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Primary and Secondary Schooling

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As this volume shows, Hong Kong and Macao are siblings: they have fundamental similarities and individual traits, and they exist to some extent in a relationship of mutual dependence. Macao is the introspective elder – outshone, overshadowed and greatly influenced by the more gifted and extrovert junior, but nonetheless a source of support to Hong Kong. Both are ports situated on the south coast of China; and there are strong parallels in their historical development, although Macao did not experience a tigerish leap into economic prosperity during the 1970s and 1980s. Both have undergone decolonisation under special circumstances: it comprises reunification with a ‘motherland’ that had been politically, economically and socially estranged, resulting in a familial accommodation of differences rather than a whole-hearted embrace. Their existence as a pair of colonial problems left over from Chinese history (and also the vexed question of Taiwan) conveniently provided pragmatic politicians in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) with legitimacy for what might have been an anomalous and potentially untenable policy of a “special administrative region with a high degree of autonomy” had only one colony existed.

The mutuality is reflected in primary and secondary schooling. As gateways into and out of China, Hong Kong and Macao are peopled with migrants (settlers and transients) seeking access to and egress from the Chinese mainland, including merchants, missionaries, educators and colonial administrators who bring multicentric perspectives of the purposes of schooling. At the interface of East and West, schools in both places mark a key point where the twain do meet and thus represent either contested cultural territory or a melting pot. In the main, Macao has been influenced by educational practices and curriculum materials from Hong Kong rather than vice versa, but this sibling dependency has not simply been a one-way process throughout history. Especially in Hong Kong’s early years as a colony, many models and ideas were transplanted from Macao.

Common issues have emerged, most notably fundamental questions concerning the provision, scope and orientation of primary and secondary schooling within the colonial and postcolonial contexts. Whose responsibility is it to provide such education? Who should receive it? What should be the aims and content? Interestingly, the answers show significant similarities and differences. This chapter provides a comparative, chronological analysis of schooling in Macao, where primary and secondary schooling are closely integrated, and Hong Kong, where the two levels are generally distinct but are becoming more integrated. The chapter describes and compares the main features of educational provision at primary and secondary levels, and identifies some of the main

forces that have shaped the similarities and differences that emerge from the comparison. It suggests that geographical proximity and contemporaneous experiences produce the similarities, while the respective colonial practices of Portugal and the United Kingdom (UK) largely account for the differences. To place this discussion in context, the chapter first refers to the evolution of school systems elsewhere, particularly those places which have undergone processes of decolonisation.

Schooling, Colonialism and the Transition to Postcolonialism

Much of the literature on schooling and colonialism is concerned with the imposition and impact of Western thought on other countries, most notably the European sea powers and industrialised nations since the 16th century and, in more recent times, the United States of America (USA). Although this emphasis is apposite for the comparative study of Hong Kong and Macao, the transition to postcolonialism is also worthy of study, in that the two colonies returned to Chinese sovereignty after developing socio-economic and political characteristics that diverged from those of the mainland.

The emergence of nation-states in the past few centuries has reshaped the nature and structures of schooling (Green 1990; Ramirez 1997). Previously, much education was informal and took the form of personal apprenticeships and other mentoring to prepare children to contribute to the survival of the clan or other social structures. The nation-state focused on industrial development and expansion of economic power at the national level. Schooling became more formal, and characterised by the provision of mass education and the cultivation of patriotic sentiments. The presence of the Portuguese and British in Macao and Hong Kong respectively is explained by this search for an expansion of trade, facilitated by the development of military technology. However, in colonial societies, the question of mass education (with its resource implications) and the cultivation of patriotism (for which country?) were problematic for colonial authorities, and the situation in many settings was made more complex by the existence of precolonial forms of schooling. In Macao and Hong Kong, precolonial schooling was oriented towards the maintenance of the dynastic system in China. The focus of the schools was on instilling the classical Chinese virtues of filial piety, loyalty and righteousness through the study of the great literary works with a view to maintaining social harmony (Cleverley 1991).

Colonial authorities around the world, faced with different modes of schooling, adopted a variety of solutions (Kelly & Altbach 1984, pp.2-4). One was classical colonialism – imposing their own imported modes on the colonies. A second approach was to promote schooling in its indigenous form. A third method was to adopt a mixed system, either by generating a synthesis of the two modes, or creating a parallel system, or some other, more complex, admixture. The most common form of schooling in colonial societies was a mixed mode, as the local administration of education (as opposed to direct control located in the colonial country) meant that the nature of schooling was often strongly influenced by the particular conditions of the colony and by those directly responsible for its provision (Kelly & Altbach 1984). This mixed mode commonly had a strong centre-periphery orientation, whereby government schooling heavily favoured colonial nationals and those proficient in the colonial language who would serve interests of the ruling power, while missionaries and local organisations mainly provided schooling of various kinds for other children. The curriculum in the