinese who agreed that they were 'Hongkongese' and 'Chinese' dropped from 59.5 to 50.2% and from 36.2 to 30.9%, respectively.
even used the term ‘re-nationalisation’ to express the seriousness of the problem he encountered. Hong Kong students, generally speaking, were found to be weak in national identity despite the emphasis of the official curriculum (Lee, 1999: 336). Although the majority of schools had reported adopting many of the recommendations of the CDC's Guidelines, the practice of nationalistic education in schools was less adequately understood than it should be. The types of difficulties faced by teachers, who had been receiving and giving de-politicised education, and the kinds of support that are needed for implementing effective nationalistic education are still being sought. A recent study done by Leung and Print (2002) found that, while civic educators in secondary schools were willing to implement nationalistic education, the percentage of those supporting it as the core of civic education was not high. All these, on the one hand explained why Hong Kong students have been trained to be politically indifferent, and, on the other, alerted many educators to re-think and re-conceptualise the curriculum.

In a very rigid sense, although what students should be learning from a civic education curriculum is highly constrained by the socio-historical context unique to each country, there are still some commonalities across many of them. The IEA's study stated the universal principle that:

Civic education should be cross-disciplinary, participative, interactive, related to life, conducted in a non-authoritarian environment, cognizant of the challenges of societal diversity and co-constructed with parents and the community (and non-government organizations) as well as the school (Torney-Purta et al., 1999: 30).

Priority is given to a student-centred (not teacher-centred) approach. By participation and interaction, students are cultivated with in-depth understanding, viewpoints and self-insights. This somehow matches with an experiential approach of learning, which emphasises the roles of students in exploring (not receiving), being active (not passive), experiencing and understanding (not repeating back) and thinking and analysing (not memorising) (Kolb, 1984). Similar movement could also be found in Hong Kong, particularly under the current trend of education reform, which highlights the concept of ‘life-wide learning’ and advocates that students “should be able to take part in a comprehensive range of learning activities both inside and outside the classroom” (Education Commission, 2000: 37). Within the domain of civic education, the use of co-curricular activities has gained much public attention. Co-curricular activities are sometimes understood as extracurricular activities, extra-class activities, non-class activities and school-life activities (Jeziorski, 1994; Stevens, 1999). More generally, co-curricular activities are “any school-based student activity that give students an opportunity to blend the various aspects of their academic learning with personal actions” (Stevens, 1999: 42). They emphasise helping students to construct knowledge, develop proper attitudes and build their value system through obtaining students' involvement and participation (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1993). The theoretical basis of co-curricular activities
is wellgrounded because fundamentally we all develop our attitudes and abilities as well as construct knowledge from learning experience; and from what we see and experience, we gradually learn how to analyse, judge and establish values (Burnard, 1988). In this sense, the effectiveness of the traditional kind of curriculum-based educational practices, mainly classroom teaching which sees teachers as 'broadcasters' and students as 'receivers', in reaching the intended ends of civic education has been questionable. Co-curricular activities help to facilitate students' cognitive and affective competences and it is believed that the same mechanism happens when they are organised for the purpose of developing students' national identity. Among the many choices of activities, study trips to China are believed to be the most effective, as they emphasise students' involvement and participation. In the light of this, the present study aims to find out the impact of study trips on students' development of national identity. Examining those experiences would bring new ideas to the present discussion, and the findings could help schools in Hong Kong to reflect on the role of study trips in civic education curriculum planning and delivery in the future.

Literature Review

The Three Dimensions of National Identity

National identity is a multidimensional concept (Torney-Purta et al., 1999). It is also a process of mass identification (Bloom, 1990). It is about a sense of 'we-ness' among members of the same nation. In this process, one has to be aware of what members of one's nation have in common and in what ways they differ from those of other nations (Chan, 2000). At the individual level, it is about which mass identification one shares and whether one perceives him/herself as a part of the 'we'. Personal differences are possible but commonality is highlighted. Very much similar to the process of socialisation, commonality is first objectively constituted and later subjectively felt. Bloom states that "national identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols—have internationalized the symbols of the nation" (Bloom, 1990: 61, 62). The 'function' of symbols is often found in the constitution of a political community to which the contents of a national identity refers. For those who find that a 'nation' is manifested not only in an entity which occupies some well-defined territory but also in the reinforced national knowledge and social norms and values of its inhabitants living in the territory, such a political community is as 'real' as the country itself. Somewhere, it is found to be the most powerful force and sociological reality of nationalism (Gellner, 1999). On the other hand, contrasting the difference

