

Research on the Integration of Lingnan Culture into “Four Histories” Education for Hong Kong Youth

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Abstract: This study focuses on Hong Kong youth, recognizing them as a vital subject within the context of “four histories” education. From the perspective of the integration of Lingnan culture, it explores the rich resources of Lingnan culture, innovates the narrative system, and explores the path of positive guidance in history education. Responding to the demands of the times, it seeks to alleviate the pressing concerns of Hong Kong society, help Hong Kong youth break down prejudices, gain a comprehensive understanding of China, grasp the development context of modern China, recognize historical trends, undertake national responsibilities, and take on the mission of the times.

Keywords: Lingnan culture; Hong Kong youth; “Four Histories” education

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1. Introduction

Valuing to draw historical wisdom and strength is the Communist Party of China’s enduring tradition. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the CPC Central Committee has repeatedly emphasized that “history is the best textbook” ^[1]. The “Four Histories” are the history of the Party, New China, the reform and opening up, and socialist development. The “Four Histories” education is based on history, narrating the Party’s struggles and the historical choices of the Chinese nation, with a clear political attribute. It is both important and urgent to implement the “Four History” education for Hong Kong youth on the new journey. It requires finding the convergence point between the historical origin, resource endowment, traditional customs of Lingnan culture, and the “Four History” education for Hong Kong youth, breaking down path dependence and formal barriers and helping them establish a correct view of history.

2. Origin of the problem: Biases and confusion in the field of history education in Hong Kong

Through an examination of social disturbances such as the illegal “Occupy Central” movement in 2014 and

the “legislative amendment storm” in 2019, it becomes evident that the proliferation of historical nihilism has created openings for hostile forces. Distorted historical perspectives such as the “Hong Kong independence,” “Local separation,” and “hatred of China” now prevail, and all this is due to the deviation and negligence of Hong Kong history education.

The problems of history education in Hong Kong stretch back to the colonial era. Under the highly centralized British political system, the Governor of Hong Kong wielded executive, legislative, and military powers—a position appointed by the UK and the Queen. Over 155 years, 28 governors rotated through this role, yet Chinese residents remained largely excluded from meaningful political representation ^[2]. The early colonial government displayed little interest in developing education within Hong Kong. The establishment of the first public school in 1862 marked a pivotal moment, but it set a tone that reverberated through generations. Instruction was primarily in English, and the curriculum centered on a version of “world history” heavily skewed toward Western perspectives. Chinese history often took a backseat, while colonial rule was subtly beautified. Within this educational landscape, colonial culture held sway over the ideological realm of Hong Kong.

On 12 January 1922, Hong Kong seamen, fed up with dual exploitation by foreign shipowners and contractors, launched a major strike. This labor action persisted for 55 days, culminating in success on March 8. The colonial government yielded to three demands put forth by the Seamen’s Union, including a much-needed pay raise ^[3].

At the end of 1925, Cecil Clementi, an advocate for traditional Chinese culture, became the Governor of Hong Kong. At that time, Hong Kong was experiencing the Guangdong-Hongkong Strike, unprecedented in the history of the world labor movement. Clementi promoted the establishment of the Chinese department at the University of Hong Kong and invited former Qing dynasty scholars to teach, initiating a wave of establishing official Chinese schools and conducting cultural and historical education. The real purpose behind this bustle was to maintain colonial rule and obstruct the development of the May Fourth New Culture Movement in Hong Kong.

After World War II, colonialism gradually faded from the historical stage, and the Cold War pattern formed. Hong Kong’s official Chinese schools began offering history courses that included both Chinese and world history. Chinese history became an independent compulsory subject in Hong Kong secondary schools, but most teaching focused on ancient history, deliberately downplaying and avoiding modern Chinese history, not to mention the history of the Party, New China, the reform and opening-up, and socialist development. The colonial government relied on support from external organizations and funding from the United States and the United Kingdom to maintain its rule, establishing various institutions under the guise of “preserving cultural orthodoxy.” This effort denigrated the image of New China, hindered the spread of patriotic sentiments, promoted the emergence of Hong Kong’s “local consciousness,” and subtly influenced its emergence in Hong Kong society.

