How Do They Become Socially/Politically Active? Case Studies Of Hong Kong Secondary Students’ Political Socialisation

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ABSTRACT Evidence obtained from focus group interviews supports a conception of political socialization as an active process where individuals interact and negotiate with socialization agents in different contexts to construct their political realities. The citizenship understandings of socially or politically active students in this study were basically eclectic, including conservative views about doing the best in their diverse roles as well as more radical orientations, such as participating in demonstrations and protests in opposition to unreasonable laws. Issues based teaching, experiential learning, and teachers with credibility have been identified as significant political socializing factors for active democratic citizenship. Such a finding has significant implications for teacher education.

Introduction

It has been argued that civic education in Hong Kong has evolved through three stages, and now is in the third stage of “Re-depoliticization of civic education” (Leung and Ng, 2004). This stage is characterized by the removal of political content, for example, education for democracy and human rights education, which were in an earlier curriculum statement, Guidelines in Civic Education for Schools (Curriculum Development Council, 1996), but not in the current reform document, Learning to Learn – The Way Forward in Curriculum Development (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). In this recent document, civic education has been renamed Moral and Civic Education, indicating a shift of emphasis. Contents related to personal and interpersonal education, family education and moral education are introduced to replace elements related to human rights and democracy. In addition, the current reforms are also characterized by a strong promotion of national and patriotic education with the support of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government. At the implementation level, studies have indicated that, regardless of what the original Guidelines proposed, schools tend to implement what they prefer. This means political content is not well addressed and there is little, if any, formal teaching about democracy in the curriculum (Curriculum Development Institute, 1999; Lee, 2003; Morris and Morris, 2001). In summary, civic education in Hong Kong schools is not adequately preparing youth for democratic citizenship.
Although the second IEA Civic Education Study indicated that Hong Kong students fared well internationally in citizenship knowledge, with a strong concern for elections, freedom of expression and political rights, it was pointed out that Hong Kong students “have a tendency to avoid activist politics” (Lee, 2003:605). These students may have political knowledge but are not necessarily behaving as active democratic citizens.

Nevertheless, in the two major demonstrations that have taken place in Hong Kong since its return to Chinese sovereignty, both on 1 July 2003 and 2004 respectively, many youth participated and several youth political organizations were formed. For example, the Hong Kong Secondary Students’ Union, the Youth Round Table, the 7.1 People Pie and the Democracy Tutorial Classes were formed by students in secondary schools and tertiary institutes. These groups of students organized seminars and discussion groups on various political, social issues and helped to organize demonstrations for the cultivation of a democratic culture in youth. This implies that, despite the lack of civic education, some students have become very socially and politically active and seem well prepared for democratic citizenship.

How do these socially and politically active students develop despite the depoliticized nature of civic education in Hong Kong? What are the factors that contribute to their social and political activities? How do the contextual factors influence students’ active participation in democratic citizenship? How do they understand the concept of active citizenship? These are the basic issues to be explored here. The study has been designed to contribute to a better understanding of political socialization in a particular Chinese context. A better understanding of what and how socializing agents influence youth can lead to more effective programmes designed to cultivate active, democratic citizens.

Political Socialization

Traditional understandings of political socialization focus on the macro or system level. The emphasis is on the induction of members of a polity into the political system. Cultural transmission leading to the internalization of values and ideology supporting the whole system (Marshall, 1998). Recent political socialization research, however, has focused on individuals’ learning and negotiating processes and uses a broader understanding of politics than did earlier researchers (Flanagan and Gallay, 1995). Recent scholars also point out that there are many contextual factors that can influence the political development of students, including schooling (Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998; Hepburn, 1995; Torney-Purta, 1995; Niemi and Hepburn, 1995; Rosenberg, 1985; Sigel, 1995; Yates and Youniss, 1998). The political socialization model adopted by the IEA Civic Education study reflected this interactive concept (Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo, 1999) and is shown in Figure 1. In the centre of the octagon is the individual student, surrounded by public discourses of goals, values and practice relevant to civic education. Discourses influence the individual through various ‘carriers’ or ‘socialization agents’, including, the family, peer group, formal community, informal community and school. The outer octagon that circumscribes these processes includes the ‘macro-systems’, composed of institutions, processes and values in politics, economics, education and religion, the country’s international position, the social stratification and symbols and narratives in national and local communities. This means that the actions of carriers are embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. The present study focuses on the carrier, ‘school’ with an emphasis on relevant pedagogies,
particularly issue-based learning and experiential learning as well as civics teachers themselves.

