Decolonization through Deliberation
Teaching Democratic Citizenship in a Quasi-Liberal-Democratic Society

Cheuk-Hang Leung
Institute of Education, London


ABSTRACT
This paper presents a philosophical analysis of democracy education in a postcolonial society. Focusing on the case of Hong Kong, it illustrates the contested conditions for civic education and democratization. It proposes that deliberative democracy should be the ideal form of citizenship education whilst public deliberation could serve as a platform for launching informal civic teaching for democracy with a view to transforming colonially distorted political culture.

Key words:
Deliberative Democracy, Decolonization, Civic Education, Quasi-Liberal-Democracy, Teaching Controversial History, Hong Kong, Public Deliberation
Teaching Democratic Citizenship in a Quasi-Liberal-Democratic Society

Cheuk-Hang Leung

Institute of Education, London

Introduction: Civic Education, Decolonization, and Quasi-Liberal-Democracy

Issues on decolonization and democratization always provoke heated debates across different classes, races, religions, political camps, and cultural groups in postcolonial societies. Social struggle for democratic citizenship could be a tough and long process for the post-colonial society, as those domestic elites and conservative groups with vested interests who succeed the colonial authority do not easily concede power. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to see a re-legitimization of authoritarian rule in some post-colonial states (Grugel, 2002). This paper aims to present a philosophical analysis of democracy teaching in a post-colonial society. My focus will be on approaches to teaching civic and political education in such a contested socio-political environment, given that the transition to full-scale democracy normally takes a fairly long period of time. In the meantime, transitional politics always creates some forms of injustice, and post-colonial governments may seem resistant to promote the kind of citizenship education that favors democratic reform. Thus, civic education may be confined to, for example national identity building, instead of teaching democratic values.

This paper addresses the key question of how to and who should teach citizens about the project of democratization and decolonization, given the apparent retreat of the state from the teaching of democratic citizenship in some postcolonial situations. The main theme of this paper is to argue that the concept of deliberative democracy represents a cooperative learning process for the public sphere; and that this could be essential for the development of democratic culture. Deliberative democracy should therefore, serve as an
educational ideal for democratic citizenship education, whereas deliberation per se should be embraced as a means of civic education for the transformation to a democratic and decolonized citizenship. My focus on deliberation will highlight the moral salience of teaching 'controversial' history through public deliberation. Therefore, as an illustration of the educative function of deliberation, in the later part of this paper, I will consider the moral implications of informal democratic education through the commemoration of a traumatic historic event in a postcolonial society, especially during the period of transitional politics towards the ultimate goal of decolonization.

The progress of the decolonization project in part lies in the maturity and intensity of the democratic civic discourse within a given society, though constitutional reform still ought to be recognized as the necessary indicator. A full-scale democracy not only rests with democratic transformation of political institutions, but also requires the citizenry to take up a set of (liberal) values that can facilitate democratic operation and consolidate an open-mined democratic life. The classical Marxist critique of colonialism, such as writers like Lenin and Hilfreding, that focuses on the imperialism of international trade and the coercive ruling of the colonizers seem to neglect the colonial impacts on the cultural dimensions of the colonized (Law, 2009). One of the key features of postcolonial studies is to reveal the underlying fabrics of colonial impacts on various epistemological, psychological, behavioral, and imaginary perspectives that still linger in the absence of colonial forces under the post-colonial period of time (Law, 2009). The project of decolonization thus should be conceived as both the reflection of and the rehabilitation from the colonial past. In this sense, the teaching of democratic citizenship is a top priority of the project with a view to developing a robust political culture for democratic public life. After all, democratic institutions cannot work without a robust democratic culture that efficiently conducts a specific liberal version of political morality for the interaction among
people in a democratic public sphere. It is, therefore, conceivable to imagine that the teaching of democratic civic values in a postcolonial state, especially given the resistance of the government, is a necessarily contested task. It is not only because of its educational salience and controversy of teaching-learning approaches (one of which, as I will suggest below, is through public deliberation), but also due to the nature that it somehow touches on a sensitive political issue --- a highly reflective citizenry in the postcolonial condition may not always be welcome by domestic elitists, big businessmen, conservative groups, and even the government.

In this context, one might note that the research of postcolonial education needs to be context-sensitive so as to grasp the accurate colonial experience for reflection. The pedagogy of civic values education, by the same token, is constrained by the social and cultural circumstances of individual postcolonial society. In this paper I propose the term quasi-liberal-democracy, which is used exclusively to depict merely some post-colonial societies that well suit the approach of teaching democracy through public deliberation. It portrays a society with semi- or fragile democratic institutions that, for example, were inherited from the colonial master in the later period of governance. The quasi-nature infers to the unfinished constitutional reforms of governmental settings. It also lies in the relative lack of a thriving political culture in favor of the consolidation of institutional democracy. On the other hand, the term ‘quasi-liberal’ implies a critical point of view on the potentially rich liberal resources for these postcolonial societies to further cultivate a desirable political culture and to nurture a robust democratic society. I would suggest that these quasi-liberal-democracies are mainly situated in Southeast Asian societies such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. Of course, this classification is subject to empirical challenge, but the basic observation here draws on the relatively ‘civilized’ colonial history and the rapid economic development in recent decades of these post-colonial societies,
both of which contribute to their acceptance of liberal values and material foundation for democratization. Nevertheless, the term quasi-liberal-democracy is only a conceptual tool to represent the readiness for becoming democratic and to differentiate some post-colonial societies from many others. It does not aim at constructing any epistemological distinction on different postcolonial conditions. Indeed, those post-colonial societies out of the focus of this paper – African and Latin American – can largely fall into the category of quasi-liberal-democracy at some level, despite the national variations in democratic constitutional settings and political culture. The term quasi-liberal-democracy, as a conceptual tool, depicts a particular societal configuration in order to illustrate a case for teaching democratic civic values through public deliberation. This is because the main purpose of this paper is to articulate and defend deliberative democracy as an ideal for civic teaching and to illustrate the normative endowment of public deliberation in the setting of informal education. In respect of this chosen context, the case for illustration is selective, though the educational implication of deliberative democracy it carries is thought to be universally applicable to all democratic societies. Therefore, in the following discussion on postcolonial society I will mainly focus on the case of Hong Kong as an example for illustrating a complex and contested political environment in teaching civic values via informal settings. Before that a working conception of deliberative democracy is needed in order to grasp its philosophical essence.