The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 marked the beginning of Hong Kong’s transition to return. Before reunification, Hong Kong history began to be included in the secondary school curriculum but was inexplicably placed under the world history subject rather than Chinese history. After reunification, the Hong Kong SAR government initiated reforms in history education in response to the changing circumstances, but various complex factors led to the weakening of the Chinese history subject in the new curriculum system for a period of time. Statistics show that in the 2012–2013 school year, 23.4% of junior high schools in Hong Kong did not offer an independent Chinese history subject, and only over 7,000

candidates took the Chinese History subject in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2014 ^[4]. Teaching content related to the history of China was omitted under the pretext of “insufficient study hours” after the reform and opening-up. The marginalization of national history education, the presence of incorrect viewpoints and expressions in textbooks, and significant deviations in classroom teaching are evidence of the lack of national education, which led to a series of subsequent problems.

3. Dilemma analysis: Using the “Four Histories” to mirror the present and using Lingnan culture to break the ice

Hong Kong youth are the future of Hong Kong and the hope of the nation. Political apathy cannot put the problem to rest. In response to the complex and changing international and domestic situations, it is essential to respect historical facts and remain loyal to the truth. Alleviating the urgent concerns of Hong Kong society and helping young people escape their ideological quandaries is a significant and pressing task.

3.1. Roots of the frequent disturbances in Hong Kong’s history education

From an external perspective, the world is currently experiencing profound changes unseen in a century, with the Communist Party of China amassing tremendous power of the people and advancing all the way forward. However, Western countries like the United States view China as a strategic competitor and resort to all means to contain and suppress it, with Hong Kong becoming a focal point for anti-China forces to interfere and disrupt. They take advantage of the psychological estrangement of Hong Kong youth regarding the Party, the nation, and the socialist system, amplifying their rhetoric.

Internally, due to over 150 years of British colonial rule, the administrative division has led to significant differences in systems, laws, standards, customs, culture, and other aspects between Hong Kong and the mainland. The identification of Hong Kong youth as Chinese has weakened, leading to a blurred sense of national identity and ethnic consciousness. This psychological gap has not been effectively eliminated since Hong Kong’s return; many young people have a crisis of recognition regarding the leadership of the Communist Party, the development of the motherland, and the socialist cause. This crisis has universal commonalities yet exhibits individual differences, and is always mixed with noise and discord. For example, when they express concepts such as “China,” “nation,” and “history,” it does not stem from a political recognition and interpretation of national values and significance. Although they acknowledge their shared ethnic identity, blood ties, language customs, and historical legacy with the mainland, they remain fixated on their local identity and emphasize local values.

3.2. A correct historical perspective formed with “Four Histories” education

History has no hypotheticals; it is the fairest judge. In the grand narrative constructed by the Communist Party of China, Hong Kong has integrated its unique experiences into this magnificent epic over the past century, with the enduring theme of “patriotism” consistently, featuring the involvement of Hong Kong youth. At the beginning of the founding, there were communist figures in Hong Kong. Uniting community organizations and patriotic democrats in Hong Kong during different historical periods of the new democratic revolution, socialist construction, socialist reform, and the new era, collaboratively discussing and creating various causes of national development and the rejuvenation of the nation. The successful practice of the “One Country, Two Systems” political system in Hong Kong is the most glorious chapter.

A correct historical perspective maximizes value recognition, which refers to Hong Kong youth’s

positive psychological judgment and emotional belonging to the nation and ethnicity, leading to unity of thought and action. On January 8, 2020, at the summary meeting of the theme education “Remain true to our original aspiration and keep our mission firmly in mind,” the General Secretary called on the entire Party to study the “Four Histories” well ^[5]. This was followed by a series of relevant speeches and documents that provided guidance for the teaching and research of the “Four Histories,” making it a hot topic. Only by comprehensively and deeply studying the “Four Histories” can Hong Kong youth form an accurate cognition of the nation, ethnicity, and people; genuinely recognize the Party and socialism; realize their historical mission of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; make correct value judgments and behavioral choices; and truly aspire to greatness, uphold virtue, become great talents, shoulder great responsibilities, aligning with history, walking with the motherland, and being with the people.

3.3. Lingnan culture is the genetic code for Hong Kong’s transition from chaos to governance and prosperity

The famous educator Kalinin once said, “Patriotism education begins with a deep understanding of one’s homeland” ^[6]. Lingnan, located in the southernmost part of China, is geographically separated from the inland by the Five Ridges. Historically, the concept of Lingnan includes Guangdong (including Hainan, Hong Kong, and Macau), Guangxi, and parts of eastern Yunnan and southwestern Fujian. Today, Lingnan generally refers to the southern China region. Since modern times, Lingnan has taken the lead in embracing modernization, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has become a frontier. Lingnan culture, with its geographical advantages, has ushered numerous development opportunities and led the way in the era. In April 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the “Outline of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Plan,” which proposed shaping the humanistic spirit of the Bay Area. It emphasized cultural confidence and jointly promoted the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture, leveraging the advantages of geographic proximity and shared cultural heritage in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao to support the promotion of Lingnan culture represented by Cantonese opera, dragon boat, martial arts, lion dance, etc., and highlight the unique cultural charm ^[7].