Figure 1: The political socialization model, adopted by the IEA Civic Education study (Torney-Purta et. al., 1999:18)

Schooling as a political socializing carrier

Schools have long been considered influential political socializing agents or carriers. Nevertheless, reports about the impacts of formal teaching of civic education on democratic citizenship are mixed; some identified positive impacts, while others identified none (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Print, Ornstromare and Nielsen, 2002). The conventional view among political scientist was that civic education had only marginal impact on students’ democratic orientation. However, this conventional wisdom has undergone significant revision recently (Finkel and Ernst, 2005). Factors facilitating teaching and learning of democratic citizenship have been identified.

In general, civic education programmes that make use of active pedagogies, such as, role playing, dramatization, group decision making and the like, will have greater effects on an individual’s orientation (Nemerow, 1996; Porter, 1993; Print, 1999, Print et al., 2002). In particular, scholars have argued that an open classroom culture which facilitates discussion of controversial issues, exchange of opinions, expression
of attitudes, tolerance, mutual respect for difference of opinion and support of social justice, often correlate with attitudes and competence that have the potential to foster active citizenship (Blankenship, 1990; Ehman, 1980; Hahn, 1998; Hess, 2001; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001).

Experiential learning has also been found to be effective. This includes various forms of students’ participation in decision making, such as, student councils or other forms of student government (Lai and Wu, 2003; Print et al., 2002; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). It has also been pointed out that experiential learning and service learning programmes, especially those emphasizing political dimensions and social justice, are effective in fostering personal, interpersonal and active citizenship development in students (Billig, 2000; Leung, 2003; Mooney and Edwards, 2001; Robinson, 2000). In addition, Finkel (2003) and Leung (2003) argued for the effectiveness of involving advocacy NGOs in experiential learning as they can act as resource providers and expert advisors. Moreover, experiential learning that can involve students both cognitively and emotionally in politics has been identified to be a better predictor of long-term political engagement (Boehnke and Boehnke, 2005).

In addition to pedagogies, the perceived credibility and likeability of civics teachers by the students is another crucial factor. It has been found that the perceived credibility of the teacher can enhance the acceptance of the message conveyed by the civic teachers (Finkel and Ernst, 2005; Goldenson, 1978).

Non-schooling factors

Non-school factors that have been found important to promote civic engagement include home literacy resources (except Hong Kong), time spent watching TV news and reading newspapers, educational background of parents, expected years of education (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). In Hong Kong, Lee (2003) has argued that the exposure of students to media during the transitional period of Hong Kong from UK to People’s Republic of China was an important factor for the development of democratic citizenship of Hong Kong students. Since this paper focuses on school related factors, non-school factors will not be explored in detail.

Political socialization as negotiating processes

The IEA ‘octagonal model’ of political socialization suggests that discourses influence the individual through various ‘carriers’ or ‘socialization agents’ that are embedded in cultural and institutional contexts. As recent research on political socialization has shifted to the emphasis of learning by the individual, socializing processes are much less perceived as static and passive. Instead, individuals interact and negotiate with the factors in the social, economical, cultural and political contexts. Individuals actively engage in constructing their own political realities in the contexts. They create the principles upon which decisions are made through constructing, refining and reconstructing as they grow up (Flanagan and Gallay, 1995; Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998; Torney-Purta, 1995). Research on attitudes has also pointed out that attitude change does not occur uniformly across a population’s exposure to persuasive messages, but rather depends conditionally on a series of variables related to message, message context and to individual themselves. In a nutshell, individuals are engaged actively in the political socialization processes (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Finkel and Ernst, 2005).
Research design

In this study the basic research question is “How have contextual factors, pedagogy, (issue-based learning and experiential learning) and civic teachers influenced students’ active participation in democratic citizenship in Hong Kong?”