**Deliberative Democracy as Ideal for Civic Education**

Citizenship education in a liberal pluralist society concerns the relevant knowledge of a democratic community and aims at fostering civic virtues of commitment to a democratic polity. In other words, it emphasizes the civic participation of citizens and their required
education. The deliberative turn in democratic theory that emerged mostly in the 1990s can be seen as a response to the increasing demand for the political participation of citizens. Deliberative democracy addresses the legitimacy issue of lawmaking through the public deliberation of citizens. It also presents an ideal of political autonomy based on practical reasoning of participatory citizens seen as a way to attain rational legislation, participatory politics, self-governance, and even accommodation of moral differences (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Deliberation here means a social process that is distinguished from other forms of communication. During the process of deliberation, people can propose ideas and listen to each other’s opinions. It is also an interaction that allows for changes in judgments and preferences throughout the whole process. In this sense, deliberative democracy is a model, which objects to seeing democracy as consisting merely in voting or the aggregation of citizens’ preferences; it also rejects the definition that confines democracy to simply constitutionalism. Instead, deliberative democracy encourages the political participation of citizens and proclaims ‘the authenticity of democracy’ --- a substantive democratic control by ‘competent citizens’ (Dryzek, 2000). Nowadays, in real politics, some political institutions have been developed in the name of deliberative democracy, such as deliberative polls, citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, and national issues forums (Goodin, 2008). Deliberative democracy is not only an ideal proposal by political philosophers; it has been gradually implemented in some of our ordinary political practices.

As citizenship education aims at promoting active civic participation, deliberative democracy should become its ideal form of democratic citizenship that educational theorists apply. It carries robust moral salience for educating democratic citizen. Deliberative democracy in its ideal form can foster democratic life in at least three ways. First, the reason-giving character of deliberative democracy can enhance citizens’
understanding of public debates through information sharing and public deliberation. Reasoning and arguments are appreciated during the process of deliberation (Cohen, 2009). In an ideal speech situation, public deliberation is free from coercion, distortion, deception, and manipulation; that is, to use another Habermasian term, a 'lifeworld' would be formed where free and equal citizens can take part in public affairs with a sense of communicative rationality. An ideal formulation of deliberative democracy resembles the lifeworld, in which democracy would be enriched with communicative actions through the public deliberation of reasonable citizens (Habermas, 1996). In this sense, democracy cannot be simply reduced to voting; and voting itself is not merely a means for aggregating private interests, as we can, ideally, see the reasons behind each preference. The reason-giving character and the communicative features embedded in deliberative democracy promote an educative environment for citizens to respect reasons and practices acting as politically autonomous participants.

Secondly, deliberative democracy can help to promote social justice. Public deliberation can efficiently expose how certain preferences are potentially linked to sectional interests, as public deliberation is more capable of comprehending complex problems than individual contemplation. Citizens can figure out those partial interests underlying specific preferences and seek those that represent the interests of many (Held, 2006: 237-8). As deliberation enhances better understanding of arguments and reasoning (see above), it could help to build up a more open, fair and dynamic platform for collective reasoning. Public reasons prevailing through public deliberation are those could pass the scrutiny of common goods and public interests. In this regard, the requirement of transparency generates a sense of impartiality among deliberative participants. Public deliberation thus helps transcend the language of interest to the language of reason (Elster, 1998: 101-5). In deliberative context, the outcome can sometimes be shaped independently of the
motives of participants, since there are powerful norms to oppose the appeal to interest or prejudice (Elster, 1998: 104). Citizens and politicians are required to justify their proposals by public interest. Deliberation is not only a form of information exchange, but also a process of justification and presentation of reasoning on various public proposals and opinions in order to maintain a just society.

Third, deliberative democracy requires a communal setting for a realization of fair public interaction among free and equal citizens. In this particular public setting for deliberation, given under fair conditions, citizens are encouraged to develop a sense of justice, by which they can take part in deliberation in accordance with public reasons that all are expected to follow. The effect of this communal setting of public deliberation is also, it is argued, to cultivate citizens with a sense of belonging and caring about other fellow citizens. The more they practise discussion, debate, negotiation, and interaction in public deliberation, the more citizens will come to acknowledge the virtues of accommodation of differences. Deliberative democracy, as both the ideal of democratic citizenship and the method of collective decision-making, requires individuals to always be responsive to other’s interests and needs. Talking cannot always settle disputes, but it helps us to clarify things and to put ourselves into others shoes. By knowing more about each other’s positions, we can develop codes of mutual respect in public forum. The essentiality of reciprocity is a top priority of democratic civility in deliberative political settings; and the sense of justice and of belonging and caring all help consolidate the reciprocal mindset of citizens. Deliberative democracy, apart from legitimizing collective decision and promoting social justice, cultivates reciprocal citizens who acquire liberal civility and duty that enhance their willingness to accommodate moral differences (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).
In a nutshell, deliberative democracy aims at strengthening the legitimacy of democratic decision-making procedures by the input of deliberative elements in the life of public participation. Citizens thus cannot simply state their preferences in public dialogues; they have to be prepared to provide reasons and arguments in supporting their points of view. Political deliberation is an ideal, that is, it is a circumstance where citizens are free from distortion, manipulation, coercion, strategizing or bargaining in motivating rationality and arguments (Cohen, 1989: 22-26). Deliberative democracy therefore offers free and equal citizens a way of dealing with moral disagreement about public affairs. It prescribes a set of principles on fair terms of cooperation that could enhance the accountability and legitimacy of decision-making for public affairs (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). A new paradigm of citizenship education should, I argue, follow this shift of democratic theory to fit in with the account and the requirement of implementing deliberative democracy.

