

The Realistic Landscape, Differences, and Efficiency Enhancement Path of Political Identity among Young Students in Guangdong and Hong Kong: An Investigation Based on the High School Political Curriculum Standards

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Abstract

The high school stage is the "budding stage" for the cultivation of national and political identity among young people. As a key course for cultivating moral character, high school ideological and political education plays an important leading and nurturing role. Through the comparative analysis of the guiding documents for high school political curriculum in Guangdong and Hong Kong, namely the curriculum standards, it can be found that the differences in political identity among young students in Guangdong and Hong Kong are due to the incomplete content of the Hong Kong high school political curriculum standards, as well as various erroneous social trends and media misleading, which have infringed on the cultivation of political identity among young students in Hong Kong and weakened their national and political identity. In this regard, it is necessary to further improve the political curriculum standards for Hong Kong high schools, vigorously promote the construction of political courses in Hong Kong high schools, and play the role of political courses in rectifying the root causes, in order to effectively enhance the political identity of young students in Hong Kong.

Keywords: Guangdong Hong Kong Youth; Political identification; National identity; High School Political Curriculum Standards

1. The Current Landscape of Political Identity Among Guangdong–Hong Kong Youth

Guangdong and Hong Kong share unique historical, cultural, and geographical connections. Historically, Hong Kong was once under the jurisdiction of Guangdong Province and, after a period of colonial rule, returned to the motherland in 1997. Culturally, both regions belong to the Lingnan cultural sphere, sharing a common origin and distinctive characteristics. However, due to special historical factors, Hong Kong's culture has developed a unique blend of Chinese and Western influences that distinguishes it from Guangdong. Geographically, the two regions are closely linked, but under the framework of “One Country, Two Systems,” Hong Kong practices a capitalist system different from that of mainland China. Since the start of reform and opening-up, the relationship between Guangdong and Hong Kong has continued to evolve, yet the gap in political identity between the two regions remains significant. Political identity refers to citizens' attitudinal approval and behavioral support toward political authority. In today's context, it specifically refers to recognizing socialism with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

A random survey conducted in 2023 among first-year high school students in Guangdong showed that political identity among students reached 100%. In contrast, the political identity of some Hong Kong youth still needs improvement. For example, after the 2019 “anti-amendment bill” disturbances, statistics indicated that 40% of those arrested for participating in these activities were students, including nearly 2,000 primary and secondary school students. The large number of students involved highlights the weak sense of national identity, civic spirit, and rule-of-law awareness among the younger generation in Hong Kong, making it urgent to strengthen political identity education and guidance for Hong Kong's youth.

2. Differences in High School Political Curriculum Standards Between Guangdong and Hong Kong

Curriculum standards are the core guiding documents for teaching activities. Currently, Guangdong implements the General High School Ideological and Political Curriculum Standards (2020 Revision) (hereinafter referred to as the 2020 Standards) issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. In Hong Kong, there is no direct equivalent of a high school "political course." The closest counterpart is the Citizenship and Social Development subject (hereinafter referred to as the Citizenship Subject), which replaced the former "Liberal Studies." The Liberal Studies subject had repeatedly been drawn into social and political controversies, becoming a tool for some with ulterior motives to distort national concepts and mislead students. As a corrective measure, in 2021, the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) replaced Liberal Studies with the Citizenship Subject and released the Curriculum and Assessment Guide for Citizenship and Social Development (Grades 10–12) (hereinafter referred to as the 2021 Guide), which functions as Hong Kong's de facto curriculum standard. Analyzing and comparing the 2020 Standards and the 2021 Guide helps in understanding the similarities and differences between Guangdong and Hong Kong's high school political curricula, thus promoting the achievement of teaching objectives in political education across both regions.

2.1 Similarities Between the Two Curriculum Standards

In the area of value-oriented education, both Guangdong and Hong Kong's latest curriculum guidelines share several commonalities: Emphasis on cultivating correct values. The 2020 Standards explicitly state: "The high school ideological and political curriculum is a key course for implementing the fundamental task of moral education, aiming to cultivate socialist core values... and to form a correct worldview, outlook on life, and values". The 2021 Guide similarly emphasizes in its objectives: "Establish positive values and an active life attitude to become knowledgeable and responsible citizens toward society, the country, and the world". Focus on fostering national identity. The 2020 Standards highlight: "Strengthening patriotism, collectivism, and socialism education comprehensively, reflecting the nature and philosophy of the

ideological and political curriculum”.The 2021 Guide notes the goal of cultivating students “to become independent and responsible citizens, to recognize their national identity, and to have a global vision”.Integration of theory and practice.The 2020 Standards propose: “This curriculum strives to integrate disciplinary logic with practical logic, and theoretical knowledge with life concerns, by adopting thinking activities and social practice as key components”.The 2021 Guide includes: “Field study tours to the Mainland and related project-based research, covering Chinese cultural elements, national development, and achievements, are part of the curriculum”.

