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Language and the History of Colonial Education: The case of Hong Kong

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Judith Brown, in her *Epilogue* to Volume IV of *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (*OHBE*), states that of the legacies of the British Empire, the 'most significant of all is the legacy of the school and the university', and in particular the role of English as an international language.[1] Brown's acknowledgement of the importance of colonial education renders all the more striking the lack of attention given to this subject in the *OHBE* as a whole. For example, while Volume IV contains chapters on 'Gender in the British Empire', 'Critics of Empire in Britain', 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain', and 'The British Empire and the Muslim World', education receives barely two dozen references, buried in the text of other chapters. These offer glimpses into the development of literacy in parts of Africa, the expansion of state educational provision in Ceylon, and the concern of Nigeria's colonial authorities regarding the socially and politically destabilizing effects of the spread of Western education; but taken together they provide no overall analysis of colonial education policies, systems of schooling or curricula. Notwithstanding what some have criticised as its ultra-orthodox overall approach, with regard to this particular field the *OHBE* more-or-less accurately represents the current state of research. Despite a number of interesting forays on the periphery, the history of colonial education remains a vast and largely unexplored field of enquiry: the dark continent of imperial historiography.[2]

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[1] Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds), *The Twentieth Century. The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 706.

[2] As noted below, much of the research that has been done on colonial education has been conducted by 'educationalists'—e.g. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (eds), *Education and the Colonial Experience* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984); Stephen Ball, 'Imperialism, Social Control and the Colonial Curriculum in Africa', in

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The study not only of colonial education, but of the history of education in general, has been neglected both by historians and 'educationalists': the former have tended to regard it as the specialist preserve of experts on education, while most educational scholars have been heavily influenced by social scientific theories that accord little value to historical research—and especially to research of the more orthodox, 'empiricist' variety. However, the paucity of research in this area has not deterred a number of scholars from making generalisations regarding the impact of 'colonialism' on education in former colonies. These have often involved some variant of neo-Marxist determinism, in the light of which colonial education policies are seen as part of efforts by the 'Western' capitalist metropolis to impose and perpetuate imperial control—and to extend it beyond the end of formal colonial rule. From this perspective, any trace of 'Western' influence on schools or their curricula tends to be interpreted as evidence of 'cultural imperialism', with all the negative overtones that term implies.[3] Among the earliest exponents of this view were Martin Carnoy, Paulo Freire, and Ander Gunder-Frank, who pioneered variants of the 'dependency' thesis in the 1960s and 1970s. Notwithstanding their differences in approach or emphasis, these scholars all worked at a high level of generality, and all saw the cultural relationship between 'the West' and 'the rest' essentially in terms of an 'impact-response' equation, whereby the all-but-irresistible force of Western colonialism radiated outwards from a European or American metropolis, moulding and shaping a passive Third World 'Other' in its own image, and to its own ends.

The most recent refinement of the 'cultural imperialism' thesis is that put forward by 'cultural theorists' inspired principally by the works of Michel Foucault and the 'deconstuctivist' literary theory of Jacques Derrida. Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* and its sequel *Culture and Imperialism* deal mainly with the portrayal of non-European cultures in Western literature, but Said also claims that colonial systems of schooling used knowledge as an instrument of power in order to dominate and subvert indigenous populations through a

Ivor Goodson and Stephen Ball (eds), *Defining the Curriculum* (London: Falmer, 1984); Keith Watson (ed.), *Education in the Third World* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); Clive Whitehead, 'Education in Far Away Places: Evidence from the Periphery of the Empire of the Problems of Developing Schooling in British Colonies', *Education Research and Perspectives*, 16, 1 (1989), 51–69.

[3] Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Longman, 1977).

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process of cultural alienation. Said himself has little to say about systems of schooling, being essentially a literary critic and cultural historian in the broadest sense; his comments on education, such as they are, take the form of asides in his discussions of literary trends and attitudes. His work has nonetheless played an important role in highlighting the importance of culture not merely as a by-product of an imperial history seen as the outcome of principally economic and political processes, but as a significant factor in its own right in the shaping of the imperial enterprise. Moreover, the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse', as deployed by Said and by others, has informed some fascinating research on the 'mind' of both the coloniser and the colonised.[4]

However, much of the work inspired by the Foucault–Said 'line' essentially posits a crude conspiracy theory, according to which colonialist governments, equipped with infallible foresight, consistently and successfully imposed their culture and vested interests on the colonized, and a cult of the victim whereby the recipients were essentially passive witnesses in this process. This is despite the fact that Said makes use, both in *Orientalism* and especially in *Culture and Imperialism*, of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and that Gramsci himself was concerned to emphasise that hegemony could not involve total control by the powerful.[5] According to one analysis of his thought, 'Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own.'[6] Said observes that 'culture . . . is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other

[4] See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth Penguin, 1978—and 2nd edition, 1995); and *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), much Indian writing on the cultural impact of colonialism—as well as the 'Subaltern Studies' project, also works such as Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986). Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge, The British in India* (Princeton University Press, 1996) and *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) However, it should be noted that much work by Cohn, Cannadine and others on the relationship between culture and imperialism—and 'power' and 'knowledge' in the imperial context—has owed nothing to Foucauldian 'discourse theory'. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[5] See *Orientalism*, 6–7 and *Culture and Imperialism*, 56–9.

[6] Dominic Strinati. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 166.

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persons works not through domination, but through what Gramsci calls consent'.[7] In other words, Said recognises that hegemony can only work if the controlled enjoy a degree of social, economic and cultural autonomy. The implications of this, insufficiently explored by Said (and arguably also by Gramsci), are that the hegemonic order is constantly changing—in effect, being re-negotiated—as the scope of the autonomy enjoyed by subordinate groups expands or contracts. This shifting, protean quality is emphasised by Raymond Williams, who sees Gramsci's original concept as excessively uniform, static and abstract:

> A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realised complex of experiences, relationships and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. . . . Moreover, . . . it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own.[8]

While the greater flexibility and subtlety that the idea of 'hegemony' might lend to Said's analysis of culture and colonialism has gone largely unnoticed, the more rigid Foucauldian conceptualisations of culture and 'discourse' that he also invokes have inspired a number of scholars to pursue research that takes 'colonial culture' as a uniformly and irredeemably malignant essence bent on colonising our consciousness. Into this category falls Alastair Pennycook, who, in *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* and elsewhere, goes further than Said in arguing that the English language itself is inherently 'imperialist', and that 'discourses of colonialism' adhering to English represent the most fundamental and pernicious legacy of British colonialism.[9] In effect, Pennycook, like Said, agrees with Judith Brown as to the importance of colonialism's educational legacy, but views this by definition as an entirely negative phenomenon—part of a programme of cultural aggression visited by the 'West' upon the 'East' (or the 'North' upon the 'South').

Although Pennycook would not describe himself as a 'historian', his work demands attention from historians of British colonialism

[7] *Orientalism*, 7.

[8] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 112.

[9] Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998); and 'Language Policy as Cultural Politics: The Double-Edged Sword of Language Education in Colonial Malaya and Hong Kong', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 17, 2 (1996), 133–52.

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for two reasons: firstly, because he puts forward an interpretation of an important aspect of colonial history that has been neglected by more 'conventional' historians; and secondly, because he does so in a manner that constitutes a challenge to the values and methods of the historical profession. The purpose of this article is not to attempt to demolish Pennycook's generalisations simply in order to erect an alternative 'grand theory' of colonial education in their place. Instead, we deal with his specific claims regarding the relationships between the politics of colonial control and the nature of language policy in schools, and examine them in the light of the evidence available for one particular colony, Hong Kong.[10] Hong Kong was chosen at least partly because it is the colony to which Pennycook devotes the most attention in his book and chapter, and not because it can or should be viewed as an archetypal colony. Indeed, we regard adherence to an excessively stereotypical vision of colonialism as one of the key problems with many previous approaches to the study of education in colonial settings. The history of colonial education needs to be reconstructed from the bottom up, through studies of education policy, schools and curricula that take full account of the variations in the way colonial rule was practised and experienced in different colonies at different times. When the subject is studied from this perspective, what emerges is a picture considerably more complex than that posited by Pennycook: one in which British cultural and linguistic 'hegemony' in Hong Kong appears far more contested, fragile and ephemeral than he would maintain—and more a product of collaborative negotiation than of metropolitan imposition.

I

Early on in *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, Pennycook states that he is 'not trying to give an overview of colonialism, a linear history of the relationship between ELT (English Language Teaching) and colonialism, but rather to trace the cultural effects of colonialism on current practices'.[11] He goes on to claim that 'this book is not an exercise merely in historical analysis, nor an attempt to investigate empirically the effects of colonialism. Rather it is a form of discourse

[10] In a 'companion article', we intend to deal with questions concerning the history of the history curriculum in Hong Kong, together with questions about its possible role in the cultural alienation of students. See Vickers and Sweeting (forthcoming).

[11] Pennycook (1998), 25.

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analysis, an attempt to map out cultural and discursive frames that influence our lives'.[12] In other words, his main purpose is to demonstrate that cultural prejudices engendered by colonialism have not only influenced attitudes to English language teaching, but have come to permeate the English language itself to such an extent that they continue in large measure to determine attitudes and policies towards language in the 'postcolonial' world—and especially in what he terms 'the colonial present in Hong Kong'.

While readers of this journal may take exception to the use of 'merely' in connection with historical analysis, it would be unwise of them to disregard either Pennycook's methods or his message. Despite his professed disdain for 'empirical' history, he actually does devote large sections of his book to a fairly conventional, if incomplete and selective, historical analysis of colonial education policies, relying almost exclusively on secondary sources. He is especially interested in debates among colonial administrators over the relative merits of teaching students through the medium of English, or in their own vernacular languages, and he analyses several such debates that took place in India, Malaya and Hong Kong from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s. He emphasises that proponents of vernacular and English-medium instruction were often in agreement over the political ends to which education policy should remain ultimately subordinate. While supporters of vernacular education often stressed the educational arguments in favour of teaching students in their own languages, a number of them also cited the threat to colonial control that might be posed by producing an excessive number of English-literate, westernised school or university graduates. It was recognised early on by a number of colonial administrators that a lack of sufficient suitable employment opportunities for such men might fuel anti-British resentment. In the view of some of the proponents of vernacular education in late-nineteenth century India or Malaya, it was only prudent to limit access to English-medium education in order to prevent too many 'natives' developing ideas above their station. On the other hand, supporters of broadening access to English-medium instruction were generally convinced of the benefits of spreading Western knowledge and enlightenment—religious and scientific—as widely as possible, seeing this as part of the imperial 'civilizing mission'. Many of those who favoured vernacular education agreed

[12] *Ibid.*, 27.