Specifically, we asked:

- What are students’ understandings of an active citizen?
- What are the school related factors, with particular reference to pedagogy (issue-based learning and experiential learning) and civic teachers that encourage students to become socially or politically active?
- How do the individuals negotiate in the socializing process?

This research was based mainly on focus group interviews of students, secondary or tertiary, who are active in social or political participation. Socializing agents, such as civic teachers, NGO people involved in school civic education programmes, who were identified as influential by the student participants were also interviewed for triangulation purposes.

Sampling

There were two ways of sampling the student participants. The first group of students was purposively sampled from two active students groups, Democracy Tutorial Classes and the Hong Kong Secondary Students’ Union. They were either secondary students who had participated actively in several mass demonstrations or tertiary students who had participated actively in several mass demonstrations when they were secondary school students. The total number of student participants in this category was 19. For the second group of students, the Alliance for Civic Education (ACE), a federation of local NGOs working on civic education, was approached for names of socially or politically active secondary school civics teachers. Teachers were then asked to identify socially or politically active students. Similar to the first group of students, this second group of students was either secondary students or tertiary students who had become politically active and started to participate when they were secondary school students. The total number of participants in this category was 18, making up a total of 37 student participants. In this paper, only the results from the second group of students will be reported. The eighteen students included three male university students, Chiu, Ho and Kwok (aged 19-20) who had graduated from school Li and three 6th form female secondary students, June, Cheng and Tung (aged 18-19) from the same school. Two male 6th form students, Yip and Chow (aged 18-19) were from school Kee. Ten 3rd or 4th form secondary students (aged 14-16), Sze Sze (female), Chan Pak (male), To To (female), Big Lo (female), Little Lo (male), Little Wan (female), Chi Fai (male), Orange (female), Ng (male) and Shun (female), were from school Cheng.

For teacher participants, four civic teachers were named by the students as significant socializing agents and the results of interviews with them are reported here. They were Mr. Cheung and Mr. Fong from school Li, Ms Liu from school Cheng and Mr. Leung from school Kee. Except Mr. Fong, all were the active civic teachers recommended by the ACE. Three political oriented advocacy NGO people, who had been involved in school civic education programme were also recommended by the interviewee students as significant socializing agents. They were Fred, Frankie and Debby. All names are pseudonyms.
Data collection and analysis

The period of data collection started from July 2005 to February 2006. Qualitative data was collected by semi-structured focus group or individual interviews with students, teachers and NGO people. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese, the native language of the participants. Each interview lasted for one and a half to two hours. They were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese. The ‘constant comparative method’ was adopted for analyzing data. Each transcript of interview is compared with another transcript, one incident with another incident, one category with another so as to look for emerging patterns.

Findings and discussions

The findings reported in this paper address the three research questions listed above and are reported here as (1) understandings and behaviours of active citizens, (2) political socialization factors and (3) students negotiating in socialization process.

Understandings and behaviours of active citizen

All the eighteen students were described as active socially or politically when referred by their teachers. However, their socially/politically active behaviours varied from a minimum of showing concern and willingness to discuss current issues only to active participation in and members of political oriented NGOs. The three 6th form students, June, Tung and Cheng from school Li showed a limited understanding of active citizenship As June said:

After being taught by Mr. Cheung in Liberal Studies, I have become much more concerned about politics and current news.

Chiu, a graduate from school Li, showed a much fuller understanding:

I have joined the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement of China (comment by author: a subversive organization as defined by the People’s Republic of China) as a member because I like its mission, to redress June 4 injustices, and to make a more just society.

The remaining fourteen students were in between these two poles. In addition to discussing current issues, they all identified other forms of participation apart from joining political NGOs. Chow, a student from school Kee, actively participated in social services and leadership trainings. Two students of school Cheng, Ng and Big Lo had written publicly in response to government consultation on public policies. All of the fourteen, except Chow, had participated in various demonstrations, such as, the July 1 demonstrations, anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstration and the annual memorial gathering in Victoria Park for the June 4 Incident [1]. Some accounted for their minimal participation by the complexity of politics while some said they only participated in events rather than in particular groups since they could not always identify with everything the groups do. Though they varied in the degree of participation, the involvement of all these students was already stronger than the vast majority of secondary students in Hong Kong.