**The Difficulties of Postcolonial Democracy Teaching**

Having stated the educative force of deliberative democracy, we may now return to the issue of decolonization and education, and take a closer look at the relationship between deliberative democracy and decolonization. The projects of decolonization and democratization are intertwined with each other in postcolonial societies. The effects of colonialism are embedded deep down in the political culture, contributing to various features of political life such as the virtue of respect for authority, the general sense of political apathy, the obsession with elitism, obedience to regulations and rules, and a family-oriented social ethic (Vickers, 2006). These features are even more commonly observed in those Southeast Asian post-colonial societies (such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore) where Confucianism was adopted by colonial governance as a useful
Decolonization through Deliberation

resource to inculcate a relatively obedient political culture (Vickers, 2006). Given these paternalistic and communitarian dimensions, nevertheless, certain liberal values are also appreciated within these relevantly economical well-developed post-colonial societies. In the case of Hong Kong, the collaboration of colonialism and capitalism implies that colonial legacy has shaped the path of capitalism for the subsequent economic development and the implementation of social policy. Market economy has become a dominating principle for manufacturing production and other economic operations. In addition, the western concept of welfare entitlement was also brought into Hong Kong in a tailor-made manner after the 1960s riots in order to legitimate colonial rule as well as to stabilize the social and economic order.ii At the same time, the globalization of Neoliberalism and the third-wave democratization in recent decades further advanced some prima facie liberal positions in postcolonial societies including Hong Kong. People have unavoidably been exposed to a package of loosely defined liberal values, such as freedom of speech, rule of law, and faith in the free market. It is its nature of being in-between of Chinese and Western culture that contributes to Hong Kong’s status as a prominent case for quasi-liberal-democracy

Despite the complex characteristics of its political culture, as a British colony for more than 150 years, Hong Kong has been described as a depoliticized society (Lau, 1982; King, 1975; Hughes, 1968). Lau depicted a complicated Chinese political culture of the Hong Kong populace in the colonial era, which was mainly formed from the Confucian culture and the nature of refugee society. He named it “utilitarian familism”, iii that is, the community as a whole had a relatively inward looking tendency and wished to be left alone from politics (Lau, 1982). In fact, the colonial government was regarded as a benevolent colonizer since a series of policy reforms in 1970s.iv Indeed, these ‘benevolent’ acts of the colonial government fulfilled the expectations of traditional Confucian ruling in which a benevolent dictator would be expected to show parental care and concern for the welfare
of the people. In such a system, some might argue, political participation can hardly be held (Bray & Lee, 1997). A depoliticized Hong Kong society thus became consolidated mainly in the colonial era, especially since the 1980s as Hong Kong enjoyed sustainable economic prosperity.

Civic education in Hong Kong was arguably allied with the depoliticized theme of colonial governance. As geographically located at the southern border of China and far from the British colonial homeland, Hong Kong has been deeply influenced by Mainland China. It was not part of the plan of the British colonial government to launch a progressive civic education programme in Hong Kong. As a result, there was no formal political education in the Hong Kong school syllabus and teaching political ideology in schools was a sensitive issue (Morris, 2009; Lee, 2005; Morris & Sweeting, 1991). The junior secondary Economics and Public Affairs syllabus has always been criticized for merely describing the economic and social development of colonial Hong Kong, rather than teaching civic awareness (Lee, 2005; 2004; Morris, 1988). There were little changes in the depoliticized dimension of education until 1984, the year that the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed confirming the return of sovereignty to China in 1997. Since then a few changes in the school syllabus were adopted. A new A-Level subject, Government and Public Affairs, was launched in 1988. It stresses the western concepts of democracy as well as the political system and development of China. In 1992 Liberal Studies was introduced into the sixth form curriculum, intending to explicitly promote political consciousness among pupils (Ho, 2007). As a matter of fact, however, both subjects were seldom chosen elective subjects in the sixth form curriculum in Hong Kong secondary schools. The expected political impact could thus hardly be achieved. Just prior to the handover of sovereignty, the government published the second edition of Guidelines on Civic Education in 1996, which attempted to shape the civic education for a new political
era (Lee, 2005). However, at the implementation level, civic education in schools was not strong enough.