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with this aim, but argued that it would be more effectively achieved through mother-tongue instruction. However, in his enthusiasm for polarised 'argument'(with 'anti-colonial' representing all that is good and 'colonial' representing all that is bad), Pennycook fails to acknowledge the existence and influence of individual educators (especially missionaries) in China who were able to appreciate and respect various sides to the issue of language policy and even attempt to weigh up and debate the *pros and cons* of different practice.[13]

In the case of Hong Kong, Pennycook attempts to show how, by the early 1900s, the arguments in favour of teaching English to a small elite had prevailed. He argues that this was due partly to the nature of the colony as a trading port, partly to a desire to use it as a base from which to influence China (culturally as well as commercially), and partly to 'the role of certain influential administrators', such as E. J. Eitel, a German missionary and inspector of schools from 1879 to 1897.[14] According to Pennycook, the emphasis on English was given added impetus by Frederick Lugard, Governor of Hong Kong from 1907 to 1912, who enthusiastically supported the establishment of the British-style University of Hong Kong because he saw this as a vehicle for his particular brand of paternalistic imperialism.[15] However, he notes that the Chinese Revolution of 1911 fuelled growing concern amongst British officials regarding the potential for Chinese unrest. Especially after 1925–26, when Chinese workers in Hong Kong staged a massive strike and boycott of British goods, there was increased emphasis on more direct intervention in the curriculum of local Chinese schools, which were seen as potential 'breeding grounds for sedition'. Pennycook quotes the Eurasian, R.H. Kotewall, who in a 1925 memorandum recommended that

> great stress should be laid on the ethics of Confucianism which is, in China, probably the best antidote to the pernicious doctrines of Bolshevism ... [Money] spent on the development of the conservative ideas of the Chinese race in the minds of the young will be money well spent, and also constitutes social insurance of the best kind.[16]

[13] See, for example, A.W. March, 'The Place of English in Education in China'. *The Chinese Recorder* XLVI (Feb. 1915), 108–21; Herbert H House, 'English in Education in China', *The Chinese Recorder* XLVII (Feb. 1916 : 98–103; and Gertrude Howe, 'Teaching English in Girls' Schools', *Records of the Triennial Meeting of the Educational Association of China*. (Shanghai, 1893), 151–4.

[14] Pennycook (1998), 113.

[15] *Ibid*., 117ff.

[16] Cited in Pennycook (1998: 123) from CO129/489: 455–6.

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The policy of encouraging a highly conservative Confucian approach to Chinese education was taken up with enthusiasm by the Governor, Cecil Clementi, who invited a group of senior Chinese literati to devise a curriculum that would promote a highly conservative interpretation of the traditional Confucian values. Pennycook cites Luk's work on Hong Kong's Chinese curriculum,[17] which demonstrates considerable continuity between Clementi's initiative in the 1920s and the report of the Committee on Chinese Studies in 1953. This report laid down the parameters for the curriculum for Chinese language, literature and history in local schools, ensuring, according to Pennycook, that these would be biased towards pre-modern topics and literary works and imbued with conservative values. Thus he concludes that 'the curriculum followed by students *today*... is closely linked to the curriculum formulated in the 1920s, a curriculum developed then to counter Chinese nationalism in the schools, redeveloped in the 1950s to counter communist influences *and still held in place in the 1990s as part of British colonial rule*'.[18]

Having ostensibly exposed the political considerations that informed the early history of colonial education in Hong Kong, Pennycook shifts his focus to a discussion of the contemporary situation, abandoning history in favour of 'discourse analysis'. The purpose of his historical section is to substantiate his argument that education policy in Hong Kong, especially as regards language education and 'cultural' instruction, has always been subordinate to the aim of establishing and maintaining British cultural as well as political domination. He emphasizes that British ascendancy was irredeemably tainted by the opium trade, which he erroneously claims to have been 'dominant in Hong Kong's development until the Japanese invasion in 1942'.[19] At the same time, he rightly challenges the myth of Hong Kong people's political docility, pointing to the long history of riots, demonstrations and political activism from the nineteenth century right up to 1989 and beyond. His view of the political context in which education policy was made is thus one of colonial oppression versus Chinese resistance, summed up by the title to this chapter: 'Opium and Riots: English and Chinese'.[20]

[17] B.H.K. Luk, 'Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum', *Comparative Education Review*, 35 (1991): 650–68.

[18] Pennycook (1998: 124). Italics inserted by present authors.

[19] *Ibid.*, 105.

[20] *Ibid.*, 95–128.

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Although he frequently stresses the need for awareness of the complexity of colonialism, for example by stating that 'it would be simplistic to try to understand education policies only in ... terms of material interests and social control',[21] Pennycook explicitly dismisses attempts to weigh up the positive as well as the negative aspects of colonialism's educational legacy.[22] As a result, he implicitly adopts an ethical standpoint from which 'colonial' influences are perceived as uniformly 'bad', and 'indigenous' culture, free from such influences, as uniformly 'good'. For example, he rejects the view that 'Hong Kong Chinese have maintained a remarkably consistent mercantile and pragmatic attitude to English', arguing instead that they have merely been 'constructed as such with remarkable consistency'. In other words, this perception of Hong Kong Chinese as pragmatically reconciled to the utility of English is merely a product of 'Hong Kong colonial discourse' that has been 'useful both in denigrating the Chinese as nothing but economic pragmatists and in explaining the promotion of English as a response to Chinese desires'.[23] In making this unsubstantiated claim, Pennycook ignores entirely the 'pragmatic' efforts of Chinese individuals over many generations to accommodate themselves to, and make use of, invading (and temporarily prevailing) outside forces, especially their languages; not to mention the history of the Chinese diaspora, as traders, colonisers and settlers in South East Asia and around the world. These processes were clearly not 'constructed' by the Western imperialists and do not deserve to be de-constructed as such. They manifested themselves in ways that certainly did not imply a reduced valuation of the Chinese language. Typical examples, in China itself, include the establishment of the Office of the Translators in 1467,[24] the evolution of 'Pidgin' and 'China Coast English',[25] and such Chinese-authored handbooks as the 1905 publication, *English Made Easy* by Mok Man-cheung.[26]

[21] *Ibid*., 108.
[22] *Ibid*., 102.
[23] *Ibid*., 194.
[24] Kingsley Bolton, *Chinese Englishes: A Sociolinguistic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). In press.
[25] Kingsley Bolton, 'Language and Hybridization: Pidgin Tales from the China Coast', *Interventions* 2(1) (2000): 35–52; 'Chinese Englishes: from Canton Jargon to Global English', *World Englishes* (July 2002), 21, 2, 181–199.
[26] Anthony Sweeting, 'Snapshots from the Social History of Education in Hong Kong: An Alternative to Macro-Mania', *Education Research and Perspectives*, 16, 1 (June 1989), 3–12.

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Since he discontinues his narrative of the history of language policy roughly fifty years short of the end of colonial rule in Hong Kong, Pennycook does not present much historical evidence for his view that the overriding purpose of this policy right up to 1997 was the promotion of British interests at the expense of those of local Chinese residents. A subsequent section of this article, therefore, tests his claims regarding the history of colonial language policy by re-examining the case of Hong Kong, focusing especially on the later period not covered in his account. Briefly first, however, it may be helpful if the period with which Pennycook does attempt to deal is re-considered, on the basis of the available evidence, rather than from a standpoint pre-determined by poststructuralist presuppositions.

II

When the history of British education policy is considered, two principal themes stand out—one is the strength of the voluntarist tradition and the corresponding antipathy to centralisation and systematisation in education, and the other is a record of government under-investment in schools and universities, as compared with most continental European states. It is significant that 'public' schools in Britain denoted privately-run institutions set up to provide a gentlemanly education to the sons of aspiring middle-class families—perpetuating aristocratic, hierarchical values in a society which in many ways remained resolutely *ancien regime*. The dominant political position, certainly until the 1870s, was that education was primarily a matter for individual choice and responsibility. It was only thereafter that British governments belatedly and reluctantly responded to calls to improve the nation's educational 'competitiveness'. Even then, the nationalist drive to impose uniform curricular standards and pedagogical practices remained far weaker than, for example, in Germany or France—the English (never Scottish) tradition of *laissez-faire* (or plain apathy) in educational matters died hard.[27] When examining education policy, or the lack of it, in British colonies, it is vital to bear in mind the domestic record of elitism, voluntarism

[27] It is perhaps worth remembering that the very first example of national educational standardisation in Britain—the institution of civil service examinations in the 1860s—was inspired by Chinese precedent. It is no trivial coincidence that Whitehall civil servants have traditionally been referred to as 'mandarins'.

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and the general concern to keep government involvement in this field to a minimum.[28]

With regard to language policy, it has been argued that 'linguistic imperialism' began at home, with the promotion of 'standard English' over and against the plethora of regional dialects or—in the cases of Scotland, Ireland and Wales—national languages. Here again, however, allegations of 'imperialism' risk anachronism and over-simplification. On the one hand, there can be no denying that the initial identification of a south-eastern variant of English as 'the King's English' was a consequence of the concentration of political and economic power (and consequently also of the market for published literature) in that region of England. However, there is evidence to suggest that, certainly within England, popular recognition of the existence and value of this 'standard English', and demands for access to it through education, largely predate any concerted official attempts to promote it. Early in the nineteenth century, William Cobbett, hardly a spokesman for the English establishment, emphasised the empowerment that command of the standard literary language could confer when he wrote that 'grammar, properly understood, enables us, not only to express our meaning fully and clearly, but so to express it as to enable us to defy the ingenuity of man to give our words any other meaning than that which we ourselves intend them to express'.[29]

The starting point for the history of British colonial education, and the quintessential exposition of its aims (especially that of providing 'native' elites with an English gentlemanly education), is often taken to be Macaulay's famous 'Minute' of 1835. 'The Macaulay system' had an enormous impact on the subsequent development of Indian education, which it is not our purpose to examine here—except to note, as Pennycook does, that the Indian experience provided the background to much of the debate over education policy elsewhere in the empire, and in particular the controversy over the relative merits of vernacular vis-à-vis English-medium education. While the terms of the debate might have been similar in different colonies, the disparity in local conditions, and the distinct priorities of different colonial administrations, led to a variety of policy outcomes. The development of an education system for training a corps of 'native' clerks and civil servants was bound to be a high priority for the tiny contingent of British administrators charged with governing the vast Indian empire.