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When the eighteen participants were asked for their understandings of what an active citizen was, all except Chow and Tung expressed eclectic views reflecting both conservative and radical stances. Some conservative views included the duties of the citizens to perform to their best in their respective roles, to obey the laws, to know more about and to care for the society, to contribute to the common good of the society, to balance private and common goods. Some radical views were checking the government by various means including voting, writing responses to public policies, organizing demonstrations, protesting against unreasonable laws. Chi Fai from school Cheng argued that

*We have to uncover the ‘hidden agenda’ of the government.*

His classmate Big Lo supported this view:

*As active citizens, we have to start from knowing more about the society. When we hear about unfair issues, we have to voice out. We have to know what the government is doing. We can write letters. If more radical actions are needed, we can organize protests and demonstrations.*

Similarly, Yip, a student from school Kee voiced:

*In addition to contributing our best to the society, as citizens, we have to criticize and monitor the government if we could.*

Concerning the issue of obeying the law, Kwok supplemented:

*Citizens should obey ‘reasonable’ laws but have to object the ‘unreasonable’ laws. We have to help in developing a better society and to reduce injustice.*

This view of rejecting ‘unreasonable laws’ was shared by most participants. All, with the exception of Chow and the three students in school Li, had participated in the demonstration against the Basic Law Article 23 [2], which was considered by many Hong Kong people as against their basic human rights. The idea and action of rejecting unreasonable laws implied an understanding of the concept of civil disobedience. It seems that many of these activist students are quite ready to be active citizens for a democratic society. The full range of views expressed by the students are similar to the categories of citizenship identified by Westheimer and Kahne (2004): ‘personally responsible citizen’, ‘participatory citizen’ and ‘justice-oriented citizen’, with Chiu more inclined towards being a ‘justice-oriented citizen’ while Chow was more inclined towards being a ‘participatory citizen’.

However, their conception of active citizenship was still restrained as only Chiu and Chan Pak were able to talk about the idea of global citizenship. Chiu commented:

*Concerning environmental protection, indeed this is the duty of citizens to make the world sustainable. As we are enjoying the gift of the world, we have to make our world develop in a balanced manner.*
The group of students in school Cheng had been actively participating in various social and political issues but they were dissatisfied. Since they were below the age of 18, the legal age for adults in Hong Kong, they were not treated as ‘citizens’ and had very little power, both in the society and school. Little Wan pointed out:

*There are many labels in the society. People always say you could do things after age 18. But so many youth are still immature at age 18 while many others are very mature before that age. Nevertheless, we (i.e. under the age of 18) are not given sufficient space for expressing our opinions.*

This group of teenagers revealed a serious problem. Youth do not see themselves with sufficient channels and chances to express their views at both societal and school levels. This reflects a deeper issue that children are considered as “not –yets: not yet knowing, not yet competent and not yet being” (Verhellen, 2000). By defining childhood as a preparation period, they are placed in a state of limbo. This lack of channels for participation is incompatible with their understandings of ‘active citizenship’ and experiences of participation.

**Political socialization factors**

Some significant school related factors identified in the study include teachers, civic education related subjects taught with an issues based approach, experiential learning with social and political elements, NGO people involving in civic education activities and students’ self governance with tolerant school ethos. Some non-school related factors revealed include family members talking about news, social and political events, religion and church. In the following discussion, we shall focus on teachers, the issues based approach and experiential learning. Basically these factors intermingled giving a composite influence and it is hard to separate them. However, based on the interviews, these factors have been separated in the following discussion.