Civic education in Hong Kong, whether from a depoliticized colonial perspective or a postcolonial politicized account, does not acknowledge its aim as enhancing democratization of Hong Kong. The version of civic education dominant in the colonial period generally took a social focus rather than a civic one (Lee, 2005). The depoliticized theme unavoidably led to a trivialized implementation of civic education (Leung, 1995). Even in the later years of the colonial period, the so-called politicized changes on civic teaching with a view to greater emphasis on democracy and related concepts could only be conceived as the result of political bargaining among different camps prior to sovereignty transition. It was a political gesture more than an actual implementation of curriculum. In fact, there was no compulsory civic education syllabus in colonial Hong Kong. On the contrary, the politicized civic education framework largely draws on national identity building and promotion of patriotic emotion. Therefore, it is understood that the political culture can hardly be described as liberal democratic in a sense that would be strong enough to motivate sufficient social force needed for the pursuit of the long-term battle for democratization in a place like Hong Kong that embraces a deep-rooted cultural impact from colonial governance. I contend that democracy is not merely a formal decision-making system; it entails a package of values and practices that support the playing-out of democratic politics and a thriving democratic public life. The aim of democratization not only rests with constitutional reforms, but also addresses the issues of cultural transformation of postcolonial society, which is, to take a relatively narrow understanding of civility, a robust political culture that encourages various democratic ideas and practices so as to enhance consolidated democratic institutions and to maintain an open-minded public sphere. In respect of this, decolonization does a similar job here;
as mentioned above, it aims at tackling the colonial social fabric underlying the
epistemological, psychological, and cultural perceptions of the colonized. The concern I
want to highlight here is the lack of opportunity for colonized subjects to learn about and
then to reflect on the desirable meaning(s) of democracy – democracy as a deliberative
ideal for all people - within the colonial constraints. Colonial experience (including formal
education) always avoids understanding on certain dimensions of liberal ideas, such as
knowledge about democracy, which provides critical and reflective forces against authority.
Democracy is one kind of these driving forces on social development. In this regard, the
learning of democracy in Hong Kong is quite superficial, if not alienated or distorted. The
inefficacious understanding of democracy not only hinders the progress of democratic
reforms, but also reinforces colonized culture. The projects of democratization and
decolonization are interrelated and even interdependent. But there is no simple causal
relation between these two. A more democratic political institution would enhance the
decolonization of non-autonomous political culture, as people would have a platform to
practise democratic related behaviors; In contrast, the progress of democratization could
be benefit from a relatively decolonized political culture. In other words, a colonized
political culture (for the case of Hong Kong combined with its Confucian orientation) would
be a big obstacle to democratic reform in postcolonial society. In this sense, both projects
would come to a deadlock situation, as it somehow brings a series of chicken-and-egg
problems from an empirical perspective. This partly explains the failure of civic education
and the importance of an informal teaching on (deliberative) democracy in postcolonial
society.

The lack of sufficient civic education could be a leading cause for the failure of both
democratization and decolonization projects. Indeed, the latter involves a larger scope
than the former, but there are still many common concerns between them. Both projects,
for instance, refer to the concept of autonomy. The pursuit of democracy, in a loose sense, means to ask for a self-rulled political institution, in which citizens are granted equal political rights to participate in politics and are expected to receive equal concern and respect from the government. The state of affairs of being decolonized implies a similar sense of self-rule; it intends to remove those cultural traits influenced by colonial indoctrination, manipulation, and coercion in order to exercise critical and reflective deliberation and reasoning that an autonomous citizen should require. However, as discussed above, the depoliticized colonial education and the patriotic-focused post-colonial civic teaching play no significant role in constructing a supportive platform for democratization. Although it has been said that there are constantly more than sixty percent of voters regarded as pro-democracy in Hong Kong, the democracy movement in the past twenty years could hardly be regarded as successful in terms of institutional progress. A recent case on constitutional reform reveals the fragility of the pro-democracy community in Hong Kong, which is suffering from a deficit of political knowledge regarding the nature of democracy. It also indirectly explains the weakness of and difficulties facing informal civic education in Hong Kong.

**The Struggled Process of Hong Kong’s Democratization**

The democratization of Hong Kong can be traced back to the Joint Declaration in 1984. Since then the British colonial government started releasing certain power through public sectors reforms and relaxing the authoritarian rule by allowing direct election for some seats of the Legislative Council (Legco) with a view to boost Hong Kong’s democracy after 1997 (Ma, 2007). The Basic Law, conceived as the constitutional law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), states that HKSAR is entitled to have its own
directly elected Chief Executive and universal suffrage for all seats in the Legco. In the political reality after handover, however, Hong Kong has been subject to the power of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in materializing such promises on constitutional reforms.\textsuperscript{5} With this background the recent ‘de facto referendum’ presents a preliminary case of progressive informal civic education in Hong Kong. By 2009, democrats in Hong Kong expected that the upcoming constitutional reform proposal for 2012 by the government would be a minimal one.\textsuperscript{xii} They intended to force Beijing to offer more, but lacked the institutional power to rebut the NPCSC\textsuperscript{xii} (Ma, 2010). In this context, some democrats decided to undertake aggressive action in order to gain more bargaining power - a resignation in protest by five pro-democracy legislators, one from each of the five Legco geographic constituencies. This would trigger a by-election allowing all Hong Kong voters to take part in expressing their views on democracy. It was hoped that if finally the pro-democracy camp won the by-election for all five seats with a high turnout, it would become a de facto referendum that expressed tremendous support from the general public in Hong Kong for further democratization, thus creating pressure on Beijing (Ma, 2010). However, the pro-democracy community was split into two. The de facto referendum did not receive much recognition from most moderate pro-democracy voters.\textsuperscript{xiii}