[28] Andy Green, *Education and State Formation* (London: Macmillan, 1990).
[29] William Cobbett, *A Grammar of the English Tongue* (1818), 14–15.

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For trading outposts like Hong Kong and Singapore, the importance to the government of laying on educational provision for the indigenous population was far less obvious.

In the case of Hong Kong, the situation was not as simplistic as Pennycook assumes, even with regard to the earlier period partially covered by his account. As far as language was concerned, there was no coherent overall *policy* for at least the first three and a half decades of Hong Kong's colonial existence, but there were several different practices. As in other colonies, and in the UK itself, religious groups were quick to step into the breach resulting from governmental apathy and set up their own schools. In the first 'Western'-style school established in Hong Kong, about half of the pupils' time was devoted to English studies, 'the other half being occupied with Chinese'.[30] Ying Wah (Anglo-Chinese) College, established by the missionary Sinologue, James Legge, used Cantonese as its operational medium of instruction, while the affiliated 'Theological Seminary' made greater use of Mandarin, although in both English was an important subject.[31] That there was no top-down imposition of a clear, consistent language policy at this time may be surmised from the criticism that the use of English in schools received in the local, English-language press over an extended period.[32] Moreover, at a public meeting held in 1855, the editor of a leading newspaper declared:

It was not very creditable to Hongkong that, though it had existed for twelve years as a British Colony, it was without a Public School for instruction in

[30] *Chinese Repository*, XII (July 1843), 362. The institution referred to here was the Morrison Education Society School, which, its first and only headmaster, the American Samuel Brown, moved from its original home in Macau to Hong Kong in 1843. For further information on Brown and his school, see Anthony Sweeting, *Education in Hong Kong, Pre-1841 to 1941: Fact and Opinion* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1990,) 20–2, 143, 146, 161–7.

[31] Council of World Mission (CWM) Archives, G4, Box 5: letter from Legge, 29th January, 1850. Legge, who became a very accomplished Sinologue, later translated the Chinese Classics into English, aided by the Chinese scholar and radical, Wang Tao. See Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang Tao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[32] e.g., *Friend of China*, 7th December 1850, 387; *China Mail*, 1st May 1867, 2. In the former, a conclusion was that 'the much desired plan of imparting Christian knowledge to Chinese adults in their own language (leaving *them* to instruct their children) may be deemed the most advisable after all'. In the latter, the editor commented that the basic cause of Legge's failure in the field of formal religious education in Hong Kong was that an English-language education provided Chinese students with a knowledge that raised them above the mass of their fellow countrymen and enabled them to obtain secular employment that paid much more than a religious vocation could earn.

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English, so that the children of our countrymen were less cared for, growing up in greater ignorance, than the Chinese.[33]

The earliest Government-assisted schools were those that had been founded by Chinese in some of the villages of Hong Kong Island, naturally making use of Chinese (invariably oral Cantonese) as their medium of instruction.[34] When the Hong Kong Government's Education Committee recommended that English be introduced into their curriculum, this was done in only two of the schools. Contemporary evidence casts doubt on retrospective suggestions that any great importance was attached to this initiative. For example, although half-yearly prizes were offered to pupils showing the greatest proficiency in the English language, these prizes were only $1 in value, as compared with $1.50 for 'greatest proficiency in Scripture Knowledge' and $1.50 for greatest proficiency 'in the Four Books of Confucianism'.[35] If money talks, its message, at least in Hong Kong during the 1850s, does not seem to have been based on linguistic imperialism.

A little later, language practices in some Hong Kong schools and even the traces of an emerging language policy seemed much more clearly in favour of the promotion of English. It is significant, perhaps, that much of this development occurred after the British had made gains in the Second Anglo-Chinese War (1858–60) and in a period when the commercial value for local Chinese or Eurasians of an acquaintance with English was rapidly becoming more apparent. Much of the early drive for popularising the use of English in schools was inspired by Legge, a missionary and scholar who would have accepted the designation 'Orientalist' with pride.[36] As noted above, his Ying

[33] Cited in E.J. Eitel, 'Materials for a History of Education in Hong Kong', *The China Review*, XIX, 5 (1890–91), 322.

[34] Report of the 1847 Education Committee, reproduced in Wilhelm Lobscheid (1859), *A Few Notices on the Extent of Chinese Education and the Government Schools of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, printed at the *China Mail* Office), 19–22. The successor to the 1847 committee of enquiry was, significantly enough, given the designation, 'Committee for Superintending *Chinese* Education' (emphasis added by present authors), as is evinced in all of its annual reports, 1848–1858.

[35] Eitel, *op. cit.*, 322. A more general reference to these prizes appears in Committee for Superintending Chinese Schools (1853), *Report for 1852*, para. 7. Ironically for Pennycook's argument, the authorship of these rules is commonly attributed to Legge, a person he considers to be a champion of cultural imperialism and the teaching of English.

[36] For evidence to support this claim, see Editorial in the *China Mail*, 27th March, 1873, 3; Eitel (1876: 24); Helen Edith Legge, *James Legge: Missionary and Scholar*

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Wah College used Cantonese as its main medium of instruction and his Theological Seminary, Mandarin. By the late 1850s, however, Legge had become a staunch advocate of the use of English in Hong Kong schools, at least partly as a means of spreading British and Christian influence in China. It is possible that his championing of the cause of English was influenced by the failure of Ying Wah College in 1857. On the other hand, the encouragement of English teaching by the Education Committee in two of the five government aided schools in 1853 was at least partly an outcome of his appointment to the Committee in that year. Legge himself also notes that he had conveyed his views to an earlier Governor of Hong Kong in 1845. His personal conviction manifested itself in what became known as 'Legge's scheme' to reorganise Government schooling by 'consolidating' the efforts in the main urban area into one 'Government Central School',[37] under a British headmaster. In 1861, he declared:

> This plan makes the teaching of English a more prominent part of the Education in Government Schools than it has hitherto been. But I beg to submit to you that it ought to be so. It ought to be so in this colony where the administration of justice is conducted in the English language, and according to English law. It ought to be so, that an influence may go forth from the Island, which shall be widely felt in China, enlightening and benefiting many of the people.[38]

Whereas the first justification Legge puts forward seems firmly based on his concept of natural justice, the second is clearly more amenable to Said-influenced interpretations of the motives of Orientalists. Even so, as a matter of fact, the Central School, like several prominent missionary schools, started its proceedings by dividing the school day into halves—one for 'English school', the other for 'Chinese school'.

(London: Religious Tract Society, 1905), 203, 204ff.; Mary D. Legge, 'James Legge', unpublished paper read to the Sino-Scottish Society of the University of Edinburgh, 1951, 9; Lindsay Ride, 'Biographical Note' in *The Chinese Classics*, Volume 1 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 10–22; Lauren Pfister, 'Clues to the Life and Academic Achievement of One of the Most Famous Nineteenth Century European Sinologists', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, (1993), 200f; Man-kwong. Wong, *James Legge: A Pioneer at the Crossroads of East and West* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Company, 1996), 81, 127–130. Legge's Orientalist credentials (in the original, non-Said-influenced meaning of the term) included his translation of the Confucian Classics, his friendship with Wang Tao, and his long tenure as the first incumbent in the Chair of Chinese at Oxford University.

[37] Subsequently renamed, briefly, Victoria College and then Queen's College.

[38] Hong Kong Government Gazette, 1861, 107.

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One prominent sympathiser with Legge's educational ideas was Frederick Stewart, who was appointed to be the first Headmaster of the Government Central School. In his earliest years in Hong Kong, Stewart became somewhat disillusioned and forcefully expressed his disappointment with the standard of English shown both by his students and by many of his teachers.[39] The main strategy he adopted to deal with this situation did not, however, incorporate a disparagement of the value and importance of Chinese in the education of his students. In fact, it led him to insist that 'an Entrance Examination, on the more commonly used [Chinese] elementary books' be 'made compulsory'. In his Annual Report for 1865, he added:

> Boys who passed this examination were to be admitted into the School to read Chinese for a year, after which, on a second examination, they were admitted into the English classes. They were then to devote four hours a day to English and four to Chinese.[40]

This division of the school day clearly reflects one of the principal aims of the early 'Anglo-Chinese' schools, which was to provide Chinese boys with the bilingual capabilities they would need in order to act as a bridge between the local population and 'foreign' administrators and traders. While the commercial benefits to the British from the establishment of the Central School are thus clear, for the graduates themselves the employment and commercial opportunities could be highly lucrative—as they and their parents well knew.

Pressure to change this 'system' came neither from Stewart nor from other European teachers working in Hong Kong schools during the 1860s and 1870s, but from an energetic new governor, John Pope-Hennessy, who believed he was operating in the interests of local Chinese parents.[41] Hennessy explained his determination to improve the teaching of English at the Government Central School to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by referring to the complaints he had heard about the standards there 'from Chinese

[39] See, for example, Hong Kong Blue Book, 1865, Annual Report on the State of the Government Schools for the Year 1865, 277. That he remained convinced of the difficulty Chinese students experienced when learning English and of the temptations for them to leave school before they had mastered the language but after they could pick up an acquaintance with the language is illustrated by the comments he made in a letter to the British Colonial Office in 1878. See Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion* (1990), 233.

[40] Hong Kong Blue Book, 1865: 277.

[41] Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion* (1990), 231–2. Primary sources providing evidence to support this view include the dispatch from Hennessy to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27th January, 1878, in CO129/181, 133ff.