**Teachers**

The contribution of the four teachers to the political development of the students was very significant. Both Yip and Chow said,

*Mr. Leung was the most significant factor.*

Similarly, Little Wan said:

*After all, Ms. Liu is the most important because she led us participate. We felt interested after participation and naturally we started to think.*

Her classmate Little Lo supplemented this view:

*I agree that the most significant influence is Ms. Liu. She taught us when we were in Form 2. She has broadened our horizon so that we know more about our society, our context.*
Another classmate Shun commented that without Ms Liu, they would all become ‘potatoes’. Students and graduates from school Li made similar comments about Mr. Fong and Mr. Cheung. These four teachers shared some similarities in their personalities which were effective in influencing students. They are knowledgeable, open minded, critical and competent in challenging students to think from different perspectives. In addition, they showed concern for social and political issues and students. Orange from school Cheng commented:

*Ms Liu knows many things about current news and always ‘forces’ us to think from different angles. She is also easily approachable.*

Cheng from school Li argued:

*Mr. Fong and Mr. Cheung are different from other teachers. They are very causal and approachable. They concern about students’ welfare and willing to give a helping hand.*

Cheung himself echoed the view and elaborated:

*I think after all, the most significant factor is our affective relationships with the students and ourselves as being role models.*

In addition, except for Mr. Leung, all were active participants in social and political issues, such as, demonstrations and rallies. Mr. Leung explained:

*I tend to participate mentally and intellectually. My classrooms are already my battle fields of participation.*

In sum, the teachers’ credibility and likeability as influential political socializing factors recognized by Finkel & Ernst (2005) and Goldenson (1978) have also been identified in this study.

**Issues based approach**

In general, all the four teachers adopted an issues based approach in teaching civic education related subjects, such as, Liberal Studies, Civic and Life education. All of them were good at challenging students to think about issues from different perspectives. June from school Li commented:

*Mr. Cheung uses current news issues to teach, which makes you feel very interested. We collect data about the news and then discuss or even debate. He will bring in both the ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ sides of the arguments for us to reflect and decide.*

Her classmate Tung supplemented:

*Mr. Cheung will lead you to think and analyze the issues instead of telling you the ‘right’ answers.*

Kwok also commented that:
Mr. Cheung encourages us to speak our views and rationales, no matter we are for or against. Then he may share his views. Hence, we can view an issue from different perspectives.

When being asked for his teaching strategy, Mr. Cheung elaborated:

_In addition to providing information to the students, we have to create chances for them to discuss current issues._

Similarly, Chow commented about his teacher:

_Mr. Leung will not give us a so called 'right answer'. Instead he provides different perspectives of the issues to us and requests us to make our own decisions. If we cannot decide at the moment, he will encourage us to keep on thinking. Usually, he gives his views when being asked._

Mr. Leung commented:

_I intend to provide them with alternative views, especially those being marginalized so as to balance the mainstream ideas. But I will not impose. I wish them to be more sensitive and critical._

Similarly Ms Liu used an issues based approach:

_For those who could not go for experiential learning, I used issues based teaching. Issues that we are going to explore include Disney Land and anti-WTO. I shall ask students to collect information and will explore the issues from various perspectives._

It is clear that issues based teaching adopted by the teachers encourages students to explore current issues from different perspectives and to formulate and argue for their rationales, in a supportive classroom climate. These teaching and learning processes are compatible with those identified by Hahn (1998) in European classrooms. They are useful in broadening the horizons of students, increasing their social and political awareness and enhancing their competence to analyze issues critically.

**Experiential learning**

Ms. Liu used many experiential learning activities in her teaching of Life and Civic Education. She took students to participate in various activities, such as, a Poverty Walk, June 4 Memorial Meeting, observing competing candidates in election time, July 1 and anti-WTO demonstrations. Experiential learning influenced students in different ways. Chan Pak’s comments reflected the views of all students:

_I think this activity (i.e. the Poverty Walk,) should be promoted because it not only raises our knowledge, it also lead us to think. Usually we learn by words and pictures but now we learn by direct personal experience which leaves us with deep impact. I have more concern for social issues and feel less alienated from the society now._
In addition, students felt themselves undergoing a change as they engaged more with the real world, but they found it hard to express what had happened. Sze Sze put it this way:

*Very interesting. I am not quite sure what exactly I have learned from these activities. My feelings are very strange and hard to express. But some changes have happened. I can see things more accurately now. I feel interactions. When we read newspaper, TV programmes, they are just one way. But now we are exploring and interacting.*

This group of students had very positive experiences from experiential learning. Their interest in the society was enhanced. They were more motivated to pursue knowledge and their horizon for viewing things was broadened. Their sense of identity had also been strengthened. The most important outcome was that they were witnessing their own transformation and growth.