In fact, the de facto referendum should be read, together with the ‘anti-high-speed-railway movement’ in early 2010,\textsuperscript{xiv} as a process of public learning for liberal democracy. Since the late months of 2009, social activists initiated a series of events to mobilize people to take part in the anti-high-speed-railway movement. They aroused tremendous support from civil society, most of them from the younger generation notably called “the post-1980s”, so that the mainstream media at the later stage had no choice but to engage in the public debates concerning the plausibility of the government’s proposal for high-speed railway and the related issues on the legitimacy of government structure and the
overwhelming influence of the business sector on government policy. In the space of a few months, this created an efficient form of public deliberation for Hong Kong people to critically debate those structural problems of Hong Kong society. There was massive media coverage in commentary articles and newspapers headlines, and the news was rapidly and widely spread with tremendous impact via the Internet among the general public, especially targeted at the youth. Critical discussion on topics like the collusion between the government and businessmen and the injustice of functional constituencies of Legco have appeared on Internet websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and other online open forums. Activists even produced video clips and songs to boost the movement. On the day the bill was passed by the non-fully-democratic-represented Legco, a crowd of thousands gathered outside the Legco building in protest from noon to midnight, many of whom were post-80s young citizens who had reflectively learnt about the problems of inequality in Hong Kong through this process of public deliberation. Also, some secondary school teachers brought their students to the assembly that night as a sort of informal democratic education. The movement had an unexpected impact on cultivating democratic spirit among the younger generation in Hong Kong who learnt to engage in a debate on public affairs through the use of public reason.

However, when it comes to the de facto referendum, things get complicated in a postcolonial society like Hong Kong. It has always been uneasy to launch an effective informal civic education on issues with high political risks in the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Although the by-election could be fairly conceived as constitutionally allowed and was exercised within the existing political framework, critics claimed the act was “too radical” and feared it would anger the CCP, which would not be a good idea for the long-term democracy movement of Hong Kong. Strategically speaking, the leaders of the movement failed to convince the large number of moderate pro-
democracy voters to recognize that the de facto referendum was the right step to take. Of course this was partly due to the politically contested environment that both HKSAR government and the CCP set up in order to stifle aggressive opinions on the issue. Mainstream media were under self-censorship on the topic of de facto referendum, since it has always been highly political sensitive in the authoritarian ruled China. More fundamentally, nevertheless, I would contend that it was the colonized political culture that played the decisive role on the failure of the campaign. The ‘power dependence’ claim on Hong Kong’s democratization only explains the institutional constraints from the PRC (Kuan, 1991); it neglects the cultural dimension of Hong Kong that has hindered the development of the democracy movement since the 1980s. Obviously, if Hong Kong society had enough social mobilization, it would be possible to press Beijing into more concessions on the pace of democratization (Ma, 2007; Sing, 2004). In this regard, the origin of the failure of democracy movement, I argue, lies in the insufficient civic education for democracy that obstructs a postcolonial populace from learning the ethics and practice of modern liberal democracies. Indeed, democracy has to be taught. The lack of political education on democracy prevents citizens from understanding certain important rationales underlying democratic institutions; for instance, the practices of resignation and re-election have been key legitimate procedures in the history of democracy. Similarly, the lack of a liberal democratic political culture means it is difficult to promote a sense of familiarity with some democratic practices – from a moderate level such as participating in policy focused groups to the relatively radical one such as civil disobedience – in order to cultivate the courage against authority in the face of injustice.

The agenda of sovereignty handover in the 1980s determined a politicized society for Hong Kong and kicked off the political awareness and participation of Hong Kong people. The mass participation in politics such as the million-people-demonstration in support of
democracy in China in 1989 and the half-million-protest against the national security legislation in 2003 rebut the charge of political apathy amongst HongKongers. Although utilitarian familism is no longer (or never) applicable in the context of Hong Kong, the mixture of colonized-Confucian culture contributed to the general low degree of civic participation and the reluctance to act against authority. The case of de facto referendum in Hong Kong shows that quasi-liberal-democratic society sometimes presents an ambiguous picture of democratization. It is, I argue, the lack of formal political education and insufficient resources for informal civic teaching that has largely hindered the reshaping of the colonized political culture and thus impeded the progress of democratization and decolonization.

The problem becomes explicit but difficult to solve. A more democratic political institution would provide better opportunities for citizens to learn and practise democratic knowledge and skills so as to build up a decolonized culture that respects the values of autonomy and self-rule. However, the context of postcolonial society is not always democratic-friendly; apart from the semi-authoritarian government, the quasi-liberal-democratic citizens who carry certain cultural traits from colonial governance would be a negative factor in the critical moment of a democracy movement. In other words, democratization could be understood as part of the decolonization project for a quasi-liberal-democracy, so that it is unavoidable constrained by the deficits of postcolonial culture. Taking this into account, we understand that it is often difficult to incorporate democracy teaching into the course of critical political events, as public deliberation in such a politically contested situation is always distorted by the power of governmental agencies, the interference of conservative elitists, and the self-censorship of mainstream media. In respect of this, public deliberation at that particular moment could hardly be situated in a public sphere, in Habermasian sense, in which communicative action prevails.
Decolonization through Deliberation

as the mode of action that is oriented towards understanding and agreement. Deliberation as a method of informal civic education thus faces serious difficulties when the public domain is occupied by distortion, coercion, deception, manipulation, and calculation. This would not be conducive to the deliberative function that informal civic education requires. More explicitly, as John Rawls (1993) specifies, the use of public reason has to be operated within a desirable background of public political culture that is suited for the public life of liberal democracy. This understanding of public reason is not only theoretically designed for the justification of his political liberalism. This claim is also pragmatic. Public reason is not a priori to human knowledge so that we expect every political society can exercise it efficiently. Public reason infers reason for a democratic public and of those sharing the status of equal citizenship (Rawls, 1993). In this sense, public reason requires a robust democratic culture in advance. In other words, a distortion-free communicative forum in which citizens adopt public reason for deliberate public issues is the fruit of the cultivation of a long-lived democratic tradition. In the case of a quasi-liberal-democracy, the question is how to accumulate the necessary democratic discourse to cultivate the desired political culture for the project of decolonization.

Who Should Teach Deliberative Citizenship?