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shopkeepers and other native residents', noting that it was 'partly at their suggestion' that he had decided to investigate matters.[42] The first major manifestation of his determination to promote the use of English took the form of an 'Education Conference', which he convened for seven prominent members of the Executive and Legislative Councils on the afternoon of 25th February 1878. Despite Hennessy's virtual control over the voting behaviour of several of the individuals present, and although the conference resolved that 'the primary object to be borne in view by the Government should be the teaching of English', there was the narrowest of split votes on the critical issue of making 'the study of Chinese optional, according to the declaration of the parents'.[43] Moreover, the Education Commission, which Hennessy appointed in 1880 'to consider certain questions connected with Education in Hong Kong', reported in 1882, *inter alia*:

> To secure more time for, and greater efficiency in, the study of English in the Central School, it is essential that great attention should be paid by the scholars to the study of Chinese during the early years of their attendance. For this purpose, there should be an Upper and a Lower School. In the latter, Chinese should go hand in hand with English, and about the same amount of time should be devoted to each. For passing from the Lower to the Upper School, there should be a stringent examination, and no Chinese boy should be admitted to the Upper School, until he is considered by the examiners to have obtained a competent knowledge of his own language. When this has been attained, the translation lessons in the Upper School would prevent any neglect of Chinese which might arise, when the ordinary lessons in that language ceased to be taught.[44]

Pennycook selectively extracts from the Appendices to the Report of the Education Commission samples of 'discourse' which are amenable to interpretation as reflecting racially supremacist ideas.[45] He also brackets Samuel Brown's alleged 'disdain for Chinese and their education' in the 1840s with Governor Hennessy's allegedly 'entirely

[42] Sir John Pope Hennessy to the Earl of Carnarvon, 27 January, 1878; in CO129/181, 133ff.

[43] Hong Kong Government Gazette, 9th March, 1978, 90. The Commander of British Troops, the Colonial Secretary, the Surveyor-General and one non-official voted for the Hennessy-inspired proposal, whereas two non-officials who were prominent businessmen voted along with Frederick Stewart to make the study of Chinese compulsory. It might also be noted that, although the Conference voted unanimously for the idea of the Central School devoting 'more time' each school-day 'to English and less time to Chinese studies', it did so explicitly in order that the new situation would be 'without diminishing the amount of Chinese knowledge on the part of the scholars on leaving the school'.

[44] Report of the Education Commission, 1882, 1–2.

[45] Pennycook (1998), 43–4.

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pro-English attitude'.[46] He fails, however, to recognize either Brown's efforts on behalf of the Chinese in Hong Kong and in the United States,[47] or Hennessy's sympathy for the Hong Kong Chinese and his decision to appoint Frederick Stewart as Chairman of the Education Commission.[48] Similarly, in citing enrolment figures (from a secondary source) for students in English- and Chinese-medium schools for the later part of the 19th Century, Pennycook assumes that they can be considered the outcome of some directive, open or concealed, from the colonial government, when they were, of course, largely the result of efforts (both official and non-official) to cater to public demand. He also fails (or neglects) to note the major trends in educational provision during this period. These included:

- the dramatic increase in enrolments at grant-in-aid schools, as compared with those in government schools, encouraged, but not initiated by Eitel,[49]
- the increase in the efforts of voluntary societies to provide 'free' or low-fee education in new, non-Government and non-grant schools, such as those opened by the Tung Wah Hospital Committee,[50] and

[46] *Ibid.*, 143.

[47] For examples of Brown's efforts on behalf of Chinese students in Hong Kong, see Carl T. Smith, *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen and the Church in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985), 13–33. For his efforts on behalf of three of his Hong Kong students whom he took back with him and helped educate in the United States in the late 1840s, see Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion*, 20–1 and n. 36.

[48] This fact does not fit the 'linguistic imperialism' interpretation since, as already noted, Stewart was consistently a strong supporter of his students' need for a firm foundation in Chinese culture, studies, and language. He was also one of three members of the 1878 Education Conference who dissented from Hennessy's proposal to make the study of Chinese at the Central School 'optional, at the declaration of the parents'.

[49] T.C. Cheng, 'The Education of the Overseas Chinese—A Comparative Study of Hong Kong, Singapore and the East Indies', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London (1949), 123–5.

[50] For the activities of the Directors of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, see Elizabeth Sinn, *Power and Charity: The Early History of the Tung Wah Hospital* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1989), 69–71. The schools established by the Tung Wah Directors were probably the best-known, but other Chinese-medium schools founded in the later 19th or very early 20th Century include those influenced by the reform movement, the revolutionary movement, and the upsurge in nationalism during the late Qing period, as well as those sponsored by the Ellis Kadoorie Chinese Schools Society and other, smaller voluntary societies. Pennycook's reliance on secondary sources ensures that he was unaware of evidence from annual reports on education by the inspector of schools, which emphasized the predominance of Chinese-medium schooling in Hong Kong during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. For example, the *Report on Education for the year 1882* includes the statements, 'Of the 80 schools under Government supervision, there is but a small minority teaching

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- the gradual increase in provision of schooling opportunities for girls.[51]

There were efforts at certain times to promote the use of English over vernaculars, but these efforts were not consistent or orchestrated.

In like manner, Pennycook quite properly characterizes and castigates at least some of the persons involved in the administration of education in Hong Kong at the turn of the century as being 'Anglicist' and officially-sponsored education as moving 'gradually . . . towards greater provision in English, with little emphasis on vernacular education'.[52] More improperly (at least as a historian), he fails to note that the ethnically discriminatory 1902 Report of the Education Committee, which strongly favoured education in English for a minority of potential leaders rather than education in the vernacular for the masses, was immediately disowned by the British Secretary of State for the Colonies.[53] Although the Hong Kong Government did only a little to support its development, vernacular education, far from 'shrinking', was, in fact, beginning to expand—both in this period and, more especially, in the first three decades of the twentieth century.[54] Pennycook finds it interesting that the one Chinese member of the Education Commission was Ng Choy, who, he notes significantly, had been educated in England and appointed

English. The vast majority of the children in the Colony learn Chinese only'. Detailed data about the numbers of students attending schools offering education in Chinese compared with those offering education in English can be found in the *Report on Education for the year 1885*, para. 17, the *Report* (1887), para. 6, and the *Report* (1893), para. 8. None of these supports Pennycook's assumptions and rhetoric.

[51] Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion* (1990), 76–7. 293.

[52] Pennycook (1998), 143.

[53] Among other critical comments and referring directly to the Education Committee's proposal to focus on the thorough (and English-medium) education of a Chinese elite rather than 'more widely spread education', Chamberlain noted approvingly that a former Registrar-General in Hong Kong had laid down that 'the first duty is to maintain Vernacular schools' and continued, 'certainly, it would need very strong grounds to justify withholding Government assistance from Vernacular education in a large native community such as exists in Hong Kong, thereby presumably excluding the very poorest from the benefits of education.' The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, to the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Henry Blake, 12th September 1902; in CO129/311, 48ff.

[54] See, for example, Mee-yin Fong, *The First Hundred Years of Hong Kong Education* (Xianggang zao qi jiao yu fa zhan Shi: 1842–1941) (Hong Kong: Zhongguo xue she (China Studies Society) in Chinese, 1975), 68–74 and 139–44; Hei-tak Wu, 'Education as a Business', *Hongkong University Education Journal* 11 (Jan. 1939), 36; T.C. Cheng, 'Changes in Local Vernacular Schools'. Hongkong University Education Journal 11 (Jan. 1939), 50; Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion*, (1990), 290–3.

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the first Chinese member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. Ng supported the cause of the English language and argued that 'on admission, Chinese students should show a competent knowledge of their own language but thereafter their attention "should be confined to the study of English"'.[55] The implication is that Ng's English education had rendered him a brainwashed *déraciné* incapable of seeing through, let alone standing up to, British linguistic and cultural imperialism. Pennycook fails, however, to note that Ng Choy (also known as Wu Tingfang) was a prominent leader of the reform movement in China as well as in Hong Kong, and a vociferous opponent of what he considered to be ethnically discriminatory measures—such as the rules concerning the opening hours of Hong Kong's City Hall Museum.[56] Similarly, he selectively quotes from a secondary source concerning the refusal to allow Robert Ho Tung (a prominent Eurasian businessman) the right to have a residence on the reserved area of The Peak on Hong Kong Island. While there is a fair point to be made here regarding the blatant racism of residential regulations on the Peak in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pennycook neglects to divulge that the same secondary source, a few lines later, reports that by 1917 Ho Tung had three residences on the Peak or that he was knighted as a mark of recognition for his charitable activities.[57]

Furthermore, in his eagerness to set up Sir Frederick Lugard as a 'straw man', Pennycook quotes extensively passages of Lugard's own words that appear particularly open to interpretation as instances of colonialist arrogance and of culturally supremacist thinking.[58] In a section of his publication explicitly entitled 'Lugard and Hong Kong University', it is perhaps surprising that he does not also include a

[55] Pennycook (1998), 144.

[56] See Sweeting, *Fact and Opinion* (1990), 236–7. Wu Ting-fang was an adviser to Li Hung-chang and twice Chinese ambassador to the United States; see, also, Linda Pomerantz-Zhang, *Wu Tingfang: Reform and Modernization in Modern Chinese History*, (Hong Kong, 992), 26–40; Carl T. Smith, *Chinese Christians*, 148, 198.

[57] The secondary source that Pennycook cites is Peter Wesley-Smith, 'Anti-Chinese Legislation in Hong Kong', in Ming K. Chan (ed.), *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong Between China and Britain* (Hong Kong, 1994), 99. The statement about Ho Tung's three residences on the Peak appears on the same page. Perhaps it should also be noted that, when the newly-founded Peak (primary) School was declared to be reserved for children of Europeans, Ho Tung complained and secured an explicit exception from this ruling for his own children (although, once had had secured this exception, he declined to make use of it).

[58] Pennycook (1998), 145–7.

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quotation from Lugard's appeal to the late Qing Dynasty Governor-General of Guangdong:

Soon after I came to Hong Kong the idea occurred to me, that in no better way could we show our sympathy with the desire of China to educate her students in western sciences, than by establishing here a University where students might be able to obtain degrees in no way inferior to those granted in Europe and America, and equally recognized by all nations. This would enable Chinese scholars to acquire degrees without being put to the great expense entailed by going to foreign countries. They would study here among their own race and not become denationalized, and separated for long years from their families—returning perhaps with revolutionary ideas, and having lost their pride in their nation and their patriotism.

. . . We need considerable funds to enable us to give effect to the scheme and I trust Your Excellency will shew your approval and interest in it by subscribing to them.[59]

It is possible that Pennycook would interpret this message merely as further evidence of Lugard's reactionary views. It might, however, be more plausibly viewed as an instance of his political acumen and/or of his skills as a fund-raiser.