Lingnan culture has a profound historical foundation and rich contemporary connotations, full of tension and vitality, continuously nurturing and inspiring Hong Kong. Although it has long been immersed and eroded by colonialism, Western civilization, and a mercantile environment, the national unity between Hong Kong and the mainland has never been fundamentally interrupted. This “unity” is reflected in the distinct linguistic habits, customs, etiquette, and religious beliefs of Lingnan. Its core driving force is the value system of Lingnan culture, which emphasizes pragmatism, openness, innovation, and a pioneering spirit.

Since the outbreak of the Opium War in 1840, modern China has gradually plunged into a deep abyss of suffering. Due to its geographical position, the Lingnan region was the first to suffer from Western colonial invasion. Advanced individuals in China, including those from Hong Kong, sacrificed themselves to save the nation from peril, fervently exploring ways to recover national dignity and sovereignty. Lingnan culture has gradually transformed from “the periphery” to “the forefront” by assimilating the essence of advanced thoughts from both home and abroad.

Since Hong Kong’s return, it has experienced the 1997 Asian financial crisis, “9/11” incident in 2001, the SARS epidemic in 2003, the US subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, and the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, along with repeated waves of unrest such as the “Article 23 Legislative Turmoil” in 2003,

the “Anti-National Education Movement” in 2012, the “Occupy Central” in 2014, and the “legislation amendment wave” in 2019. It is precisely because of the strong backing of the motherland and the spiritual characteristics of Lingnan culture that Hong Kong, which has experienced storms, has been able to transition from chaos to governance, and from governance to prosperity.

National identity, emotional identification with the nation, and ideological recognition require ongoing cultivation and sustained guidance. The spiritual characteristics of Lingnan culture continuously influence and shape Hong Kong youth. This invisible education subtly guides the historical transformation from economic and jurisprudence aspects back to consciousness and the people’s hearts.

It is necessary to take Lingnan culture as a clue, integrate the historical memory and times scene before and after Hong Kong’s return, place it within the broader context of the Chinese people’s seek, pursuit, and realize their dreams since modern times, incorporate the development of Hong Kong into the overall national layout, and realize the complementary advantages while recognizing and addressing differences in values, institutional arrangements, and development levels, enabling Hong Kong youth to integrate more quickly and effectively into the national development agenda.

4. Strategic vision: Integrating Lingnan culture into Hong Kong youth’s “Four Histories” education

Hong Kong has long been politically separated from its motherland, yet geographically it is close to its periphery, sharing various economic and cultural connections. The Central Committee remains steadfast in its support for Hong Kong’s economic prosperity and social stability. Hong Kong should timely identify its positioning, leverage its strengths, actively align with national planning, and integrate into the overall situation of national development. Lingnan culture should respond to the demands of the times and the expectations of Hong Kong youth through high-quality development. It is the right time to explore the depth of Lingnan culture, to realize the “two-way running” between the inheritance of Lingnan culture and “Four Histories” education for Hong Kong youth.

4.1. Approaching from the perspective of shared cultural heritage and highlighting the subject discourse of Lingnan culture

Cultural identity is the deepest form of recognition. Lingnan culture represents a common root for the Lingnan region, including Hong Kong and Macau. It is based on a unique geographical environment and historical conditions, originating from indigenous Nanyue culture, with agricultural culture and Marine culture as its sources. Over thousands of years, it has absorbed the essence of other ethnic and regional cultures through integration, innovation, and refinement ^[8]. However, due to the long absence of Lingnan culture’s main discourse in the Chinese cultural landscape, the image of the Lingnan region has been obscured or even distorted for centuries. Entering the new era, the distinct structural orientation of national cultural policy provides a context for Lingnan culture to “break through its boundaries.”

To grasp the characteristics of the social ideological reconstruction of Hong Kong since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law and the landing of the principle of “patriots governing Hong Kong,” it is imperative to assess the current state of youth thought, understand their real needs and views on typical social issues, and address misunderstandings and distortions. Leveraging the shared cultural heritage of Hong Kong, it is important to connect with young people, align efforts in the same direction, and synchronously integrate Lingnan’s rich cultural resources into this narrative. By adopting

engaging and enjoyable learning methods, we can explore ways to effectively implement “Four Histories” education. This includes developing a suitable discourse system and communication strategies, as well as enriching platforms that make the “Four Histories” accessible and relatable to the youth.