In responding to the students’ feedback, Liu reiterated:

*I want to have some breakthrough in the traditional curriculum and catch up with the updated current issues. I also love to use cultural issues to raise their social consciousness. After presenting what they have experienced, they will feel that they own the learning and the knowledge. One very important thing about experiential learning is that the students explore and construct their knowledge.*

Another factor leading to the success of experiential learning in Ms. Liu’s school was the involvement of politically oriented NGOs. Ms Liu herself is very active in ACE and she invited the ACE people to help in various activities. Chan Pak said:

*In addition to Ms Liu, I think outside tutors such as Debby, Frankie and Fred are very helpful too. In the Poverty Walk, they helped us broaden our understandings of poverty and related issues in Hong Kong.*

Debby, an NGO staff member elaborated:

*We want to help the students reconstruct their stereotyped pre-conceptions of some communities and social phenomenon.*

Both Fred and Frankie mentioned the importance of interacting with the experiences and debriefing process for learning. But they did not elaborate in detail. All students from school Li did not mention experiential learning. Mr. Fong explained that experiential learning was mainly used for education for national identity, where students were led to mainland China for experience for a few days. He said it had good impact on students but he did not elaborate because both Mr. Cheung and he were not involved. Concerning the use of experiential learning in local issues, Mr. Fong and Mr. Cheung had different views. Mr. Fong was in favour of using experiential learning, bringing direct experiences to students. But Mr. Cheung had reservations for fear that the experience would result in strong emotional impacts that students might find difficult to handle. He said that he preferred encouraging them to go if they chose to go after thoughtful consideration instead of organizing them to go.
School Kee also seldom used experiential learning. But after an educational activity on ‘discrimination against sexual orientation’, Chow explained:

*I think it would be better if we could directly talk with homosexual people instead of listening to tapes. Then we can understand them in depth, such as, what kind of pressure they are facing.*

Mr. Leung of school Kee supplemented that he would use more experiential learning activities in the future as he realizes its strength but he was aware that a great deal of time is needed for these kind of activities.

In sum, it seems that Ms. Liu is very keen on using experiential learning and was quite successful in using experiential learning to cultivate active citizens. Students’ visions have been broadened, social consciousness enhanced and concern and participation in social and political activities increased. Mr. Leung of school Kee also recognized the potential and wanted to use experiential learning more in the future. However, teachers in school Li had some reservation.

**Students negotiating in the socialization process**

In the socialization process, students embedded within institutional and cultural contexts actively evaluate and negotiate with the socializing agents in constructing their political realities. The agents may be reinforcing each other or working in opposition.

In facing the socializing effect of the media, Shun from school Cheng counteracted and formed his own view:

*When we were small, we were always concealed from the fact by the media, for example, we always felt that the Mickey Mouse of the Disneyland is very lovely. But now we know that when we hold the toy, the workers in China were working in inhuman conditions.*

When being asked about their general feelings of being involved in so many social/political activities, Shun’s classmate Chi Fai stated his position:

*I start to have changes. I think we should go beyond observing the society to changing the society. We should not run away from our responsibility. As we know more about the society, we should try to change it. But we have to do it step by step.*

In responding to comments that they were ‘playing politics’, Sze Sze argued with emotion:

*I don’t care what you call me. The most important thing is that I am doing things that I believe I should do. I am just exercising my rights, such as, voicing my opinions and rallying.*

But at the same time, she expressed a strong sense of burden:

*I have never felt a sense of superiority. Instead, I always feel a strong sense of burden. As I know more, I want to know more and more. But*
at the same time, I feel I cannot change much. Yes, a sense of powerlessness……..

In school Li, although Mr. Cheung was the major socializing agent, his students did not always respond in the same way, often taking quite different stances. Chiu, a graduate of the school, was introduced to the June 4 Event when he was age 12 (1st Form) in a school assembly. He was moved and started his search for democracy:

The activity made me start to care about the issue (ie the June 4th event) and I started to search in the library. What made these people sacrifice their lives? What goals they were heading for? This started my journey of searching of democracy. Later I realized that democracy has not been implemented in our daily lives. I found that there were many undemocratic ways of doing things in my school. Later, I got in touch with the Student Union. I approached them directly.