2.2 Differences Between the Two Curriculum Standards

From the perspective of content updates and structural adjustments, Guangdong began implementing textbooks aligned with the 2020 Standards in the fall semester of 2020. The content covers four modules: Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Economy and Society, Politics and Rule of Law, and Philosophy and Culture.Hong Kong introduced the Citizenship Subject in 2021 for Grade 10 students, with three themes and ten topics: Hong Kong under “One Country, Two Systems”, The Nation Since Reform and Opening-Up, and The Interconnected and Interdependent Contemporary World. These topics include national development, the Constitution, the Basic Law of Hong Kong, and the rule of law.

The 2020 Standards have a notable highlight: the integration of core competencies, with political identity explicitly defined as one of the core competencies of the ideological and political curriculum. This version elaborates on the meaning, role, and manifestations of political identity, providing clear learning objectives for students. Additionally, the updated standards incorporate numerous latest theoretical achievements of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, including economic, political, cultural, ecological, and legal dimensions.For example:In the curriculum nature section, the 2020 Standards added references to “teaching the achievements of the Sinicization of Marxism, especially Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”.In the basic

principles section, it added the goal of “using Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to shape and cultivate students, fostering well-rounded socialist builders and successors”.Furthermore, the content was restructured, integrating the compulsory courses from the previous standards (Economic Life, Political Life, Cultural Life, and Philosophical Life) into four broader modules: Economy and Society, Politics and Rule of Law, Philosophy and Culture, and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. This restructuring strengthens education on socialism with Chinese characteristics, helping students gain a systematic understanding of its development and bolstering their “Four Confidences.”In comparison, although the 2021 Guide in Hong Kong represents a positive reform of the previous Liberal Studies curriculum, it still lacks explicit emphasis on cultivating political identity and includes insufficient content on socialism with Chinese characteristics. For instance, in the theme “The Nation Since Reform and Opening-Up,” the guide merely outlines the timeline of reform, strategies implemented, and improvements in living standards and national strength, without emphasizing that these achievements were made possible because the CPC led the people in creating the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.As President Xi Jinping has pointed out, “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is the overarching theme of all the Party’s theory and practice since reform and opening-up; it is the fundamental achievement attained through great effort and sacrifice by the Party and the people.” However, these critical elements are absent from Hong Kong’s 2021 Guide, limiting students’ ability to form a systematic understanding of socialism with Chinese characteristics and hindering the strengthening of their political identity.

3. Comparative Analysis of Teaching Effectiveness in Guangdong and Hong Kong High School Political Education

The comparison of curriculum standards between Guangdong and Hong Kong reveals that the differences in content and focus lead to varied teaching outcomes, which, in turn, shape differences in the political identity of youth in the two regions.

3.1 Teaching Effectiveness of Guangdong's High School Political Education

The 2020 Standards implemented in Guangdong emphasize cultivating core competencies in ideological and political studies, including political identity, scientific spirit, rule of law awareness, and public participation. Among these, political identity is fundamental, as it shapes students' developmental direction and their ideals and beliefs, serving as the root of their national identity. As President Xi Jinping highlighted, "Political issues are always fundamental issues at any time." Unlike the Citizenship and Social Development Subject in Hong Kong, Guangdong's political education focuses on guiding students to develop a systematic understanding of the great historical course of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Students are encouraged to recognize the historic achievements China has made since reform and opening-up and to appreciate that these accomplishments are inseparable from the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This deeper understanding helps students consciously build confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics—the "Four Confidences"—creating a shared ideological foundation for youth across both regions to work toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The 2020 Standards explicitly recommend that textbooks reinforce content related to the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics⁵³. The absence of such emphasis in Hong Kong's 2021 Guide is one of the key factors leading to differences in political identity between Guangdong and Hong Kong youth.

3.2 Limitations of Hong Kong's Citizenship and Social Development Curriculum

From a content perspective, the 2021 Guide provides relatively limited coverage of socialism with Chinese characteristics in terms of its path, theory, system, and culture. From an assessment perspective, the curriculum uses a simplified evaluation system, with only two outcome levels: "Attained" and "Not Attained." The exam consists of two sections: Section A: Multiple-choice questions (30%). Section B: Data-response questions (70%). This system emphasizes basic knowledge and

analytical skills but fails to evaluate the emotional and behavioral dimensions of political identity. While the revised curriculum alleviates exam pressure, the reduced stakes may result in students undervaluing the subject and teachers investing less effort in instruction. This undermines the subject's potential to strengthen political identity among Hong Kong youth.