Lugard's approach to the issue of medium of instruction appears to have been pragmatic rather than implacably pro-English. Addressing the 1912 Congress of Universities of the British Empire, he alluded to criticisms of education in India recently voiced by Valentine Chirol:

'The third criticism [of the Indian education system] refers primarily to schools for boys and condemns the sole use of English as the medium of instruction. The criticism does not apply to Universities where (as here) it is necessary that Western knowledge should be conveyed in a Western language, since there is no common dialect which is understood by all Chinese, since the Chinese language is at present incapable of expressing technical and scientific terms, and knowledge of a Western language is necessary to open up the literature of the West to the student. The importance of the study of the Chinese language and literature is, however, fully recognised'.[60]

This concern to give Chinese university students opportunities to acquire 'Western knowledge' first-hand was not confined to imperialists such as Lugard—it was a central concern of many Chinese reformers in the early twentieth century. Indeed, ninety years later the utility of English in this respect is recognised by China's contemporary

[59] Governor of Hong Kong to Governor General, Canton, 20th January 1909.

[60] Cited in Bernard Mellor, *Lugard in Hong Kong: Empires, Education and a Governor at Work* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992), 172ff.

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'modernisers', and by the hundreds of thousands of Chinese who study for higher degrees overseas (and at universities in Hong Kong).

In the inter-war period, Governor Sir Cecil Clementi's connections with a group of highly conservative Chinese literati were not cultivated with a view to demeaning Chinese culture or language-use, and certainly did not give rise to any such outcome.[61] As a thoroughgoing 'Orientalist' in the Saidian sense, Clementi was keen to foster ultra-orthodox Confucian attitudes amongst the local Chinese population, calculating that an emphasis on values such as obedience to established authority would tend to bolster the colonial regime against the challenge of newfangled Chinese nationalism. This emphasis on the inculcation of Confucian orthodoxy would also tend to encourage rather than discourage the use of the Chinese language within schools. In Hong Kong (as in other colonial contexts), English could never be simply a vehicle for the imposition or reinforcement of colonial dominance (whatever the intentions of colonial officials)—it also inevitably gave access to the whole corpus of English literature and scholarship, much of which was radically critical of imperialism. Hence the mixture of suspicion and disdain with which Anglo-Indians regarded the highly educated, polyglot Bengali 'babu'[62]—a figure whose Chinese counterpart was perhaps the foreign-educated Chinese political reformer, whose incarnations arguably included, in different eras, Ng Choy (Wu Ting-fang), Sun Yat-sen and Zhou En-lai.

Another notable event in the history of Hong Kong's education system during the inter-war period was the short visit by the progressivist inspector, Edmund Burney, at the behest of the British Government's Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, though the practical significance of this has been over-rated. It is true that, in his (1935) Report on Education in Hong Kong, Burney excoriated what he perceived to be the Hong Kong Government's policy, including its language policy. His recommendations, however, were not completely implemented in the few years before the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. Attempts to do so shortly after Hong Kong's 'liberation' in 1945, were, as noted below, obstructed and, eventually, defeated because of opposition at the grass-roots level.[63]

[61] Luk, 'Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum', 1991, 659.

[62] Numerous references to 'babus' are to be found in the works of Kipling (e.g. *Kim*).

[63] Anthony Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed; the Reconstruction of Education in Post-War Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 72–5.

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Finally, as far as pre-Second World War realities were concerned, for numerous Chinese residents of Hong Kong, the various policy changes recommended in a 'top-down' manner by officials of the colonial government were irrelevant to their main educational concern. This was to find places for their children, especially their sons, in well-regarded schools in China. A 'shadow system', whereby children of relatively wealthy Hong Kong Chinese residents obtained what their parents considered to be a more suitable and more reliable education than that available locally, provided an almost ironic parallel to the customary practice of expatriates who had the means to send their children 'home' for schooling. It also reduced opportunities for at least some Chinese residents of Hong Kong to perceive themselves as passive victims of colonial indoctrination. In the post-war period, however, the outcome of the Chinese Civil War made the survival of the shadow system impossible, and this, combined with the intensification of the Cold War in East Asia and the world-wide trend towards decolonisation, contributed to a general raising of the stakes in debates over education policy in Hong Kong.

III

The Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945 witnessed disastrous neglect or destruction of the colony's infrastructure, while simple hunger drove the majority of what had anyway been a largely transient population to abandon the city and return to Guangdong Province or other parts of 'Free China'. Japan's surrender, the return of British rule, and the resumption of the civil war on the Chinese mainland saw a dramatic reversal of this movement in the late 1940s, as hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived in Hong Kong not, as it turned out, as temporary migrants, but as permanent settlers. This development created a massive new demand for education with which the British administration was initially quite unprepared to cope, and ushered in an era during which the colonial government, in education as well as other areas, was driven to resort to strategies of crisis management rather than long-range policy.[64] What is more, Hong Kong's transformation into a huge refugee camp came at a

[64] Anthony Sweeting and Paul Morris, 'Educational Reform in Post-war Hong Kong: Planning and Crisis Intervention', *International Journal of Educational Development*, 13, 3 (1993), 201–16.

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time of changing and growing expectations worldwide concerning the developmental responsibilities of colonial regimes—chief among which was the duty of expanding access to basic education. However, the high premium that Hong Kong's burgeoning post-war economy placed on educational qualifications meant that demand for schooling did not abate following the expansion of provision at primary level. On the contrary, a trend of rising educational expectations among the local population was destined to persist right down to the end of British rule and beyond.

The inter-war period had witnessed tentative steps on the part of officials at the Colonial Office in London to devise a coherent educational strategy for the colonies. The emphasis on providing a traditional academic education was increasingly seen as unsuited to the needs of most colonial societies as well as politically unwise, since the growing numbers of unemployed secondary school and university graduates tended to swell the ranks of anti-colonial agitators. In the post-war period, both colonial governments and the new international development agencies sought to promote what were felt to be more efficient and effective policies, geared to providing vocational instruction that would be of practical use to students when they left school, and to encouraging the use of local vernaculars in place of 'colonial' languages. The problem with this was that where a demand for education existed, it was usually for precisely the sort of academic, English-medium schooling that Western agencies and colonial administrators now deemed inappropriate.[65] Moreover, as anti-colonial sentiment prevailed in the West itself as much as in its former colonies, Hong Kong's anachronistic colonial administration was brought face-to-face with the reality of its lack of legitimacy, and its consequent weakness in the face of any concerted popular protest.

Efforts to imbue the reconstruction of schooling in post-war Hong Kong with the progressivist spirit of Edmund Burney's 1935 *Report*—especially Burney's pro-vernacular attitudes—met with decidedly mixed results. This lack of substantial achievement either on the statute books or, more importantly, in local classrooms, was not, however, for want of effort on the part of the officials involved. T.R. Rowell, the first post-war Director of Education, attempted by means

[65] See Watson and Whitehead, *op. cit.* See also Philip Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 167, and J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1956).

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of the Language Circulars of August 1946 to effect change in school practice as far as language usage was concerned and to make Chinese the default medium of instruction for students up to what was then the end of Class 8 (in present terms, Secondary Form 2). Strong opposition, led by people involved in some of the most prestigious Grant-in-Aid schools on behalf of students who were not fluent in Cantonese, ensured that what some referred to as the 'notorious language circulars' were relegated in status to pious declarations of intent, which did not require implementation.[66]

On the other hand, the influence of the Burney Report can be seen clearly in the efforts of the Government to expand primary schooling in the vernacular during the first two decades of the post-war period. These efforts included the Ten Year Plan, which was little more than a re-cycling of arrangements made by C.G. Sollis, the last pre-war Director of Education, and the much more ambitious Seven Year Plan, energetically pursued by D.J.S. Crozier, the second post-war Director and his staff, in alliance with voluntary associations and even private enterprise. It was at this time that Crozier rejected appeals from expatriate civil servants to increase provision of schooling for their children on the grounds that the much more urgent priority was vernacular primary schooling for the dramatically increased number of Chinese children in Hong Kong.[67] A desire to promote Chinese-medium education was also manifested in the establishment, in 1952, of a Local Syndicate to run a Chinese School Certificate Examination, in which Chinese Language would be a compulsory subject, and by the founding of the Evening School for Higher Chinese Studies in 1951. Further consideration of developments in the curricula of Chinese vernacular primary schools and Chinese Middle Schools was delegated, in the early 1950s, to a specially appointed Chinese Studies Committee.

The membership of the Chinese Studies Committee included a number of those highly conservative *émigré* Chinese scholars who had gathered around Governor Clementi in the late 1920s.[68] The presence of these scholars helped to ensure that the 1953 Report of the Chinese Studies Committee recommended elevating the status of the Chinese language within Hong Kong education. It was in this period, too, that

[66] Sweeting, *Phoenix Transformed* (1993), 75.

[67] *Ibid.*, 115–16. The dramatic increase was caused partly by the population influx generated by economic and political problems in China and partly by the post-war 'baby boom', a local version of the international demographic trend.

[68] See Luk, *op. cit.* (also cited by Pennycook in *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*).

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an *ad hoc* committee recommended that the Hong Kong Government establish the Evening School for Higher Chinese Studies in order to at least begin to cater for the increased numbers of students whose parents no longer felt it desirable or feasible to send them to China for post-secondary schooling.[69] Moreover, it was a recognition of the demographic, social, and political changes that were taking place in the immediate post-war years that led the Hong Kong Government to set up a formal committee to enquire into Higher Education, under the chairmanship of a prominent businessman, John Keswick.[70] The principal recommendation of the Keswick Report (to initiate Chinese language-medium degree courses at the University of Hong Kong in a range of subjects) escaped immediate implementation, because the University's Senate was divided on the issue and its Council recommended delay. Lack of suitable textbooks in Chinese, and of qualified staff competent in that language, were among the reasons, or excuses, advanced for the failure to implement—not the first or the last time that an unwillingness to commit funds would scupper an educational initiative in Hong Kong. However, the existence of widespread official support for these recommendations is not open to doubt, as demonstrated by the public and private declarations of several of those involved.[71]

Pre-dating and indubitably influencing government efforts, various initiatives from the grassroots in favour of Chinese-medium education also affected the post-war situation. These included the mushrooming of Chinese post-secondary colleges from the late 1940s onwards.[72] In the post-war circumstances, the fact that several of these new colleges had political affiliations (generally either to the Chinese Communist Party or to the Kuomintang) and that some of these were potentially conflicting certainly attracted special government attention to their development. As it became obvious that the University of Hong Kong was neither fully willing nor ready and able to implement the major Keswick Report recommendation by introducing Chinese-medium

[69] Anthony Sweeting, 'The Reconstruction of Education in Post-War Hong Kong, 1945–1954: Variations in the Process of Education Policy Making'. Ph.D. dissertation (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1989), 834–46.