As we have seen, quasi-liberal-democratic society in a postcolonial context, such as Hong Kong, generally lacks formal civic education that could help boost a democracy movement. But to enhance the project of democratization, the colonially distorted political culture needs to be reshaped and this can only be done to the extent that the civil society maintains a reflective public sphere for citizens to engage freely in conversation and debate on public issues. The core part of this transformation depends on a decent political
(democratic) education that aims at promoting a deliberative ideal for democratic citizenship. It is a reconstruction process of democratic discourse in which political culture would be reshaped gradually as citizens learn liberal democratic ideas and knowledge concerning the practice of democratic institutions informally through various social channels. Democratic transformation takes a relatively long time to accomplish its ideals as people’s behaviors and thoughts cannot be changed overnight. Even in those quasi-liberal-democratic societies, such as Hong Kong, with magnificent economic prosperity and a large pro-democracy populace as the prominent factors for democratization, the post-colonial politically intense environment could still play a decisive role in the failure of the promotion of democratic education. Nevertheless, I contend that public deliberation should still be conceived as the best means to launch informal democratic education, though the public sphere in a postcolonial context is under surveillance of political authority, or at least to a certain degree distorted by influence from the political establishment. With political culture as a necessary condition for democratization, public deliberation can serve as an essential arena to accumulate democratic discourse. This process conceivably depends on continuously emerging social events to construct dynamic communicative conditions for cultivating democratic aspirations. Deliberation is important in the sense that it is necessary for the change in political culture. Democratic citizenship requires a citizenry that can thoroughly understand a set of liberal democratic values and respect its commonly celebrated virtues and certain traditionally acclaimed democratic practices. A new democratic discourse can only be reached by ongoing public deliberation in which informal civic education enhances citizens and social groups to practise, experience, and articulate the deliberative ideals of democracy. In other words, it is a process in which individuals and social groups act interactively and negotiate actively the desirable discourse of democracy (Abdi, Shizha, & Bwalya, 2006). In this respect,
public deliberation constructs a platform for the transformation of political culture, from colonial influenced to deliberative enlightened. I acknowledge that this is largely a matter of motivation, as the change of political culture can only be altered when people act upon their newly changed faith and belief. This normative defence of deliberation as a means for informal civic education in postcolonial society arguably requires support from empirical evidence, such as moral psychology. But on the basis of common understanding of human behavior, citizens can only deliberately recognize and accept specific thoughts and beliefs before turning up to act upon on them so as to form a new political culture. Deliberation is thus the main locus in transforming collective action, common values, and social culture.

I return now to the fundamental issue that postcolonial governments are generally not willing to provide democratic civic education and even proactively obstruct the potent of any influential social and political events that could mobilize large number of participants and generate democratic opposition forces against the status quo. It may thus seem that only piecemeal social movement, perhaps at a local level or in terms of small scale of impact, could increase public deliberation from time to time. Against this background, deliberative education for democratic virtues can focus instead on some other topics that could universally touch people deeply - i.e. memory of traumatic (political) events in national history. It can provide spiritual resources for the public to conduct a deep deliberation on, for example, issues concerning universal human dignity. Citizens would be granted an opportunity to reflect on the political nature of specific tragic historical events and question the legitimacy of undemocratic ruling, as these tragedies were possibly due to authoritarian misgovernment in the colonial period. To take a case from Hong Kong again, the annual commemoration on Tiananmen crackdown shows a good example of this process, in which Hong Kong citizens are given a platform not only to vent their sorrow and distress about those who were killed in the spring of 1989, but are also given an
opportunity to deliberate publicly and interactively on the issues like the legitimacy of
government, the rule of CCP, and the social movement in China.

The annual candlelight vigil held at the Hong Kong Victoria Park has witnessed a
remarkable dynamic since the night of 4th June 2009, the twentieth anniversary of the incident, in which the number of participants reached a historical high at 200,000. The turnout rate in 2010 was also high and the figure hit 150,000. From the point of view of civic education, the organizers emphasized the theme of ‘passing the torch of June 4 to the next generation’ successfully in recent years and this is reflected in the age of participants. People under 30 became the largest group to take part in 2010 vigil; and it was the second year in a row that there had been a large turnout of young people attending the event. It was an appealing success from the viewpoint of informal civic education as most of the participants were young children at the time of the Tiananmen incident, thus their spontaneous attendance at the vigil suggests some success in spreading a sense of justice against political evil among youngsters in Hong Kong. Indeed, the commemoration is not a single event. In the face of the CCP’s strict surveillance on the issue in Mainland China, civil society groups in Hong Kong have been working hard to preserve the collective memory of the Tiananmen Square incident. For instance, the Hong Kong Journalists Association reprinted People Will Not Forget in 2009, a book written by a group of Hong Kong reporters on the democracy movement and crackdown in Tiananmen Square in the aftermath of the incident, and allowed the full version to be downloaded from the Internet for free on the eve of the 2010 vigil in order to pass the message to the younger generation. Just prior to the vigil, video clips with scenes of student protests and troops were widespread on YouTube. Despite its absence from the official syllabus, some schoolteachers still tried to mention the incident in their lessons. Furthermore, quite a number of them led their students to the vigil for observance. This was a kind of informal
civic education that contests the past against an authoritarian regime concerning what it is called ‘controversial’ history. The Tiananmen candlelight vigil represents a preservation of collective memory and a struggle over the terrain of truth. In Mainland China, official discourse deliberately acts to cover up the facts, as if the Tiananmen crackdown had never happened. This can partly explain the sense of pride Hong Kong people acquired about the annual vigil, as it is the only large-scale public commemoration of the crackdown within the territory of China. In this respect, ‘to contest the past is also to pose a question about the present’ (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003: 3). Different understandings and interpretations of particular history event can lead to diverse political and ethical consequences. The contesting of meaning in history thus is a way of contesting how to take the past forward (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003: 1). The success of the Tiananmen commemoration as a from of informal civic education does not merely lie in its preservation of the historical truth; it also reveals the injustice of an authoritarian regime so as to cultivate in participants a sense of justice, and inspire them to deliberate on the nature of a just political system.