Compounding these structural issues, various misleading social ideologies and biased media narratives have negatively influenced Hong Kong adolescents' value formation. The deepening of modernization, globalization, and digitalization has facilitated the spread of neoliberalism, consumerism, and historical nihilism, often aligned with Western ideologies. These influences, delivered through the internet, social media, and entertainment channels, have distorted perceptions of China and eroded trust in the CPC and China's socialist system. As Lenin observed, "Any neglect or detachment from socialist ideology strengthens bourgeois ideology."³⁸ This highlights the urgency of reinforcing political education for Hong Kong youth to counter these harmful trends. President Xi Jinping also emphasized during the 100th Anniversary of the Communist Youth League that contemporary Chinese youth, though confident and thoughtful, face complex social influences and need in-depth education and guidance to sharpen their understanding, think critically about life, and create their future with wisdom. Only by developing a clear and complete understanding of socialism with Chinese characteristics can young students in Hong Kong effectively identify and reject malicious narratives while making sound value judgments in the midst of competing ideologies.

4. Practical Paths to Enhance Political Identity Among Hong Kong Youth

The differences in political identity between Guangdong and Hong Kong youth stem from both historical and contemporary factors. A multi-pronged approach is necessary to progressively deepen political identity among Hong Kong youth.

4.1 Improve the Citizenship and Social Development Curriculum Guide

The 2021 Guide marked progress by emphasizing national identity in its educational objectives, but political identity cultivation still needs to be strengthened. This can be achieved by: Adding more comprehensive content on socialism with Chinese characteristics, especially Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. Updating textbooks regularly to keep content relevant. Diversifying assessment methods by introducing performance levels such as “Exemplary” to motivate student engagement. This aligns with developments in mainland education, where curriculum revisions for both high school political education (2020) and primary/middle school morality and law courses (2022) explicitly identified political identity as a core competency, reinforcing national consciousness and pride.

4.2 Leverage Schools as the Main Channel for Political Education

Schools are the primary setting for political socialization. The Citizenship and Social Development course should be the main channel for nurturing political identity among Hong Kong youth. To strengthen its effectiveness: Adopt diverse teaching strategies such as case-based learning to analyze current social events and link abstract political theories to practical realities. Use scenario-based teaching and role-playing to engage students in simulated political processes, deepening understanding through personal experience. Integrate multi-media resources to better align course content with students’ real-life contexts and make political education more relatable. By effectively utilizing this channel, teachers can counteract harmful ideologies with solid political theories, help students analyze domestic and international events objectively, and reduce the negative effects of misleading narratives.

4.3 Strengthen Teacher Training and Exchange Programs

As President Xi Jinping emphasized, “The key to running ideological and political courses well lies in the teachers.” To improve the effectiveness of Hong Kong’s political education: The HKSAR Government and Education Bureau should enhance

teacher training, ensuring that teachers are well-versed in the theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Establish two-way exchange programs between Hong Kong and mainland teachers to increase opportunities for Hong Kong educators to understand national conditions and strengthen their own political identity. Teachers who genuinely understand and believe in Marxism and socialism with Chinese characteristics will be better equipped to deliver accurate and comprehensive instruction, answer students' questions, and guide them toward recognizing the scientific and superior nature of China's development model.

4.4 Encourage Deeper Integration of Hong Kong Youth into National Development

Helping Hong Kong youth integrate into the broader context of national development is crucial. This involves: Encouraging first-hand experiences in mainland cities, such as internships and job opportunities in the Greater Bay Area, to transform emotional connections into rational recognition of national identity. Addressing current issues in policy coordination and implementation to ensure that programs supporting Hong Kong youth are accessible and effective. Leveraging curriculum-based exchanges mandated by the 2021 Guide, ensuring that students link classroom knowledge with on-site experiences during field trips. By personally witnessing the country's achievements under CPC leadership, students can cultivate national pride and transform their understanding of China into emotional and political identification.

Hong Kong is at a critical stage of governance and revitalization. Enhancing the sense of belonging and political identity of its younger generation toward socialism with Chinese characteristics is vital. Only by enabling Hong Kong youth to gain a comprehensive understanding of China's development and providing opportunities for meaningful engagement with the mainland can we bridge the political identity gap between Guangdong and Hong Kong youth.

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