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6 This results from the survey findings of the first phase of the same government-funded project, of 116 primary and 56 secondary schools, which asked the civic education teachers to indicate how 'effective' they find the different types of co-curricular activities in developing students' national identity.
between an Eastern and a Western image of a nation, Smith claims that “what we mean by ‘national’ identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous” (Smith, 1991: 9). In a more recent article, Smith even argues that this ‘modernist’ account of the nation as the product of specifically modern conditions—those of early industrialism or its anticipations, social mobility, the need for mass literacy, public education and the like—is not only wrong, but additionally only tells half the story (Smith, 1999: 37). The other half should come from the way citizens feel their nation performs social and cultural and political functions, the internalised ‘image’ they have of the nation. Synthesising the ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ account of a nation, Parekh sees the concept of national identity as three-dimensional in nature: “cognitive because they assert something about the community and are not fictitious in nature, affective because they arouse emotions, and conative because they inspire action” (Parekh, 1999: 67).

In short, national identity in this study refers to one’s moral and emotional identification with the internalised image of and the relationship with his/her political community. One’s sense of national identity can be manifested by one’s cognition of, affection for and behaviour towards his/her political community. Cognition refers to the substantial knowledge and understanding about the political community, China, and its underlying philosophical ideas such as Chinese history, culture, government’s political ideology and structure, society’s problems and ways of carrying out the citizen’s responsibility. (Curriculum Development Council, 1996). Affection emphasises one’s emotional attachment to the nation and the citizenship, one’s feelings of association with other citizens and one’s evaluative relationship between one’s own national and foreign nations corresponding to one’s persistent attitude towards the identified object, that is the nation. Behaviour varies from the active acquisition of the knowledge about the nation, the concern and reading about news related to the nation, the willingness to carry out one’s responsibility towards the nation, and the tendency to perform the above actions. The three dimensions are inter-related in the building-up of national identity (Fok, 1997). It is only for the sake of clarity that the analysis of how students develop national identity through participating in the study trips to China, and thus the evaluation of the effectiveness of the trips, will be broken down into the dimensions of knowledge, affection and behaviour later in this paper.

A Note on Critical Thinking

It is not the writers’ aim to promote irrational, outrageous nationalism in students via participation in study trips to China. Its terrible consequences, like dying for the country in an unconditional and irrational way, should always be noted. Apart from the three dimensions, it is therefore suggested that critical thinking, which is motivated by and established in moral foundation and particular values, should be a component for the better development of national identity. Critical thinking requires students to “explicate, understand, and critique their own deepest
prejudices, biases, and misconceptions, thereby allowing students to discover and contest their egocentric and sociocentric tendencies” (Paul, 1987: 140; cited in Fairbrother, 2003: 107). Students should display their capabilities to think reasonably and reflectively and to decide what to believe or do. However, since the agenda of developing national identity is nothing but political, manifestations of reasoned reflections about one’s beliefs and actions are not enough. Dispositions like ‘skepticism’, ‘intellectual curiosity’ and ‘an openness to and respect for multiple perspectives’ should be incorporated. Thus, critical thinking is defined as reasoning “from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own” and as the “ability to reason without reference to one’s own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings and vested interests of one’s friends, community, or nation” (Paul, 1992: 153–154; cited in Fairbrother, 2003: 108). In fact, the CDC’s 1996 Guidelines did emphasise that the development of students’ national identity should be founded on universal core moral values across societies. These core moral values include equality, justice, mutuality, freedom and the like to promote students to respect and to live in peace with other people and societies in order to achieve the common good for the betterment of humankind (Curriculum Development Council, 1996).

Methods

The Samples: Participating Schools and the Study Trips

There were three primary and three secondary schools, as initially recommended by officers of the Education and Manpower Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR, taking part in the study. The six schools were found to have shown remarkable initiative in implementing co-curricular activities for the purpose of developing students’ national identity. Since only two each of the primary and secondary sections did organise study trips to China in the academic year 2001–2002, for data triangulation, two other secondary schools were invited to contribute. Table 1 summarises the information about the study trips of the six schools.

