



# Different postcolonial conditions, different education histories: the cases of Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong

Ting-Hong Wong

Sociology Institute, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

## ABSTRACT

Through the cases of Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, this article explores the status of history of education under different postcolonial conditions. It demonstrates that factors such as lingering imperial influences and their tensions with anti-colonial forces, the extent of the cultural hybridity of colonial and post-colonial elites, the identities that emerged amid decolonisation and political developments after power transfer have ramifications for matters such as who researches the educational pasts of ex-dependencies, for whom and what the studies are conducted, which historical periods are being focused on, and in which languages and venues the research products are published. Findings from this article also hints that factors such as the authoritarian conditions after power transfer and prolonged colonisation by non-western powers are likely to hinder a postcolonial intellectual field from producing historiographies publishable in the western academic world.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 March 2022

Accepted 4 July 2022

## KEYWORDS

Education historiography; colonialism; post-coloniality; politics of knowledge production; comparative analysis

## Introduction

Given that the total geographical areas in the world that have in recent times been under colonial rule – defined as domination of the indigenous majority imposed by a minority of invaders<sup>1</sup> – arguably include more societies than those not having experienced colonial rule, it is puzzling that very little scholarly effort so far has been committed to examining the effects of postcolonial conditions on history of education research. Because of the lingering impacts of colonial subjugation and the seismic effects of decolonisation, postcolonial societies have peculiar cultural and political conditions that render the scholarship of their educational history considerably different from those in non-postcolonial settings. The lack of examination of the connections between post-coloniality and knowledge production has obscured how the history of education has been undertaken in many parts of the world.

Unlike nations in the centre of the world-system such as the United States, Great Britain and France, all long-established independent countries with an entrenched national field of knowledge production, the academic fields in many postcolonial societies are more susceptible to forces from outside as well as to persisting imperial

**CONTACT** Ting-Hong Wong ✉ [thwong@gate.sinica.edu.tw](mailto:thwong@gate.sinica.edu.tw) 📠 Sociology Institute, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taipei, Taiwan 11529

<sup>1</sup>This definition of colonial rule is adapted from Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1997), 16–17.

influences. In non-postcolonial countries, the status of a nation's history as a subject of academic study has been secured, and the nation's education history is researched by many native scholars working in local academia. The resultant research products, targeting compatriots as the chief audience, are mostly written in national languages and published by local journals and publishers. In many postcolonial milieus, however, the ties between local academia and those of former metropolises persist, and many historians from ex-metropolises remain the best known experts on histories of the former colonial possession. In these cases, a considerable number of expatriates keep their positions in the new nation's academia, the languages of ex-colonisers remain dominant in academic circles, and academic publishing outside the nation (in ex-metropolises or other centres of the world-system) continues to confer more prestige and power.

Lingering imperial influences do not go unchallenged in many postcolonial societies, however, as decolonisation typically stimulates a surge of national consciousness and campaigns calling for the replacement of colonial cultures and languages by indigenous ones. These conflicts may modify the field of knowledge production, fragmenting it into opposing sections possessing different linguistic capitals, outlooks and intellectual styles. The anti-colonial impulse may also catapult many local scholars – who may be culturally and linguistically hybrid, groomed by a colonial education system transmitting the cultures and languages of both colonisers and colonised – to prominent academic positions. It may also impel the postcolonial state to support historical research on the new nation and to recognise scholarly works published locally and in indigenous languages. Conflicts between lasting imperial influences and emerging nationalistic forces – whose results hinge on factors such as the strength of mobilisation, the cultural characteristics of the new state elites, the geopolitics of the surrounding regions, and so on – immensely affect the production of knowledge of the education history in post-colonial societies.

Moreover, the condition of educational history in former dependencies also hinges on political changes after decolonisation. After power transfer, some ex-dependencies have been democratised, some have descended into authoritarian rule and some have been subordinated to another hegemon. In democratic postcolonial territories, the history of education is more likely to thrive, because historians there, driven by a passion to understand the new homeland, can freely research the nascent nation's educational history. Further, their intellectual endeavours are likely to be supported by postcolonial authorities aspiring to cultivate a new national identity through the production of national history. In ex-dependencies under authoritarianism or those forced to become part of another empire, however, the regimes keen to impose a historical narrative serviceable to their political agenda often curtail academic freedom and suppress alternative historical discourses. These conditions can drive historical inquiry outside, resulting in the history of education being executed externally – by foreigners, exiled scholars and sojourning researchers. Moreover, academic fields in postcolonial territories that have been absorbed into another empire are likely to be invaded by agents from the 'new metropolis' – some commissioned to advance historical rhetoric that facilitates the ex-dependencies' absorption into the new homeland. These peculiar cultural and political conditions can strongly mould the history of education, affecting such crucial aspects as which researchers are studying the educational past in postcolonial societies, who the target audiences for

research works are, which historical periods are being focused on, and in which languages and outlets research outputs are published. The resultant scholarship of history of education therefore differs markedly from that of non-postcolonial sovereign nations.