[70] Committee on Higher Education (1952), *Report*, 2–3 ; see, also, Sweeting, 'Reconstruction of Education in Post-war Hong Kong' (1989), 902–24.

[71] See, for example, Sweeting, 'Reconstruction of Education in Post-war Hong Kong' (1989), 905–9.

[72] John Francis Cramer, 'The Chinese Colleges of Hong Kong', *Comparative Education Review*, III, 1 (1959), 26–9; Cho-yeeTo, 'The Development of Higher Education in Hong Kong', *Comparative Education Review*, IX, 1 (1965), 74–80; Sweeting (1989), 846–62.

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degree courses, the Director of Education became more inclined to accept some of the Chinese post-secondary colleges as worthy of Government support, essentially because they were the only practical alternatives.[73]

This change in policy was certainly in part due to a desire on the part of the colonial government to exert some control over developments in higher education in the vernacular—reflecting a particular concern to prevent education becoming another battleground for the Communist–Nationalist in-fighting that caused sporadic unrest within Hong Kong during the 1950s. The policy shift is also open to interpretation along more pragmatic lines. In the circumstances of the 1950s in Hong Kong, it was felt that *something* needed to be done (and, in the broader Cold War context,[74] something needed to be *seen* to be done) about the problems of the increasing numbers of non-English speaking residents of Hong Kong, especially with regard to higher education opportunities. The University of Hong Kong solution, favoured by Keswick and his Committee, had not proved feasible. In parallel, eventually, with efforts to produce 'bridging programmes' that would enable the academically more successful students from Chinese Middle Schools to reach standards in English sufficient to render them eligible for admission to the University of Hong Kong,[75] the most practical option appeared to be for the Government to approve and subsidise the best of the Chinese post-secondary colleges. This policy orientation led eventually to the establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963.[76] Although some officials

[73] Sweeting, 'Reconstruction of Education in Post-war Hong Kong' (1989). 979–1006. The Evening School of Higher Chinese Studies could not accommodate the numbers of students envisaged and efforts by Americans to establish a university in Hong Kong were regarded by British and Hong Kong officials as unnecessarily confrontational with China. See, also, Sweeting, 'Reconstruction', 971–8.

[74] It is not surprising to find, in the Cold War context of the early 1950s, that one of the options considered (but dismissed by the colonial government, largely for reasons of territoriality) was a proposal by Americans to establish an American University in Hong Kong (Sweeting, 'Reconstruction' (1989), 862–7, 971–9).

[75] This was known as the 'Special Classes Centre' scheme, strongly espoused by L.G. Morgan, then Deputy Director of Education. It was implemented from 1955 in Clementi Middle School, the Government's own 'flag-ship' school for vernacular education.

[76] Alice N.H. Lun, 'The Founding', in Alice N.H. Lun (ed.), *The Quest for Excellence: A History of the Chinese University of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1994), 3–33; Anthony Sweeting, 'Education Policy Making in Hong Kong, 1995–1991', unpublished Research Report produced for the Education and Manpower Branch of the Government Secretariat, Government of Hong Kong, 1996, 29–157.

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and advisers warned of the risks entailed, referring to problems experienced in Singapore relating to the establishment there of the Chinese-oriented Nanyang University,[77] the path in the later 1950s and early 1960s towards the opening of the Chinese University seemed relatively smooth and obstruction-free. In large part this was due to the willing collaboration of the exiled Chinese scholars who ran the new university and were only too pleased to have thereby acquired a secure and relatively independent academic base.

Chinese-medium schooling at all levels clearly achieved greater status within educational circles, and began to be taken far more seriously by the government, during the first two post-war decades. Despite this, the main trend in connection with school enrolments was away from Chinese-medium and towards English-medium secondary schools. This was not encouraged, or even anticipated, by colonial officials. It was the outcome, instead, of local parents' perceptions of the opportunities then existing for employment and higher education, together with a recognition of the value of English in the countries that seemed most amenable to and attractive for further migration. In this period, as later, these included the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, as well as (but not primarily) the United Kingdom. In the years after 1982, when the news of a likely Sino-British 'accord' over the future of Hong Kong spread, fluency in English as a desirable qualification for emigration purposes assumed even greater importance, especially for relatively young professionals and their children. Some parents may also have appreciated the value of English as a world (and science and technology-oriented) language. Few, if any, appear to have been concerned about its track record as a colonial language. The dilemma as far as language in schools was concerned was between the 'use value' of Cantonese, and the 'exchange value' of English. While academic specialists and officials emphasised the 'usefulness' of mother-tongue instruction in Cantonese, in terms of its greater effectiveness in achieving educational goals, for parents such arguments were outweighed by the economic value of the command of English as a marketable skill both within Hong Kong and overseas.

Another attempt to promote the cause of Chinese as medium of instruction in secondary schools was made in 1973, when the Board of Education's proposals for 'the expansion of secondary education over

[77] Colonial Office minute by W.I.J. Wallace, 16th March, 1959, and Wallace to Melville, 5th May, 1959 (in CO1030/572); R. McC. Andrew, Foreign Office, to M. McMullen, Colonial Office, 28th August, 1959 (in CO1030/900).

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the next decade' included the assertion that the normal medium of instruction should be Chinese.[78] As happened with the 1946 Language Circulars, however, this initiative provoked considerable opposition from both schools and parents. In the face of this, by the time the official 'White Paper on Secondary Education over the Next Decade' was published (November 1974), the recommendation had been diluted to the anodyne suggestion that language policy should be the responsibility of the individual schools. This served as authorisation for schools to follow practices approved by the 'market' (i.e. most of the parents). Thus, the trend towards increasing numbers of enrolments in schools that were at least ostensibly English-medium continued and was, if anything, reinforced. In practice, the prevalent mode of teaching in most schools, especially the more recently established ones, became a mixture of Cantonese and English. Students would sit for English-medium public examinations, and 'cram' for these using textbooks written in English, but in the classroom the language of oral instruction was, in the overwhelming majority of cases, Cantonese. Government officials and their educational advisors lamented this state of affairs, but did not have the gumption to attempt to force a change and face down the public protests that this would inevitably have provoked.[79]

Outside schools during the late 1960s and the 1970s, the momentum in favour of the Chinese language increased. This was evinced by the widespread public support for the 'Chinese Language Movement', a successful campaign to ensure that Chinese was recognized as one of the two official languages of Hong Kong. Membership of the Chinese Language Movement ranged from such Hong Kong notables as Sir Kenneth Fung Ping-fan, P.C. Woo, Q.W. Lee, and Hilton Cheong-leen to the leftist members of the Hong Kong Federation of Students. The movement, which formalized itself sufficiently to generate a committee in 1968, shortly after the disturbances of 1966 and 1967, probably deserves to be considered as the first of Hong Kong's modern pressure groups. As a moderately anti-colonialist and pro-nationalist movement, with a finite target—the recognition of Chinese as an official language of Hong Kong—it attracted very

[78] Report of the Board of Education on the Proposed Expansion of Secondary School Education in Hong Kong over the Next Decade, Hong Kong (August 1973), 6.

[79] As noted below, protests did indeed erupt in late 1997 when the government decided to force the majority of local secondary schools to switch to 'mother-tongue' instruction.

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broad support. In 1971, students began campaigning actively on behalf of making Chinese an official language of government in Hong Kong, successfully pressing the Government to form its own committee to investigate the issue. The first significant sign of success occurred in 1972, when Legislative Council members were permitted to make their speeches and intercede in debates or 'question time' in Cantonese. Finally, in 1974, the Official Languages Ordinance was passed.[80] This declared that, henceforth, Chinese (meaning, in the Hong Kong context, Cantonese) would become an official language in Hong Kong, enjoying equality of status and usage with English in government communications. It is significant that this issue surfaced at a relatively late phase in Hong Kong's colonial history and that it required the impetus supplied by a broad-based pressure group to achieve resolution. The failure to act earlier to make Chinese an official language of government doubtless reflects a widespread and often arrogant assumption on the part of colonial officials that ordinary local people 'were not interested in politics', and were by-and-large content to let the British get on with the administration of public affairs. Nonetheless, notwithstanding the arrogance that frequently coloured this perception, there appears to have been some truth in it, particularly with regard to the 1950s and 1960s. The fact that pressure for official status to be granted to the Chinese language took so long to build may be largely attributed to the refugee mentality and perceived transient status of much of the Hong Kong Chinese population until well into the post-war period.

Exogenous influences may also have played a role in stimulating support for the Chinese Language Movement. In particular, the enhanced international standing of the P.R.C., as demonstrated by its success in gaining the United Nations seat for China, reinforced the pride with which many young people in Hong Kong regarded their Chinese heritage (including the Chinese language). The P.R.C.'s subsequent success in ensuring that the fate of Hong Kong was removed from the agenda of the United Nations' Committee on Colonialism and acknowledged as being a purely domestic matter for China to resolve probably also influenced attitudes towards Hong Kong's two main languages. It is more than likely that both endogenous and exogenous forces influenced the authors of the 1972 pamphlet, *At What Cost? Instruction through the English Medium in Hong*

[80] Ordinance 10/74: Hong Kong Government Gazette Legal Supplement 1, 116, A.37-8.

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Kong Schools[81] and the attitudes of public figures such as Szeto Wah, who made a point of refusing to use English in public pronouncements and contributions to debate in the mass media. While a continued acknowledgement of the economic utility of English manifested itself in parental preference for English-medium over Chinese-medium schools, for increasing numbers of Hongkongers, the status of the Chinese language (or its Cantonese variant) was central both to nationalist pride and to a growing sense of Hong Kong's distinctive cultural identity.

By the early 1980s, the rhetoric of many pressure groups and aspiring leaders of local opinion was clearly in favour of the Chinese language and, in many cases, hostile to English as the language of colonialism. This possibly influenced the international Panel of Visitors, which produced a report, entitled *A Perspective on Education* in 1982. This OECD-endorsed panel, more commonly known, after its chairman, as the Llewellyn Commission, hoisted higher the banner of vernacular education and helped to intensify political pressure for 'mother tongue education'.[82]

The last years of Hong Kong's formal existence as a colony[83] witnessed an increasing number of public statements from community leaders and education officials in favour of 'mother tongue learning', a strong party-line within the Education Department against the prevalent use of 'mixed mode teaching', but no clear indication that a significant number of parents would tolerate their children being

[81] Cheng Ngai Lung, Shek Kang Chuen, Tse Ka Kui, and Wong Siu Lun, *At What Cost? Instruction through the English Medium in Hong Kong Schools*, privately published pamphlet (June 1973). One of the authors, while emphasising the local influences upon his thinking at the time, acknowledged that the international climate had also played a part (Interview with Professor Wong Siu Lun, 19 June, 2002).