Action Research: Conducting Research with Teachers

In order to investigate in-depth the impact of study trips on students, in developing their national identity, an action research method was adopted. Action research emphasises curriculum research and development and puts provisional practice to the test. Curriculum here refers not only to the stated CDC’s Guidelines but also to all specifications about education, the practice of learning and teaching and the study trips to China in particular. Very often, action research takes its participants as a kind of social matter, a form of strategic action susceptible to improvement (Stenhouse, 1975; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, 1998). Since any inquiry is of little significance unless it is rooted in the knowledge of those who are actually involved (Heron, 1981; Rowan and Reason, 1981), school teachers were given the
Table 1  A summary of the Study Trips of the Six Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study trip</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary schools (PS)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS_WY</td>
<td>Knowing about China and comparing the learning environment of Hong Kong schools with that of Mainland.</td>
<td>Three days, Zhaoxing</td>
<td>P.1 to P.6 students and their parents, altogether 99 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS_CSW</td>
<td>Knowing about China and exchanging experience with Mainland students.</td>
<td>Two days, Gaomingshi</td>
<td>P.1 to P.6 students and their parents, altogether 110 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary schools (SS)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS_HW</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge of various subjects, such as history, geography, literature, liberal studies and exchanging experience with Mainland students.</td>
<td>Seven days, Jiangxi</td>
<td>All 70 S.6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS_TBN</td>
<td>Knowing the economic development of Shanghai; appreciating Chinese traditional architecture and exchanging experience with Mainland students.</td>
<td>Five days, Shanghai</td>
<td>14 S.6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS_SHW*</td>
<td>Giving donations to the poor students.</td>
<td>Five days, Guangxi</td>
<td>20 students from S.1 to S.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS_CC*</td>
<td>Knowing the economic development of Shanghai; appreciating Chinese traditional architecture and exchanging experience with Mainland students.</td>
<td>Six days, Shanghai</td>
<td>20 S.4 and S.6 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These two secondary schools were invited for data triangulation.

The status of co-researchers and were invited to contribute actively and directly to the creative thinking at all stages of investigation. This co-operative mode of inquiry even suggests the idea of a ‘tacit understanding’ that the frontline teachers certainly know more and the research area better than the researchers do. On the contrary, researchers were there not to compel teachers to organise trips or activities on particular topics, but to facilitate them to deal with the issue of developing students’ national identity, to be reflective about their organisation and implementation of the study trips, to help trace the impact on students and to aid in identifying the underlying hindrance and success factors of those trips. More generally, emphasis was put on the idea of constructive alignment, to see if the activities align with both the objectives, as stated in the curriculum document, and the learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996, 1999).

Biggs’s idea of constructive alignment focuses fundamentally on learning and teaching in higher education. The principle is that “when there is alignment between what we want, how we teach and how we assess, teaching is likely to be much more effective than when there is not” (Biggs, 1999: 26).
The Methods Used

Instead of merely reporting selected study trips from a teacher’s perspective, other methodologically triangulated data were collected. They are for transforming the taken-for-granted knowledge and beliefs of teachers to a critical and theoretical level and to suggest reminders for implementing study trips to China to develop students’ national identity. To simultaneously see things from an insider’s perspective and explore the nature of a particular social setting, researchers (sometimes as active participants) performed observation throughout each of the steps of organising and implementing trips. Researchers jotted down field-notes on the typical interactions between teachers when organising the activities, between teachers and students when conducting the activities and between students when participating in the activities, and made critical reflections (Burgess, 1984). To trace the impact of study trips, students who took part in the selected trips were interviewed later in focus groups largely about their cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of learning. The interviews were semi-structured. The information collected thus gives researchers more room to make accurate, precise and meaningful interpretations (Measor, 1985; Fielding, 1993; Fontana and Frey, 1994).

