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## Secondary School History Curricula

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This chapter presents a study of the implemented history curriculum in eight secondary schools in Hong Kong and Macao during the 1980s and early 1990s. The Sino-British and Sino-Portuguese Joint Declarations on the future of Hong Kong and Macao were signed respectively in 1984 and 1987. These political changes, along with other features of decolonisation, were related to the development of the history curriculum in schools of different political backgrounds in each colony. Inter-territorial and intra-territorial comparisons show that the history curricula in these schools were quite different from those in other colonies, that curricular diversity was greater in Macao than in Hong Kong, and that the curricula of schools of similar political backgrounds located on opposing sides of the Pearl River were often very different.

The history subject was chosen for the study because the teaching of history is intrinsically political. Sweeting (1991a, p.30) observes that history, as part of the school curriculum, often demands a form of collaboration with the existing political regime. One example was the South African history curriculum which was taught to defend the ruling Afrikaner Nationalists who saw apartheid as divinely ordained and scripturally defensible (van der Berg & Buckland 1982, p.23). The period covered by the present study included the transition of the 1984 Sino-British Agreement and the 1987 Sino-Portuguese agreement.

There are several ways to politicise the history curriculum. The content of a favoured area (for example, imperial history) can be increased to unbalanced proportions. Alternatively, omission of unfavoured historical events can also present a biased picture. Judgements, especially selective commentaries, on historical events can transmit political messages. Judgements can be made on nationalist, racial, moral and religious grounds. A common form of partial judgement is the externalisation of responsibility for negatively-judged events (for example, putting total blame on colonial exploitation for economic backwardness in postcolonial countries) and the internalisation for positively-judged events (for example, putting Chinese nationalist unity as the most important reason for the defeat of the Japanese in World War II).

### History Curricula in Former Colonies

History curricula in colonies of European powers tended to be Eurocentric. Memmi (1965, p.105) criticised the irrelevant nature of the French colonial history curriculum which, he said, was aimed at socialising the colonised into European language, values

and norms:

The history which is taught him [the colonised] is not his own.... He knows who Colbert or Cromwell was, but he learns nothing about Khaznadar; he knows about Joan of Arc, but not about El Kahena. Everything seems to have taken place out of his country. He and his land are nonentities or exist only with reference to the Gauls, the Franks or the Marne.

Seven years before Uganda's independence, a British teacher in the colonial education service of Uganda (Musgrove 1955, p.300) noted that although Ugandan history was taught, there was no evidence that:

the School Certificate syllabuses ... have been designed in the light of such studies of native peoples. One aspect only of the African's situation has been regarded as relevant – his membership of the British Empire.... The basic assumption underlying the selection of such a study I have found to be false: that because Uganda is part of the British Empire the people of Uganda will be interested in the Empire's growth. My pupils do not speak of it as 'their' Empire.... Membership of the Empire has not the significance for them which is often assumed.

The West African School Certificate history syllabus called 'The Development of Tropical Africa' was used in Nigeria when it was under decolonisation, until 1965, five years after Nigeria had become independent. Despite the name of the syllabus, it was criticised by Jones (1965, p.145) for "its Eurocentrism in content and approach, when even its African section was held to deal mainly with the activities of non-Africans in African situations". However, Jones also attributed part of the blame of this Eurocentrism to teachers who "concentrated on those parts of it which offered the best prospects of examination success: viz. accounts of European exploration and British constitutional history" (p.145). An examination-oriented teaching approach, which was common in Hong Kong, could accentuate the Eurocentric effects (or could reduce them if such topics were unpopular in examinations) in the history curriculum.

The existence and the orientation of local history in the curriculum was an indicator of how much and in what ways the formation of national identity among the colonised people was allowed. When local history was included in the colonial curriculum, it was often described from the colonisers' perspective. Harber (1985, p.171) noted typical derogatory descriptions of indigenous Africans found in Rhodesian history textbooks: they were a savage and blood-thirsty people; bushmen were "often ugly"; black labourers were "raw and ignorant", while white employers were "energetic, skilful and ambitious". According to Okoth (1993, p.141), Ugandan students were taught that "Africa had no history of its own; that African history started with the arrival of European explorers, that Africa was discovered by Europe". These students were also made to learn of the "great" European explorers who travelled in Africa which was referred to as the "Dark Continent". In Australia, the existence of pre-colonial Aboriginal history was dismissed by a 1923 textbook with a sweeping statement: "From the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1788, Australian History begins" (quoted in Firth & Darlington 1993, p.87).

While local history depicted in the above British colonies and quasi-colony was Eurocentric, history learning in Portuguese colonies bore even less relevance to the local cultures and situations. The English-language literature has not contained much