In the whole process, Chiu played an active part in evaluating and constructing his political future in his interactions with many socializing agents including, Mr. Cheung, the search for democracy in the library, student union and significant social/political events and people. At last, Chiu chose to participate actively in the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement of China. He believed that by joining the Alliance he could help to build a just society.

Kwok and Ho, graduates from the same school as Chiu, had quite similar experiences with Mr. Cheung, nevertheless they had different responses because of a different evaluation of the experiences. Unlike Chiu, both participated in individual events and valued the participation but they did not join any NGO. Their reflection on the experience led to different conclusions from that of Chiu. They explained their view:

Many of these groups are immature. Most of them are ‘interest groups’ that exist because of their self interests. Their concerns may not fit all of my concerns. For organizations, I think it is not the right time. I do not have a comprehensive view of the world and we are not sure who is right and who is wrong. I don’t think I can have a stance at this stage.

The differences between Chiu and his two classmates suggests that although teachers can be powerful socialization agents, the personal construction of meaning for individual students will always be a key consideration. Chiu, for example, may have been subject to other experiences that led him to think and act differently from his classmates or his own personal values may simply have been different.

Similarly, Chow and Yip from school Li behaved very differently though both remarked that Mr. Leung was the major influence on them. In the WTO event, Chow participated actively as volunteer in preparing the conference, while Yip participated as volunteer to help the demonstrators. Chow had a history of working as volunteer in social services and involvement in leadership training, with an emphasis on charity rather than social justice:

I think taking part in preparing such a big and international conference is a great opportunity for learning as I can talk with and serve many people from different parts of the world. But for demonstrations, I feel they are too remote.
It seems that Chow’s history of service activities and leadership training reacted against Mr. Leung’s more critically oriented influence, making him inclined towards being a ‘participatory citizen’, emphasizing serving but not challenging the establishment (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Unlike Chow, Yip has always been very critical. He said this critical attitude developed from his long history of reading books and newspapers commentaries critically. He explained his participation in the WTO demonstrations:

*I am afraid that the media will mislead us by portraying a distorted image of the Korean farmers. It seems that the police are afraid of the farmers. Perhaps some kind of pre-conception of the farmers has been implanted. I want to be a witness. In fact, I find them very orderly and peaceful. Those who act violently are only a minority. But they were the ones reported by the media, not the peaceful ones.*

Yip’s more critical attitude is more in line with Mr. Leung’s critical orientation. It seems that Chow and Yip had different attitudes towards the establishment with Yip being more critical and perhaps less trustful. These personal values may explain why they react differently towards Mr. Cheung as a socialization agent.

As featured in the ‘octagonal model’, negotiation is embedded in the individuals’ context, including the religious context. The contradictory effect of the religious context on negotiation was evident from students in school Li. June commented:

*My learning in church also hinders me. They taught me that I should not get involved in politics as politics are complicated and even ‘dirty’ to a certain degree. I feel confused, as Mr. Fong, a Christian teacher, encouraged us to participate. Why is he so different from my church?*

When the individual’s context, for example, their religion, conveys messages opposite to those of other socializing agents, for example Mr. Fong, the individual may feel confused and frustrated. However, June’s classmate, Cheung held a very different view of her religious context. She said she would criticize and question political figures whenever she got chances:

*My church encourages me to know more about politics. University students in my church teach us what politics are. My church, in addition to being concerned about God-Man relationship, is also concerned Man-Man relationship.*

From the discussion, individuals do not react to the political socializing agents passively as suggested by the traditional view of socialization. Instead, in alignment with recent views of socialization, the individuals negotiate with the socializing agents within their own individuals’ contexts, resulting in different emotions, interpretations and constructions of his/her political realities, which lead to personal political decisions and further actions.

**Conclusions**

The results of this study cannot be generalized because they have been based on purposive sample of socially and politically active students. Yet the views of the young people interviewed in this study are helpful in understanding how this
particular sample of activist students in Hong Kong created meaning from multiple processes of political socialization. In addition, it also suggests hypotheses for further studies on how active democratic citizens develop in different social and political contexts.