Fieldwork and Methods of Analysis

Fieldwork took place during December 2001 and June 2002. Interviews were conducted in schools by at least two experienced interviewers, with each lasting for about an hour. With a few exceptions because of difficulties in arrangement, each focus group included at least four students who were randomly selected. They were conducted in the local Chinese dialect. All interviews were videotaped, translated into English as necessary and transcribed. Written transcripts were analysed, compared and contrasted for significant themes underlying students’ views. Though it was valuable to report the ‘total comments’ of respondents so as to depict the significance of the themes revealed, in the following, interpretative summary supported with ‘illustrative quotes’ was used instead. This is intended to help readers to understand the way in which students experienced, the meaning of these themes, and most importantly the firm feeling they had about the study trips (Bryman and Burgess, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Results and Discussion

Reflection from observations and interviews retrieves three important impacts of the study trips on students, which correspond directly to the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of national identity.
The Emphasis on Cultural Knowledge

National identity places much emphasis on both the political and cultural commonalities shared by people living in a community. The learning contents of the target study trips, as mentioned in the CDC’s 1996 Guidelines, should include the understanding of the traditional thoughts, historical heroes, ethnic groups, social problems, economic development, constitutive principles of the Chinese government and many other topics. This helps to present students with a picture of both the political and the cultural China. However, the objectives of the present study trips showed an uneven weight between the two. The political issues of China were touched slightly; social problems were seldom discussed. However, exceptions were found. For example in SS_HW, seminars were arranged to provide students with the opportunity to understand the legal system of China. Students also visited the Museum of the Nangchang Revolution to learn about the political revolution leading to the foundation of contemporary China. In SS_TBN, students visited the Yatdahuazhi, in which the Chinese Communist Party secretly had their first meeting. Regarding the other study trips, political items were always undermined by other cultural content in the same trip, which did little to enhance students’ understanding of political China.

Two incongruities to the above trends were located. Recent economic development of China, which is closely related to its political environment and development, was easily identified as the outstanding item for study or even the main theme of the trip. But the political implications of the economic development were often ignored. Generally, students enjoyed the cultural activities as long as they need not sit down and listen passively to their teachers’ ‘speech’ and had a chance to ‘play’. Throughout the interviews, students often recalled cultural items better. For example, students after participating in PS_WY said, “what we remembered most was the food and the beautiful places traveled”. Political aspects, and even the economic development of China, were often mentioned less or omitted altogether. For example, after taking part in SS_HW, students did not mention their learning about the legal system, tourism and the economic reform of China first orat length. Rather, they talked a lot and more excitedly about the scenic spots in Jiangxi (excluding the museum) and their interactions with the Mainland students.

The shift to cultural knowledge is understandable since, compared with political items, it is effective in fostering a positive image of China. In fact, during the interviews, it was found that students were commonly pre-engaged with a negative image of China and/or the Mainland Chinese. They often implied in their comments that “Hongkongese” was supposed to be more civilised than the Mainland Chinese. It was a stereotype, a simplified generalisation perhaps from the media presentations. Students who had never been to China thought that the place was very backward and they at first did not want to visit. As one of the students of PS_CSW said, “I thought it’s full of pebbles and rocks”. Therefore, it is believed that with the emphasis on all the positive cultural aspects of heritage,
customs and traditions, students were more likely to demonstrate a change in the pre-engaged image, a replacement of the negative stereotype with a more positive one. However, given the proposition that it is the students who need to exhibit their ability to reason without reference to the feelings and vested interests of one’s friends, community or nation in the development of national identity, such an imbalance is subject to criticism. Political as well as social and economic aspects of China should by all means be discussed and referenced. Again, it should be remembered that the purpose is not to promote irrational nationalistic study trips which aim to indoctrinate students with strong ideologies to love the country and the ruling political party. Nor is it a suggestion towards another extreme of putting forward a radical stand to force students to criticise the nation by presenting the controversial political issues about China, say the June 4 incident. The claim is that to balance the knowledge between cultural, political and other aspects of China is as important as to include critical thinking in nationalistic education if we want to have a better and balanced development of students’ national identity in the cognitive dimension. Obviously, more knowledge of different aspects of China helps in breaking down students’ negative stereotypes of China, filling an oversimplified understanding of the nation with substantial information and reducing the intuitive negative affection very often against China or being a Chinese.