To explore the state of the history of education under postcolonial conditions, in this article I examine the educational historiography of post-war Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong – which all have ethnic Chinese as the demographic majority and have been colonised quite recently, yet their colonial experiences and subsequent political developments are starkly different. Taiwan entered the postcolonial era through political democratisation around the late 1980s and early 1990s, after successively being subjugated by two invaders from neighbouring Asian regions – by Japan from 1895 to 1945 and the Kuomintang (KMT) regime from China after 1945. Singapore become an independent, authoritarian nation dominated by English-educated elites in 1965 after a century-and-a-half of British rule followed by two years (1963 to 1965) as part of Malaysia. Hong Kong was incorporated as a special administrative zone of the People's Republic of China when the British departed in 1997 and has come under increasingly draconian control from Beijing since then. The ways that the different colonial pasts and postcolonial presents of these three locations has led to dissimilar states of education histories can shed light on the peculiarities of knowledge production under diverse conditions of post-coloniality.

To explore the different states of history of education in the three places, this article will use a sample of the historical literature on education in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong – which includes monographs, journal articles and book chapters – that I have amassed in the past three decades. I have been studying the educational histories of Singapore and Hong Kong since the early 1990s when I did my PhD research comparing state Chinese school policies in both places. I began researching Taiwan's educational history some 20 years ago when I started working there. The sample of literature has been supplemented by an extensive literature search conducted through online catalogues and databases from a number of research libraries in the past two years. The literature has been selected on the criteria of being sufficiently academic and historical, or useful in illuminating significant trends in education histories in the three places. In the end, I included 117 items of research literature on Taiwan (20 books, 85 journal articles and 12 book chapters), 44 items on Singapore (12 books, 29 journal articles and three book chapters), and 63 items on Hong Kong (13 books, 40 journal articles and 10 book chapters).

To delve into the state of the educational history of the three places, I undertook statistical analysis on the backgrounds of the authors of the sampled literature, including where they came from, received their academic training and are now residing. I collected these biographical data through printed sources, internet searches, email enquiries and 'asking around'. I also did statistical analysis on the literature, looking into the languages in which they were published, the historical periods they cover, and the years and venues of publication. Finally, I examined the content of the literature, delving into such aspects as intellectual style and the issues and debates they engage with. Although my own linguistic background allowed me to look only at literature in Chinese and English, which might not be all-inclusive, the database I created is large and representative enough to generate useful insights on the state of educational history in these three postcolonial

settings. Before examining the education history of Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, I will first outline the postcolonial condition of each place.

## Different postcolonialities

### *Taiwan: a democratic postcolonial society previously under two Asian hegemons*

Taiwan, as stated above, became a democratic postcolonial society after colonisation by the Japanese in 1895 when the Qing authorities – defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War – relinquished the island; and more recently by the Republic of China regime when the Second World War ended in 1945. After retaking Taiwan, the Nanjing KMT authorities de-Nipponised the island through explicit re-Sinicisation measures such as restricting the use of the Japanese language, suppressing the memory of the Japanese period, and promoting the learning of Mandarin Chinese and Chinese history.<sup>2</sup> In 1949 the KMT, defeated by the Communists in the Chinese Civil War, evacuated to Taiwan with about 1.5 million mainlanders (*waishengrens*). They imposed what I have elsewhere called ‘national-colonial rule’: under the protection of the United States in the context of the Cold War, the KMT politically and culturally oppressed the *benshengrens* – the islanders, the Han Chinese who had come to Taiwan much earlier and, at about six million, the majority on the island – yet also undertook to integrate them as citizens of the Republic of China by redoubling their efforts at re-Sinicisation.<sup>3</sup>

The KMT’s Sinicisation campaign stemmed from the imperatives of national-colonial rule. It entrenched Chinese as the dominant language and moderated western influences on the island’s educational system. Pivotal in imparting a patriotic Chinese nationalistic identity, Taiwan’s education system was less penetrated by western influences than were its counterparts in Singapore and Hong Kong. In Taiwan, Mandarin Chinese remained the medium of instruction at all levels of schools; very few college faculty members were expatriates; and most scholarly works were published locally and in Chinese, although Taiwan’s higher education was highly dependent on the United States, receiving large amounts of assistance funds in the 1950s and 1960s. The regime’s Sinicisation policy also marginalised Taiwanese history in both education and research.<sup>4</sup>