The case of the Tiananmen commemoration indicates an alternative way to launch informal civic education in a quasi-liberal-democracy. As constrained by the postcolonial circumstances, social movements directly confronted with the political authority, despite their importance in translating democratic knowledge and practice to the public, would inevitably crash with the obstinate political culture that is colonially distorted. The educational effects of such movements are thus sometimes undermined. Alternatively, appealing to an influential event in the nation’s history could even more efficiently form a deliberative community for reshaping political culture that favors a movement for democracy. The commemoration is educative in a sense that it tries to establish a reliable interpretation of history, which intends to seek for truth – the pursuit of trustworthy
knowledge and the desire to act justly. It serves, in Habermas’s words, a role of ‘deep hermeneutics’ through which to criticize the hegemonic ideology (Habermas, 1977: 360).

In this respect, the message conveyed by the vigil ‘uncovers and attempts to naturalize built-in distortions’ operating in the public forum ‘in order to promote emancipation through self-reflection’ (Gallagher, 1992: 18). The commemoration as a form of informal education helps reveal the immense injustice in a way that can bridge history and memory. Unlike history, memory operates in living humans in which the distance between the past and the present is not an issue, as the two are acutally merged (Gardner, 2010; Ricoeur, 2004). In this regard, the official denial of the Tiananmen crackdown as part of ‘history’ arguably enhances the room for the politics of memory and the informal teaching of this ‘controversal’ ‘history’. Situated in between the obscured historical facts by the officials and the public desire of preservation of social memory of the crackdown, the commemoration transforms itself into a process of purification of minds, that is, participants are given the recognition of the ‘virtue of operation of memory as an essential temporalized human faculty’ by defining everyone’s ‘capacity to understand the past under the warrant of the common humanity of lived experience across time’ (Gardner, 2010: 94-95). In this situation, therefore, witnesses of the crackdown strive not to forget what they saw and recognize it as a moral duty to convey their testimony to the next generation. People with quasi-liberal-democratic experience understand that individual or collective memory can be distorted or manipuluated to ‘forced forgetting’ (Gardner, 2010; Ricoeur 2004; Connerton, 1989). They would, one could argue, treasure the establishment of commemoration as a form of public deliberation to exercise their capacity to represent truthfulness and justice concerning history and human dignity. The younger generation, on the other hand, can also respect the truth-seeking testimony efforts of their senior fellows. A deliberative community thus becomes consolidated in which citizens’ civic engagments
are motivated by the deep sense of justice that Rawls argues that every liberal democratic citizens should acquire (Rawls, 1993). A deliberative community that focuses on the matter of political justice is a desirable means for both the projects of decolonization and democratization, since democratic political morality has to start and to develop from there. Memory requires witnesses to be true to themselves. They are prescribed by the inner moral demand to exercise their moral capacities to speak out inherited injustice, to act against improper authority, and to transmit their faith to the next generation.

**Conclusion**

Decolonization is indeed a process. It is also an unfinished project comprising ‘a clutch of fitful activities and events, played out in conference rooms, acted out in protests mounted in city streets’ (Betts, 1998). In the quasi-liberal-democracy, some might work on this project aggressively; while others might engage in it step by step. In any case, the effort has been always incomplete, and it is difficult to measure or to judge when the project can be claimed to have come to an end. But one thing is clear. Democratization is one of the indicators of success here, as a well-institutionalized democracy allows its citizens to live autonomously and to engage in civic participation with a view to attaining some degree of self-rule, which are the credentials of a decolonized citizen. In this sense, the project of decolonization requires a way of democratic life and relevant training for achieving these aims. In this paper, I have proposed that the ideals of deliberative democracy are well suited for the long-term aim of decolonization. Public deliberation as a means for informal civic teaching in quasi-liberal-democratic society can play the role of reshaping the colonially distorted political culture into a deliberative oriented one. The case of Hong Kong explicates the contested political environment of a typical postcolonial
society in which public deliberation becomes the critical junction to cultivate democratic citizenship. It is a public arena for the accumulation of discourse for deliberative democracy. Given the surveillance and interference of government, as well as the inadequate political culture for democracy, the civic teaching of democracy can only, perhaps, be situated within the memory of one’s national history. It is for sure that national traumatic history is full of sorrow and painful memories; nevertheless, teaching it via public commemoration does not necessarily entail any form of disrespect or being accused of manipulating public emotion over history wounds. The informal civic education on one’s national tragedy, just like holocaust education, is fundamentally an essential duty to one’s nation as well as to the entire human race. As I have argued, public commemoration per se is an appropriate form of public deliberation necessary for the cultivation of democratic political morality in deliberative citizens. It is also an irreplaceable foundation for informal civic education in postcolonial societies. (7515 words)

Bibliography


Notes

i The use of the term ‘postcolonial’ sometimes creates ambiguity in meanings. In this paper I will differentiate ‘postcolonial’ from ‘post-colonial’ in a way that the former intends to locate a problematization of postcolonialism while the latter portrays a timeframe concept for the period after colonialism of certain place.