Students’ Affective Experience of China and Its People

Sympathy and empathy were two outstanding affections found in students after the study trips. They were particularly enthusiastic in fund-raising for poor villagers in SS_SHW. They represented the relationships between the students and the Chinese compatriots. The sorrows of people generally attract human sympathy. When students realised the poverty in undeveloped villages, they felt sorry for them. During the trip, although the Secondary 1 students complained that some of the Mainland boys were not friendly, the older Secondary 6 schoolmates did not take care of them and recalled very excitedly about the visit to a famous scenic spot in Guangxi, they were still deeply moved by the plight of the villagers. They showed great sympathy and tried their very best to help. In their words:

S.1 student A: We visited a family. The wife told me that the family farms to earn a living. They spend much of the time sowing sugarcanes and water chestnuts. Almost all families in Guangxi sow water chestnuts. They gave us a very big bag of them. [...] Her husband passed away 9 or 10 years ago. She has three sons and one daughter. The daughter and the youngest son are studying in school. The elder brothers have to go to the city to work for the family. The chestnut field is left for the mother. The youngest son is quite smart and received a few awards. He is in Primary 6. He wants to continue studying but they have no money.
S.1 student B: If he wants to study in high school, they would have to move to the city.

S.1 student C: I visited another family. They were very warm towards us too. They gave us what they had sowed.

S.1 student A: The villagers there gave us what they thought was the most valuable thing.

S.1 student C: And they gave us fruits. The children in the family sometimes said that they do not have to study but sometimes they said they have to. [...] Actually, some of them don’t really want to study but some of them do. They don’t want to study because they are poor. They want to work and help the family.

S.1 student B: But the daughter of the family wants to study very much. She likes it. But they have no money indeed.

S.1 student A: Be frank, ‘give is better than take’. I gave the woman of the family that I visited HK$10. I think she would be happy.

The Secondary 6 students in SS SHW told the researchers that the Secondary 1 companions were not mature enough to understand the plight of the villagers. They had no other negative comments. In fact, the Secondary 6 students, as the organisers of the trip, showed stronger emotions towards their experience of the poverty of Chinese villagers. A very common feeling and comment about the trip was that:

S.6 student: The visit to their families impressed me most. I went into a house and found it very dark. There were lamps, but the lamps were not the same as what we have. They were very weak lamps. The house was so dark that we could hardly see each other even though we were sitting face-to-face. A family that we visited had to sell potatoes to gain a living. The family members had no rice to eat. They ate potatoes only. But when we arrived, they served us with a great dish of potatoes, telling us to help ourselves, to eat as many as we could. We did not do so because the potatoes were their meals for the whole day. There’s no reason for them to serve us their mere food. [...] For us, the potatoes are not precious. For them, they are everything. If we save money and donate a little bit, it would be very useful for them already. It is very meaningful.

We have to be aware of the possible narration of the Chinese compatriots as ‘the others’ in these fund-raising trips. When students were not reminded to care and to help ‘them’ because ‘we’ are connected by the same kinship, other core social values such as benevolence and the betterment of humankind were most probably aroused, not to mention empathy. In fact, to think and feel by putting themselves in the Chinese compatriots’ shoes was seldom discovered in our students. Since sympathy for the poor villagers sometimes highlights the higher status of the richer
and the luckier, there is even a great danger of the development of sympathy into a differentiation of Hong Kong students from the Chinese compatriots.

A sense of familiarity and a sense of strangeness were two other kinds of affections towards China that were found in the students. They came largely from the feeling that “we are so close to the nation”. During the trips, students did put the perceived, psychological boundary between the Mainland and Hong Kong into dialogue. No doubt, cultural China was quite familiar to students since the study trips highlighted cultural elements. Students did not find that they were from a different culture but only a different ethnicity. The psychological boundary, which became conspicuous during the study trips, had been subjectively kept in students’ minds and was deliberately activated by their first-hand experience. Hong Kong students’ reactions to what they saw in China and the ways they interacted with the Mainlanders revealed the idea that they were visiting a totally different place from Hong Kong and were going to experience lifestyles totally different from those of Hong Kong. They seldom considered the cities or the villages they visited as a part of our nation of which Hong Kong is also a member. They would easily not consider the lifestyles experienced as “comparatively minor differences within the larger, common national culture”.

