Introduction

In Hong Kong, conventional textbooks pose persistent problems which confront stakeholders in the education field: government officers, teachers, students and parents. Despite great efforts and various measures to tackle the taxing problem, there has been little improvement. (Education Bureau, 2009, p. 6)

This paper attempts to summarize the problems in Hong Kong, outlining major problems of textbooks in the territories. It also highlights that the problem has been a common one, worrying not only Hong Kong.

Putting relevant issues in the perspective of the global trend to capitalize on information and communication technology (ICT) and to evolve into electronic textual media, this paper explicated the advantages and disadvantages of ebooks. Then it puts forward an immensely promising solution — open textbooks. Besides explaining the nature of open textbooks, it elucidates how open textbooks may remove problems and constraints of conventional textbooks and make disadvantages of ebooks irrelevant, before drawing a conclusion.
much public concern (Education Bureau, 2010; Legislative Council Secretariat, 2011c). Related problems can be summarised into the following five:

2.1 High and Increasing Prices

According to the annual textbook price surveys conducted by the Consumer Council between 2000 and 2009, the average prices of textbooks have kept rising above the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) over the past years, at a rate from around 2% in 2004 to over 7% in 2008, with a sharp drop to around 1.5% in 2009. In 2006, textbook prices on average increased by 4.2% and 5.2% respectively for the primary and secondary school sectors, which far exceeded the average rise of 1.5% in CCPI in the preceding 12-month period. The respective increases rose to 5.4% and 3.0% in 2007, and 5.9% and 6.0% in 2008, compared with only 2.0% rise in CCPI in 2007 and 4.3% in 2008. (Consumer Council, 2010a)

In 2010, the average expenses for secondary and primary form textbooks increased by 6.9% and 0.2% respectively when compared to the average textbook expenditure in 2009. (Consumer Council, 2010b) Then in 2011, the average expenditure of primary school textbook increased 4.1% as compared with that of the previous year. There was a slight increase of 1.6% to 2.0% in the average textbook expenditure for junior secondary grades and the average textbook expenditure, however, has decreased by 3.5% with reference to that of last year. This was mainly due to a substantial drop of nearly 40% in the average expenditure of Form 6 (Senior Secondary 3) students, thus resulting in the substantial reduction in the average textbook expenditure for secondary schools. (Consumer Council, 2011)

2.2 Inflexibility in Revision or Updating

In the last few decades, there were often complaints that publishers revised textbooks too often, making it difficult for textbooks to be reused and pushing parents to purchase new textbooks, rather than used ones. The general public commonly believe that publishers use textbook revisions as a means to increase prices and to prevent students from using second-hand books. In view of these, the government set up a "three-year rule of no revision" in 2003 (Education Bureau, Textbook Committee, 2008) Under the textbook review mechanism, all textbooks that have been reviewed by the Education Bureau and are recommended to be put on the "Recommended Textbook List" are not eligible for revision within three years. Publishers may improve a textbook no less than three years after its publication. In 2009, this three-year directive became a five-year rule (Education Bureau, 2009, p. 64), though textbook publishers may provide schools with printed pamphlets on necessary revisions of textbook revisions free of charge.

This, however, poses problems relating to the suitability of each textbook. It is essential that textbook contents are up-to-date, match the school curriculum well and reflect the latest status of the world or real life. Textbook revisions are vital and indispensable. According to a survey conducted in 2009, the Consumer Council