Evidence obtained from this study supports the conception of political socialization as an active rather than a passive process. Individuals interact and negotiate with socialization ‘carriers’ in specific contexts to construct their political realities. It also provides evidence supporting the move of political socialization literature away from a ‘narrow’ to a ‘broadened’ conception of politics. This group of activist students was interested and competent in participating in political activities interpreted in a broad sense, such as serving the underprivileged, writing responses to consultative documents and joining rallies and demonstrations. Yet the socialization processes were not deterministic – it was not possible to predict what course of action students would choose or why at times there was consistency between the views of key socialization ‘carriers’ and those of students, and at other times there was dissonance. Given common socialization experiences, what are the dynamics of individual student’s negotiation and interaction with the ‘carriers’ against the backdrop of complicated contexts? All these are issues worthy of further research. In addition, how educators could make use of the broadened conception of ‘polities’ for cultivation of democratic citizenship is another issue worthy of research.

Evidence also indicates that the understandings of citizenship of this sample of active students are basically eclectic, including conservative views of doing the best in whatever roles they are and obeying the law to more radical views of participating in demonstrations and protests in opposition to unreasonable laws. Moreover, most of them have practiced their more radical understanding of ‘active citizenship’ by being involved in various recent demonstrations. These understandings and practices are significant in the development of democratic citizenship, matching the democratization of Hong Kong. However, their sense of global citizenship was weak as revealed in previous discussion. This is not a satisfactory phenomenon in a globalizing era and much work has to be done to address the issue. In addition, their conceptions and action of active citizens challenges the taken for granted assumption that children are just ‘preparing for citizenship’, a concept which put them in the state of limbo. More channels for youth and children participation are urgently needed and they should be treated as ‘here and now citizens’ at both societal and school level to address the issue of emerging young ‘active citizens’

As for the cultivation of active democratic citizenship, issues based teaching, experiential learning, and teachers with high credibility and likeability have been identified as significant political socializing factors for this sample of students. Much more resources should be put to schools so that they could use these pedagogies to cultivate active citizens. However, the possible negative impact of emotional arousal in experiential learning, which could be a hindrance to the development of critical thinking, was raised in the research. Further research is needed. In addition, the involvement of advocacy oriented NGOs in experiential learning was another controversial issue deserving further research. Last but not least, the characteristics of effective civics teachers have been identified. These characteristics include for example, open mindedness, being very knowledgeable, willingness to care and to participate in societal issues, willingness to care for students, and courage. Teacher education programmes could well focus on the development of these attributes in order to produce graduates who can cultivate democratic citizenship.
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NOTES

[1] The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, also known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, June 4th Incident, or the Political Turmoil between Spring and Summer of 1989 by the government of the People's Republic of China, were a series of demonstrations led by students, intellectuals and labour activists in the People's Republic of China between April 15, 1989 and June 4, 1989. The resulting crackdown on the protestors by the PRC government left many civilians dead, the figure ranging from 200–300 (PRC government figures), to 2,000–3,000 (Chinese student associations and Chinese Red Cross). (Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on 2 September, 2006 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_4th_Event)

The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement of China launches annual public memorial candle lights assembly in every June 4 evening in Victoria Park staring from 1990, requesting the PRC government to redress the June 4 Incident. Several tens of thousand people participate every year.

[2] The Basic Law, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the People’s Republic of China is the mini-constitution of Hong Kong after the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a special administrative region in 1997. Article 23 of the Basic Law states: The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People’s Government (PRC government, added by the author), or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

On September 24, 2002 the HKSAR government released its proposals for the anti-subversion law. It is the cause of considerable controversy and division in Hong Kong, which operates as a separate legal system in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Protests against the bill resulted in a massive demonstrations (amount to half million people, added by the author) on 1 July, 2003. In the aftermath, two cabinet members resigned and the bill was withdrawn after it became clear that it would not get the necessary support from Legco (Legislative Council, added by the author) for it to be passed. The law was then shelved indefinitely.
(Retrieved from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on 22 August, 2006 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hong_Kong_Basic_Law_Article_23)

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