Here are typical quotes which show such a sense of strangeness to China as a reflexive affection to the psychological boundary. In SS_TBN, when a student arrived at the Customs in Shanghai, he saw an electronic sign showing both English and simplified Chinese characters, he said, “I felt more comfortable to see those English characters here”. In the trip, he told us that he was planning to go to Taiwan for further study. “Why not the Mainland then?” the researcher asked. The answer was that “it is because I will not have to read simplified Chinese characters”. The following conversation also revealed how the Secondary 1 students who took part in SS_SHW felt. Although they were considered to have shown less sympathy towards the poor villagers by their higher form schoolmates, they were uneasy about the ‘difference’ between them and the Chinese students. In their words:

S.1 student A: We once attended a gathering at night. We did not go on time, but the Mainland students all clapped hands to welcome us when we went into the playground. At the moment, I thought that we were selfish. We all [including the Mainland students] are secondary students. Some of them studied in higher forms than us. We all are Chinese. But why should they welcome us in that way? They stood up in a line.

S.1 student B: A is saying that they ‘opened up’ a road for us to go through the playground into the hall.

S.1 student A: They might have been waiting for us for half an hour. But we were still driving a car into the playground. We were quite snobbish.

S.1 student C: Yeah. The gathering was very odd. We sat on chairs but the Mainland students sat on stools. Some of them had to stand in the
front while others had to stand on stools at the back. Some of them even had to climb up to the windows in order to see how the gathering was going!

Generally, a sense of familiarity can be aroused by the study trips. It firstly helps students to step into the Mainland. They could then be more familiar with China in the sense that they did not only understand China at a distance from textbooks, media, friends and family, but also in person. Students mostly found it exciting to go on trips with their schoolmates. This helped them to articulate their enjoyment of the experience of China. Together with the breaking of negative stereotypes of China, study trips do perform the function of developing students' sense of familiarity with the nation. Students had a chance to explore, to know more about China. No one could really control or predict what the students would eventually discover from the trips. Therefore, the impact of a study trip on developing students' national identity can roughly be estimated by the way their affection is driven about (not essentially towards) the nation, particularly when they are given the chance to discover and 'experience the nation' all by themselves.

**Students’ Sense of Identity and Its Relationship with the Behavioural Dimension**

To trace the impact on students’ national identity with regard to behavioural tendency is the most difficult task. Up to now, the study trips were mostly used to arouse students' interest to learn more. At most, teachers tried to motivate students to care more about China and to move them to donate toys, stationery and money to help the poorer Chinese students. As a typical example in various respects, students in S5_SHW started off the discussion related to the conative dimension of national identity. A student organiser who took part in a similar activity for the first time said:

It creates the most impression to visit the villagers' family. They lead a hard life. [. . .] A mother of five children got a disease, maybe inherited. Three of the children also became a little bit sick. They are very poor. But one of the children likes to go to school. His teacher also said that he has a good academic performance. He has an elder sister, but she dropped out of school because they are poor. Therefore, I'd like to . . . I asked for their address. Maybe I will send them money to support their schooling.

This student organiser is one of the few students who said that they would do (not 'doing') something for the citizens of the same nation after taking part in the trip. Other students followed up in the behavioural aspect mainly by searching the web to learn more about China and Chinese culture (sometimes for finishing their projects) when they found that they were interested in the topic.
Conation can either be a tendency to perform an act or an actual performance of an observable act. It is unfair to assess any study trip as ineffective at all when students do not want to contribute to the nation explicitly or to attend demonstrations against imperialism over their own nation after the activity. A tendency to perform an act may be closely related to strong emotions developed towards an object. Thus, observable collective behaviour, for example, the demonstrations against the bombing of the Chinese Embassy by the United States, is the manifestation of the ignition of emotions of the nation. The situation becomes more complicated when students are often told to think twice before they act.

Conclusions

In summary, referencing the evidence up to this stage, there are at least two conditions which are important to the effective use of study trips in developing students' national identity in a post-colonial age. They are (i) the strengthening of students' knowledge of certain important events of the mother country through critical thinking (the cognitive impact) and (ii) the arousal of students' emotion towards China (the affective impact).