4.2. Directly touching hearts with a strong sense of reality to shape a correct historical perspective

Hong Kong’s modern and contemporary history is a history of patriotism and struggle. Hong Kong society upholds the glorious tradition of loving the country and Hong Kong. Throughout different historical periods, such as the Hundred Days’ Reform, the Xinhai Revolution, the National Revolution, the Anti-Japanese War, socialist construction, and reform and opening up, waves of patriotic figures have emerged in Hong Kong. The Communist Party of China and Hong Kong have always been interconnected; without the Communist Party, there would be no New China, and without the Communist Party of China, there would be no return of Hong Kong. Thus, Hong Kong youth should become participants and practitioners in this new journey. However, under the influence of erroneous ideologies, some individuals have taken things out of context, piecing together a distorted history, while others deliberately misrepresent facts, slander, and fabricate history. It is crucial to guide Hong Kong youth to discard biases and prejudices, enabling them to comprehensively and systematically study the “Four Histories” with a broad vision and a modest attitude. and to gain an in-depth understanding of the origins of the Party and Hong Kong, so as to ensure that the Party always remains in overall control and coordination.

To clarify the historical events and figures that link Hong Kong closely with the Party and the motherland over the past century. By gathering small details, a rich narrative environment is created for Lingnan culture that provides an immersive experience in “Four Histories” education, delicately recounting historical facts like a fireside narrative to restore history’s original appearance. Distinctive memory points that trigger the emotional resonance and inner involvement of Hong Kong youth are created, enhancing their courage and sense of responsibility. Improving related history teaching materials will allow Hong Kong youth to understand China’s significant achievements and unique contributions to economic development, political progress, cultural prosperity, social governance, ecological civilization, as well as in aerospace technology, education and medical care, poverty alleviation, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, broaden their horizons and tolerance, and cultivate them into a social force that expands political recognition, follow the trend of the times, and walk with the great motherland in the new era and forge ahead together.

4.3. Balancing the heaviness of “history” and the development of “situation” to progress with the times

On the eve of the founding of the nation, to break the comprehensive blockade imposed by the Western capitalist camp led by the United States against the new China, and to leverage Hong Kong’s role as a window and a link, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and other first-generation Party leaders made strategic decisions to “temporarily maintain the status quo” and “fully utilize long-term plans” [9]. After decades of political changes, China’s special policies toward Hong Kong, the safeguard measures to maintain peace and social stability in Hong Kong’s borders, and material assistance to Hong Kong “without bargaining” have remained unchanged.

It is essential to understand Hong Kong youth’s awareness of the historical motivations, processes, and significance of “One Country, Two Systems.” Through positive guidance in historical education,

demonstrating that the Party and the government's fundamental policies towards Hong Kong have remained consistent. This will help Hong Kong youth break down prejudices, gain a comprehensive understanding of China, and recognize that "One Country, Two Systems" is a historical contribution of the Party, embodying political wisdom. "One Country" is unshakeable and invulnerable; youth needs to deeply understand the development context of modern China, where China comes from and where it is going, awaking their sense of mission and consciously taking on national responsibilities, integrating into national development, and continuing to create the future.

The integration of Lingnan culture into Hong Kong youth's "Four Histories" education should be based on a reflection of the current national education system, creating a positive public opinion and atmosphere. This involves continuously enriching and refining the ways and mediums of expression, reflecting a seamless connection between grand narratives and concrete expressions, with the core being that form serves content. Starting from the maintenance of national interests, it is important to pay attention to the social development trends at home and abroad, track cutting-edge theories and achievements, expand the thinking space, and place Hong Kong youth's "Four Histories" education within the context of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development, the overall national development, and the "Belt and Road" national initiative for continuous attention and reflection.

5. Conclusion

The ideological situation of Hong Kong youth is related to the future, striving to guide them to study the "Four Histories" comprehensively and systematically, helping Hong Kong youth clarify the development context of modern China amid the immersion in historical knowledge and Lingnan culture. Hong Kong youth should deeply understand why China believes in Marxism, why it chooses the Communist Party of China, and why it follows the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This will also involve reinterpreting China and establishing historical and political recognition of the political, economic, cultural, and social systems of socialist China. It is vital for youth to understand the relationship between Hong Kong and the nation, as well as their own relationship with the country, thereby solidifying political recognition through cultural identity and correcting the dissonance between Hong Kong's "return of jurisprudence" and "return of the people's heart."

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