[82] E.g., the Panel of Visitors declared, 'We . . . accept as a fact that the mother tongue is, all other things being equal, the best medium of teaching and learning. There are sound political, cultural and psychological reasons to support the proposition.' (John Llewellyn, chair, *A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government, 1982), 28).

[83] A number of commentators, including one of the present authors, have considered that a form of 'applied de-colonization' and perhaps even the spread of post-colonial attitudes well before the formal change of sovereignty in mid-1997. See, for example, Sui-Kai Lau, *Decolonization without Independence: the Unfinished Political Reforms of the Hong Kong Government* (Hong Kong, Institute of Social Research Center, 1987); Anthony Sweeting, 'Education within Historical Processes', in Gerard A. Postiglione (ed.), *Education and Society in Hong Kong: Toward One Country and Two Systems* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992), 45–6; Anthony Sweeting, 'Hong Kong', in Paul Morris and Anthony Sweeting (eds), *Education and Development in East Asia* (New York: Garland, 1995), 63.

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switched to Chinese-medium schools.[84] In fact, in one of the most publicised cases, a leading spokesman for mother-tongue education, who was also the headmaster of a well-known school, was put into an embarrassing position when his school council reversed his decision to switch to Chinese-medium teaching because they had found that the quality of the student intake had declined significantly after the change.[85]

An 'intervention study' type of research into the effects of different forms of language treatment on Secondary Form 2 students in History and Integrated Science lessons in the early 1980s produced results and recommendations, which, though never formally published, had significant impact locally.[86] Its main finding, that only about 30% of students could benefit from being taught in English, was replicated by subsequent research and was quoted frequently as providing a firm, scientific basis for the policy of encouraging more schools, via 'positive discrimination',[87] to adopt Chinese as their medium of instruction. The establishment of the Institute for Language in Education (ILE) in 1982, although staffed at the most senior level with persons qualified

[84] The Tiananmen Square Massacre of June 4, 1989, though it had a massive impact on the broader political scene in Hong Kong, had no direct discernible impact on the government's medium of instruction policy. However, since one of the legacies of June 4 was a greater official sensitivity to public concerns, it may if anything have reinforced reluctance on the part of the Education Department to venture any radical initiatives in the controversial area of language teaching in schools.

[85] David C.K. Cheung's school, originally known as Carmel English School, switched to mother tongue teaching and learning in 1988. Because of its perceptions of a decline in the academic standards of the student intake, the Carmel School Council insisted on a return to English-language instruction in 1990. This led to Mr. Cheung's resignation. See, for example, *SCMP*, 6th October, 1986, 27, and 16th June, 1990, 2; David C.K. Cheung, 'Why Mother-Tongue', in Anthony Sweeting (ed.), *Differences and Identities: Educational Argument in Late Twentieth Century Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong, 1990), 73–9; David W.C. So, 'Language-based Bifurcation of Secondary Schools in Hong Kong: Past, Present and Future', in K.K. Luke (ed.), *Into the Twenty-first Century: Issues of Language Education in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, 1992), 83.

[86] M.A. Brimer (ed.), 'The Effects of the Medium of Instruction on the Achievement of Form 2 Students in Hong Kong Secondary Schools' (Hong Kong, December 1985). This report received only a very limited form of publication, mainly in senior government circles and, at the insistence of the Education Department, was categorized as 'Restricted'. A copy is, however, shelved in the Hong Kong Collection of the University of Hong Kong's Library.

[87] Early forms of positive discrimination included offering schools that adopted Chinese as their medium of instruction additional teachers and the introduction of a Native English Teacher (NET) scheme, by which teachers from English-speaking countries overseas were encouraged by terms of service more attractive than those applying to local teachers to teach English for a number of years in Hong Kong schools.

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in TEFL, also provided a boost to the cause and status of Chinese-language teaching. For example, later in 1982, the Government set up a working party to examine the feasibility of a separate Chinese Language Foundation 'to promote and facilitate the use of Chinese as a tool of communication for study, work and leisure'. On the other hand, the establishment of both the ILE and the working party on the feasibility of a separate Chinese Language Foundation may be regarded as typical examples of 'bureaucratic incrementalism'.[88] This phenomenon derives from the tendency of bureaucratic organizations and/or governments to wish to be seen to be tackling problems. One main way they achieve this aim is by creating a special body (new institution, committee, or working group) whose explicit purpose is to address the issue identified as needing treatment. Once the special body has been created, however, it tends to develop a life (and vested interests) of its own and the 'parent organization' may not be particularly scrupulous in monitoring or evaluating the extent to which (or even whether) the identified problem has, in fact, been resolved. For the parent organization, it is sufficient that the special body has been created! Typical examples of this tendency in the recent history of education in Hong Kong include not only the now defunct ILE, but also the Language Fund, the Quality Education Fund, ACTEQ, and, to some extent, both the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the Open University of Hong Kong. Moreover, in Hong Kong the aversion of the administration to public controversy—an aversion rooted in a consciousness of its fragile legitimacy—has exacerbated the bureaucratic tendency to allow initiatives that meet with resistance to escape implementation and become merely 'symbolic'.[89]

1982, the year of the Llewellyn Report and of various other educational initiatives was also, as it happened, the year in which Deng Xiaoping made public China's determination to resume sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. At this point it is essential to note the connections between Hong Kong's political system and the prospects for educational reform. Two education-related episodes during the 1970s had underlined the extreme political sensitivity of suggestions

[88] Sweeting (1991) 'Education within Historical Processes', in G.A. Postiglione & Y.M. Leung (eds), *Education and Society in Hong Kong: Toward One Country and Two Systems*, 57–8; 'Educational Policy, Social Change and Development in Hong Kong', in G.A. Postiglione & W.O. Lee (eds), *Social Change and Educational Development: Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1995), 237.

[89] See Paul Morris and Ian Scott, 'Educational Reform and Policy Implementation in Hong Kong', *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18 (2003), No. 1, 71–84.

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of 'colonialist' compulsion in this area: in 1975, a proposal to incorporate Chinese history into a new, Chinese-medium Social Studies subject had to be dropped following fierce and orchestrated opposition on the part of Chinese History teachers and university lecturers; and in 1978, Hong Kong witnessed sit-ins, other protests, and, eventually, the closure of a school, followed by the opening of two to accommodate opposing factions from the first.[90] An administration with a clear popular mandate could perhaps have forced through controversial educational reforms—but the political reforms that might have secured such a mandate were not forthcoming until the very last years of British rule. When these reforms were belatedly introduced, the subsequent political tension between the Patten administration and the PRC government intensified uncertainty over the colony's post-handover fate, and discouraged local officials from proposing radical solutions to controversial problems in any policy area. As a result, in the run-up to retrocession, policy on education as on other matters was, if not actually shanghaied, then increasingly 'Beijinged'.

Despite the accelerating momentum of the mother tongue campaign in the early- and mid-1990s, the real transformation as far as medium of instruction in Hong Kong was concerned happened only after the change of sovereignty. The self-consciously post-colonial administration of Tung Chee Hwa, claiming as it did to embody the fulfilment of China's promise of 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong', apparently felt confident (at least in its early days) that it commanded the necessary legitimacy to force through controversial measures. In September 1997, the Education Department finally issued 'firm guidelines' on the medium of instruction issue (although the announcement that these guidelines would be issued in fact preceded the formal handover of sovereignty). Soon afterwards, an *ad hoc* committee indicated that only 100 (out of over 420) secondary schools would be permitted to operate using English as medium of instruction. Predictably, this provoked considerable public protest, with many appeals against the committee's selection of the schools considered capable of teaching in English. Eventually, a further 14 schools were added to the list. Even after the fury and fuss had

[90] For a more detailed account of the Precious Blood Golden Jubilee Secondary School 'Affair', see Anthony Sweeting and Paul Morris, 'Educational Reform in Post-war Hong Kong: Planning and Crisis Intervention', *International Journal of Educational Development*, 13, 3, 209–11.

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faded, few, if any, educators in Hong Kong would claim that the language problem had reached a final solution.

In a recent article that cites Pennycook's theories concerning the 'cultural politics of English as an international language', Choi Po-king has argued persuasively that there exists in 'postcolonial' almost as much as in pre-1997 Hong Kong a dominant discourse concerning the superiority of English-medium education.[91] Choi claims that this discourse—reflected in the late 1997 dispute over mother tongue policy—has been constructed over a number of years by powerful local (especially locally-based Anglo-American) business interests, in cahoots with the government and with compliant academics who have provided the expert backing for a policy that reinforces the privileged status of English. There can be little doubt that a discourse concerning the superiority of English does exist in Hong Kong, that business interests have contributed to this discourse, and that it has buttressed a system of English-medium schooling that, overall, is detrimental to the education of children in an overwhelmingly Cantonese-speaking city. However, whether this amounts—as Choi alleges—to 'a form of linguistic imperialism', is highly debatable. The perception that English is an important world language and a crucial business tool in Hong Kong is not simply an illusion constructed by malevolent foreigners or manipulative bureaucrats—it corresponds to a reality that increasingly influences decisions made by policymakers and parents in Beijing, Shanghai and elsewhere in East Asia. The problem is that Hong Kong's colonial history has created a system of schooling in which English-medium education has come to be regarded both as an avenue to better life chances and as a marker of social status for the local middle class. Thus the preservation of this system has come to be perceived by influential elements not only within the local business community, but also within the local middle class more broadly, as a vested interest to be defended at all costs. The resilience of the discourse concerning the superiority of English has more to do with the disproportionate influence of the wealthy English-educated middle classes within Hong Kong's undemocratic establishment (both before and after 1997) than it does to do with any 'linguistic imperialism', if the latter is taken to imply an imposition by external 'hegemonising' forces.

[91] Po King Choi, '"The best students will learn English": ultra-utilitarianism and linguistic imperialism in education in post-1997 Hong Kong', *Journal of Education Policy*, November–December 2003, Vol. 18, No. 6, 673–694.