The Strengthening of Knowledge (The Cognitive Impact)

The impact on the cognitive dimension was found in all the study trips to be superficial and limited to the acquisition of knowledge. Lack of follow-up activities and elements of critical thinking were possible reasons for the superficiality. As mentioned earlier, it is important to consolidate and expand students' acquired knowledge. Effective follow-up activities can deepen the level of 'knowing' to the level of 'understanding'. Some of the teachers in PS_CSW identified this problem when they evaluated their study trip. They suggested that the sharing or discussion about what students and parents experienced (for example, sightseeing spots, what they learnt in the farm and the lessons in the Mainland schools) should have been arranged not only after the trip but also during the trip. This might have been able to maximise their learning, which was not limited to a sharing of information but incorporated their thinking and feelings.

To further deepen the level of understanding, elements of critical thinking are crucial. Critical thinking makes possible the disposition of a willingness to change or revise one's belief, “avoiding steadfastness of belief, dogmatic attitude and rigidity” (D'Angelo, 1971: 7; cited in Fairbrother, 2003: 108, 109). However, such elements were completely absent in all the study trips. From the observations, there were precious opportunities which could have been used to stimulate students' critical thinking. For example in PS_WY, the Hong Kong students had very contrasting experiences in two Mainland schools. They received two rather extreme kinds of receptions, one was a warm and formal welcoming and the
Mainland students were kind and helpful, whereas the other was cold and indifferent and the Mainland students were arrogant. What did the Hong Kong students think about these situations? How would they handle this contradiction? During the interviews, students talked a lot about their feelings about the Mainland students. If a follow-up activity was organised, the contrasting experiences were valuable learning resources. The question ‘Should a single experience be used to generalise all?’ could have generated students’ discussion about the causes of stereotyping and prejudice, which were critical elements for dissolving the boundary between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Meaningful and effective immersion of elements of critical thinking into activities may turn ‘knowing’ to ‘understanding’ and ‘understanding’ to ‘criticising’ which is a crucial ability to reflect on one’s national identity.

**The Arousal of Emotion (The Affective Impact)**

The result of affection may depend very much on the accumulation of emotion and/or reflection on that emotion. SS_SHW did arouse the students’ emotion towards the rural children’s poverty which vividly appeared in front of their eyes. They accepted their responsibility to help the needy but it seems that they did not ‘feel’ how the poor felt. The trip was successful in provoking students’ sympathy but not their empathy. Given that the development of students’ national identity should be founded on universal core moral values across societies, like equality, mutuality and to respect and live in peace with other people and societies in order to achieve the common good for the betterment of humankind (Curriculum Development Council, 1996), empathy should be given a higher priority (over sympathy). Empathy may require reflection on the striking experience, and questioning. More generally, students should have been given the chance to actively experience the nation and to break down the psychological boundary they have had on the ‘difference’ between Hong Kong and China, between themselves and the Mainland Chinese.

**Reminders to Teachers in Envisaging Post-Colonial Nationalistic Education**

Generating from the above two important conditions, there are as well reminders to teachers in envisaging not only the task of developing Hong Kong students’ national identity but also a post-colonial nationalistic education.

***To address more political items, social and controversial issues***

This helps to enhance students’ understanding of a person’s civic rights and responsibilities and thus inspires the way they live with other members of China, as well as the relationship between China and other foreign nations.
To equip with substantial knowledge of different items relating to national identity

The more diverse the substantial knowledge students are equipped with, the more reasonable (critical) is their understanding towards China and being a Chinese. Note that, in equipping with such knowledge, teachers have first to take students' learning competencies into consideration.

To add more extensively items which dig out students' impression of China

Teachers have to discuss with students the impression of China after the activities, so that they can extend their learning of the nation to a wider context.

To develop critical thinking

Teachers have to facilitate students to learn more about how to distinguish information from opinions and how to acquire, analyse and use information and opinions. In future activities, students should be given more chances to share and to learn together the way they support their points of view with reasons and evidence when confronting challenges and questions relating to the development of national identity.

Final Remarks

Last, the authors realise that the work reported here might be further away from studies which have taken for granted the role of co-curricular activities and study trips in developing students' national identity. Results do not necessarily converge. Though there are reminders which teachers should have taken into account when thinking of using study trips to address the legitimate need, the authors do encourage them to draw their own conclusions. This is due not only to the current action research method suggesting that teachers know more and better how the study trips could be fine-tuned to meet the need, but also the firm belief that effective learning begins with better teaching, facilitation and reflection on the given job of developing students' national identity in a post-colonial age.

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