ii The 1966 Star Ferry riots occurred at the background of recession in real estate market and general price inflation on rent, tuition fees, and water charges. The fare increase of the Star Ferry, the only public transport connecting two sides of the Victoria harbor at that time, arouse extensive opposition from the general public. The arrest of a hunger strike protest subsequently provoked riots in number of districts in April (Lam, 2004). The 1967 riots, situating at the peak of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, portrayed a different story in terms of the scale, intensity, and impact. It was commonly known as the leftist riots that initiated by the Chinese Communist Party’s agencies in Hong Kong. During the course of riots, numerous improvised explosive devices were set up on the streets, buses, and trams. Rioters also targeted on police station. The riots caused at least 52 deaths and 802 people were injured. 1936 people were prosecuted.

iii Lau’s utilitarian familism infers that Hong Kong Chinese prioritized family values over societal values and inclined to focus on materialistic and utilitarian pursuits. This Chinese Confucian-familism implied that they preferred kinship networks to political participation in order to address their livelihood problems (Ma, 2007).

iv Since the 1970s, a large-scale provision of public housing satisfied the social needs of Hong Kong people; the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption served as a powerful anti-corruption force, and the launch of extensive advisory boards as the mechanism of consultation for public policy also enhanced the colonial legitimacy.

v Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came into power and the establishment of People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, colonial Hong Kong could not hide its sensitivity to political events occurring in China. For instance, the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China, which started in 1966, partially caused the 1966 and 1967 riots in Hong Kong.

vi The Hong Kong government issued the Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools in 1985. The Guidelines stated: ‘There is a need at this time in Hong Kong’s political development to ensure that pupils understand the significance of the changes that are taking place’ (Curriculum Development Council, 1985; cited in Lee, 2005).

vii According to the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority, there were only 325 out of 32167 candidates took part in the Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL) Government and Public Affairs (GPA); and only 1242 candidates out of 32167 took part in the Hong Kong Advanced Supplementary (HKAS) Level Liberal Studies (LS) in 1998. The number of candidates sitting for the HKAL GPA in year 2009 is 313 out of 38647 while the total number of candidates sitting for the HKAS Level LS is 3307 out of 38647.

viii Nationalism and patriotism were for the first time mentioned officially. The Guidelines also emphasized the concepts of democracy, human rights and equality (Lee, 2005).

ix Perhaps, in Leung’s phrase, the ‘depoliticisation and trivialization of civic education’ should be regarded as the best specification of the condition of colonial Hong Kong (Leung, 1995).

x In 2007, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPCSC) ruled out reforms for universal suffrage of chief executive and Legco elections in 2012, but permitted the possibility of holding popular elections for the chief executive and all members of Legco in 2017 and 2020 respectively.

xi Democrats feared that minimal reform would become an excuse for the NPCSC to apply the principle of gradual and orderly progress, stated in the Basic Law, so as to decline universal suffrage again in 2017 and 2020 elections.
NPCSC stands for The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, which is the highest hierarchy of the statutory body of the People’s Republic of China.

The Democratic Party refused to join the referendum and insisted that negotiation would still be the best way to fight for democracy, while the League of Social Democrats and the Civic Party initiated the campaign and five legislators from their parties resigned in January 2010. At last, in the absence of pro-establishment candidates in the contest, all five resigned legislators were re-elected in May with a historical low turnout of 17.1%. In late June, the Legco passed the constitutional reform proposal for 2012 with little amendment due to the secret negotiation between the representatives of CCP and leaders of the Democratic Party weeks before.

The anti-high-speed-railway movement was basically initiated by a group of young social activists. It was concerned with the social justice issues underlying the proposal of building a high speed railway connecting Hong Kong and Guangdong, in which controversial issues the campaign raised included the land right of non-indigenous residents in the New Territories, the collusion between the government and businessmen, and the constitutional reform for Hong Kong. The movement obtained great support and enthusiasm from young generation and inspired the democratic spirit among them. Although the political consequences in terms of institutional impacts were not impressive, it launched an unprecedented large-scale form of public deliberation on the nature of power and the structure of postcolonial government among civil society through other social channels such as the Internet, independent media, academia, social activist groups, and university students’ networks.

For video clips that promoting the campaign are mainly conducted in Cantonese Chinese. I instead refer a brief introduction of the event that reported by English speaking media on YouTube as follow, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyzxcmEmlq8.

The practice of resignation and reelection has been the means to restrain tyranny of majority and stand for justice. Here I quote some influential cases in the British history of democracy as follow. In 1847, Jewish candidate Lionel Rothschild was elected as to the House of Commons, but was avoided by the Christian oath to be required to swear in the Commons. Prime Minister Lord John Russell thus introduced the Jewish Disabilities Bill to remove such requirement on Christian oath. However, the House of Lords rejected to approve. At last, in 1849, Rothschild refused to swear in Christian oath. He resigned his seat and then won in the by-election later to strengthen his claim. It caused the House of Lords finally in 1858 to agree the approval of the bill. In 1880, Charles Bradlaugh, an atheist merchant, was elected to the House of Parliament for Northampton. He refused to take the religious oath and intended to his seat without an oath. Finally the Parliament arrested him. As disputed went on, by-election had to be held. Bradlaugh was re-elected by voters four times in succession. In 1888, he secured a bill on a new oath act, and the right of affirmation for both Houses was finally enacted. The equal right of different religious was thus established. John Wilikes, a radical journalist and politician in the eighteenth century, also demonstrated the legitimate power on resignation and reelection in the Middlesex election dispute, and finally fought for the remove of the power of general warrants and to end Parliament’s ability to punish political dissent (Wong, 2010).

Lau’s account of utilitarian familism has been criticized as a defense for the colonial rule. His culturalist account could not explain the 1960s riots, the movement of making Chinese as official language, and the Chinese nationalist movement of the sovereignty dispute with Japan over the Diaoya Islands in the 1970s.