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To the extent that such forces do impinge on local education policymaking today, their origin lies closer to Hong Kong itself than to any distant Anglo-Saxon metropolis. Since 1997, education has assumed a central role in the efforts of the post-retrocession administration to re-invent and re-mould Hong Kong as a 'Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China'. An overtly nation-building agenda has formed an integral part of its educational programme, and the speeches of Tung Chee Hwa have been peppered with exhortations to 'love the motherland' and take pride in Chinese culture—defined as a homogenous and totalising essence. Primarily for 'patriotic' reasons, but also for obvious utilitarian ones, the teaching of Mandarin Chinese, or *putonghua*, has since 1997 become compulsory in all local schools. In these circumstances, what is striking is the almost across-the-board consensus on the continued vital importance of English language teaching. Indeed, widespread concern over sub-standard levels of English among local students and teachers prompted the post-colonial government to revive a scheme—which its colonial predecessor had earlier been driven to abandon in the teeth of opposition from the powerful local teachers' union—for recruiting 'Native-speaking English Teachers' on expatriate terms to teach in local secondary schools. In 2002, this scheme was further expanded to apply to primary schools as well.

The recent rush to learn English on the Chinese mainland, particularly evident in Hong Kong's major regional competitor, Shanghai, makes any further challenge to the status of English within the local education system highly improbable. It is perhaps significant that one of the most acrimonious debates over language education since the 1997 handover did not involve English at all, but instead pitted the supporters of mother-tongue (i.e. Cantonese) instruction against the proponents of a switch to *putonghua*.[92] This serves as a reminder of the fact, nowhere mentioned by Pennycook, that mainland China over the past century has witnessed a sweeping and unparalleled programme to establish *putonghua* as the prime medium of instruction from Kashgar to Guangzhou (and the only medium of instruction for higher education). Britain's linguistic imperialists, such as they have been, could never hold a candle to their Chinese counterparts.

[92] See Edward Vickers, *In Search of an Identity: the Politics of History Education in Hong Kong, 1960s–2002* (New York, Routledge, 2003), Chapter 3.

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IV

Interpretations of European colonialism that see it as characterised by efforts to promote cultural (and linguistic) 'hegemony' are by no means devoid of truth. The work of Edward Said, for example, draws attention to discourses of cultural and racial superiority that were particularly prevalent in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, the work of many of those who have followed both Said and Foucault into the realms of 'discourse' tends to impose a temporal and spatial uniformity upon the experience both of colonisers and colonised that flies in the face of the evidence. As Washbrook has noted,

> 'The paradigmatic qualities imputed to the colonial 'episteme' are most characteristic of the late nineteenth century, when both Enlightenment and Romantic thinking converged on the centrality of race. But colonialism had a pre- and a post-history, and reading such qualities backwards and forwards across the entire colonial (and European) cultural experience leads to anachronism'[93]

In his analysis of English language teaching in Hong Kong, Pennycook falls into precisely this trap. His attempt in the penultimate chapter of *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* to demonstrate the persistence of linguistic colonialism in late-twentieth century Hong Kong by reference to a 'discourse analysis' of his own students' essays—rather than through any analysis of policy processes or *bona fide* historical sources—can be interpreted as a tacit acknowledgement that the evidence to back up his claims simply does not exist. Both he and others looking for the persistence in the late twentieth century of nineteenth-century style colonialist thinking on education policy, complete with a racialist notion of a 'civilising mission', would find far richer pickings on the other side of Hong Kong's border with the Chinese mainland.[94]

In one of his conclusions, Pennycook manages, 'in the context of colonial Malaya and Hong Kong', to deride *both* 'policies of favouring English' *and* 'policies favouring Chinese or Malay' as 'using education for colonial purposes'.[95] In fact, of course, other language policy

[93] D.A. Washbrook, 'Colonial Discourse Theory', in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume V, Historiography*, 603.

[94] The role of the 'Han nation' vis-à-vis China's various ethnic minorities (including Tibetans and Uigurs) has always been seen by Chinese nationalists very much in terms of a 19th-century style 'civilizing mission'. See Henrietta Harrison, *China* (London: Arnold, 2001).

[95] Pennycook (1998), 150.

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options were non-existent and, therefore, Pennycook places colonial administrators in a predicament that might be summed up as 'Damned if you do; damned if you don't'. At the same time, he implicitly adopts a highly condescending view of 'natives' as essentially passive dupes, 'put into discourse' by evil colonialists,[96] and largely incapable of perceiving, let alone resisting or undermining, the process of their own cultural subordination. For him, the fact that most Hong Kong parents have long actively sought to secure an English-medium education for their children is simply evidence of the pervasiveness of 'colonialist' discourses. The possibility that these people may be making a rational, self-interested choice that for them implies no downgrading of the importance or value of their Chinese culture and identity is not seriously considered. For Pennycook, 'culture', like 'colonialism', is conceived in essentialist terms—an authentic indigenous cultural essence must be restored and cleansed of all contaminating 'colonial' influences. He refuses to admit that the process of cultural and linguistic exchange in colonial Hong Kong can be seen in other than purely negative terms, as an exercise in the imposition of Western cultural dominance.

As Said himself has pointed out, an excessive emphasis on cultural 'authenticity' can in practice lead to consequences that are far from liberating; it tends to reinforce and rigidify (or even artificially create and sustain) inter-ethnic boundaries and, in extreme cases, it can legitimise forms of micro-fascism and religious fundamentalism. However, he has nonetheless lent his endorsement to scholars who view the interaction between indigenous and 'colonial' cultures in Manichaean terms.[97] This view ignores one of the key features of colonialism highlighted by our own analysis: its collaborative nature. Ronald Robinson has argued that colonial rule depends on the ability of the colonising power to co-opt collaborators from among local elites, and that the balance of power enshrined in the resulting 'collaborative contracts' is dependent on the degree of coercive force that the colonial power is willing and able to deploy. The situation in late-twentieth century Hong Kong was one in which, to a very large extent, the collaborators rather than the colonial authorities called the tune. The

[96] *Ibid*., 108.

[97] See Edward Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', in Francis Barker and others (eds), *Europe and its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature* (Colchester: Essex University, 1985); also the epilogue to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism*. The confusions in Said's own stance are noted by Washbrook, *op.cit.*, 600 ff.

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weakness of the colonial government in the later decades of British rule is particularly apparent in the field of education policy—and especially policy on medium of instruction in schools—where the ability of officials to effect fundamental reforms of the system was practically paralysed by fear of offending the sensibilities of powerful local stakeholders. This contrasts with the greater willingness of the post-1997 government—largely borne of a greater (if perhaps misplaced) sense of legitimacy—to attempt such reforms. At the same time, the continuities between the politics of language and education in colonial and post-colonial Hong Kong are just as striking as the contrasts: like its colonial predecessor, the present administration has found it extraordinarily difficult to formulate and implement a coherent programme of educational reform or effect a satisfactory resolution of the medium of instruction issue. Moreover, there have been few if any signs of a post-colonial backlash against the study or use of the English language.

Robinson's view of colonialism as a collaborative process—subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation—is also entirely compatible with a Gramscian view of cultural interaction in colonial settings. As we suggested in the opening section of this article, the fundamental problem with Pennycook's approach in *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* arises from the rigidity of the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse' to which he adheres—a rigidity that is at odds with the shifting nature of the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' invoked by Said, but insufficiently developed in *Orientalism*. The case of Hong Kong shows that the extent to which the indigenous 'colonised' population could and did manoeuvre within the parameters set by British educational control was always considerable, and tended to expand greatly in the last decades of colonial rule. The accommodation by the British of changing local demands through concessions or even policy reversals reflected the constant negotiation and renegotiation that scholars such as Williams have seen as integral to 'hegemony' as a 'lived process'. Indeed, our findings show that talk of a 'hegemonic' relationship between the British administration and the local Chinese in the final two or three decades of colonial Hong Kong appears rather anachronistic. At least in the educational sphere, power increasingly lay with the (overwhelmingly local) bureaucracy and a plethora of local vested interests—especially schools, teachers and parents—that routinely thwarted government initiatives. The case of Hong Kong demonstrates that the constant re-negotiation of a hegemonic

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order can result in its being practically negotiated away altogether.

Finally, when the history of education in Hong Kong is seen in the context of recent global developments, the continued emphasis on English language learning should provoke neither surprise nor alarm. For Pennycook and many others, the worldwide spread of English as a *lingua franca* simply constitutes further evidence of the extent and severity of contemporary Western 'cultural imperialism'—with which they equate the process known as 'globalisation'. However, as A.G. Hopkins has recently argued, critics of globalisation have tended to exaggerate the novelty and uniqueness of this process, and hence the extent to which it represents an extension of Western 'imperialist' dominance. He attributes this distortion to the fact that academic studies of globalisation have hitherto been undertaken not by historians but predominantly by social scientists influenced by variants of neo-Marxist dependency theory (amongst whom may be counted many of those educationalists who have turned their attention to colonial schooling). According to Hopkins, a historically more balanced approach would 'underline the antiquity and importance of non-Western forms of globalisation and demonstrate that encounters with the West produced a world order that was jointly, if also unequally, created.'[98]

Our analysis of the history of colonialism and language education in Hong Kong points to just such a conclusion, in that it demonstrates that the resulting system of schooling has been the product not simply of metropolitan imposition on a passive peripheral society, but of complex and shifting patterns of collaboration as well as resistance. We thus also find ourselves in agreement with Brutt-Griffler's recent call for 'a reconceptualization of language policy [worldwide] as a two-sided process [which] recognizes it as a contested terrain in which policy is made not unilaterally but as a result of the interplay of conflicting historical wills.'[99] Our findings coincide with her observation that the emphasis on 'the colonial in the postcolonial' insisted upon by 'critical theorists' (such as Pennycook) is vitiated by a major oversight—their neglect of 'the postcolonial in the colonial'

[98] A.G. Hopkins, 'Introduction: Globalization—An Agenda for Historians', in A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 2.

[99] Janina Brutt-Griffler, *World Englishes: A Study of its Development* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2002), 63.

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or the processes by which colonised peoples themselves have taken initiatives.[100] The history of English language education in colonial contexts needs to be studied against the background of the spread of English as a global language, and this phenomenon should not be viewed as entirely unique or deleterious and certainly not as a simple centre-to-periphery imposition, but instead seen in the context of a long history of *lingua franca* that, amongst others, have included Latin, Arabic—and Chinese.

[100] *Ibid.*, viii, 64.

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