The KMT’s national-colonial rule went largely unchallenged until the early 1970s, when the United States, on whose support Taiwan’s survival had hitherto depended, reconciled with Beijing to counter the influence of Moscow. Washington’s strategic shift not only cost Taipei its seat in the United Nations in 1971 and diplomatic ties with many nations now recognising Beijing, but also shattered hopes for recovering the mainland and forced the regime to make the survival of Taiwan a top priority. Moreover, the crises triggered by these diplomatic setbacks, in conjunction with rising Taiwanese consciousness (later Taiwanese nationalism) propelled the beleaguered KMT invaders to shift to ground its legitimacy on the support from Taiwan people, most of whom were *benshengrens*. Amidst a convoluted struggle both within the state and between the state and

<sup>2</sup>Huang Ying-Chee, *Qiribenhua, Zaizhongguohua: Zhanhou Taiwan Wenhua Chongjian, 1945–1947* [Uprooting Japan, reimplanting China: cultural reconstruction in post-war Taiwan, 1945–1947] (Taipei: Maitian Chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>Ting-Hong Wong, ‘Education and National Colonialism in Postwar Taiwan: The Paradoxical Use of Private Schools to Extend State Power, 1944–1966’, *History of Education Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2020): 156–84.

<sup>4</sup>Peng Ming-fei, *Taiwanshixue de Zhongguo Chanjie* [Taiwan historical studies under China’s entanglement] (Taipei: Maitian Chubanshe, 2002), 154–5.

civil society, the KMT abandoned its national-colonial approach, mellowing the political oppression it had hitherto inflicted on the Taiwanese people. It lifted martial law in 1987; reformed the legislative sector at the central level into being accountable to the Taiwanese people in the early 1990s; and staged its first general election for president in 1996. Twice in the twenty-first century the KMT has surrendered power to the Democratic Progressive Party, a *benshengren*-dominated political party taking a pro-independence stance, after losing the presidential elections of 2000 and 2016.

With political decolonisation also came decolonisation of history education and research. In 1994, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education decreed that programmes in history departments of universities should give equal emphasis to Chinese, western and Taiwanese histories.<sup>5</sup> The amount of historical research on Taiwan rose amidst a rising Taiwanese consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s research institutes and graduate programmes in Taiwanese history have been created in leading institutions such as the Academia Sinica, the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) and the National Zhengchi University; and scholarly Taiwan history journals – such as *Taiwan Historical Research*, published by the Academia Sinica, and the *Bulletin of Taiwan Historical Research*, published by the NTNU – have also been launched.

Growing Taiwanese consciousness provoked strong reactions from Beijing, which insisted that Taiwan was a breakaway province of China destined for reunification with the mainland. The threats wielded by China, however, only added fuel to the fire, stimulating a further surge of Taiwanese nationalism. Moreover, when asserting a national identity and rejecting the China-centred identity fostered by both the KMT and the Beijing authorities, the Taiwanese people embraced historical and cultural linkages with the Japanese, their colonisers before the KMT – partly as a gesture to resist the KMT, who had undertaken to erase *benshengren*'s memory of the Japanese era; and partly using the island's unique historical experiences of Japanese rule to classify themselves as distinct from both mainlanders and people in China. These developments, as I will show, have had large effects on research in educational history in postcolonial Taiwan.

### **Singapore: an authoritarian postcolonial nation after British colonial rule**

Singapore became an independent nation in 1965 after almost a century and a half of British colonial rule, followed by two years as part of Malaysia from 1963 to 1965. Singapore had been entwined with the adjoining Malayan Peninsula in pre-war times, when it was under an administration that also encompassed the geographically larger peninsula, in which Malays were numerically the majority and constitutionally the ruling partners of the British. These strong Anglo-Malay ties weakened the affinity between the colonial state of Singapore and its Chinese residents, the majority on the island, and resulted in an educational system with a strong classification between the cultures of the colonisers and the Chinese colonised: a small number of schools run by the colonial state and western missionaries adopted English as medium of instruction, following the

<sup>5</sup>Wu Wen-Xing, 'Jinwushinian guanyu rezhishiqi zhi lishiyanjiu yu rencaipeiyou (1945–2000): yi lishiyanjusuo weizhongxin' [Training scholars researching the historical period of Japanese rule in the past fifty years (1950–2000): a study of graduate programmes of history in Taiwan], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* [Taiwan Historical Research] 8, no. 1 (June 2001): 163–78.

<sup>6</sup>Peng, *Taiwanshixue de Zhongguo Chanjie*, 154–5.

curriculum model of British schools, and taught a modicum of the Malay language – the language of the British's ruling partners – and excluded the culture and language of the Chinese 'aliens' from the curricula. The Chinese residents under British oversight established their own schools, which taught in the medium of Chinese, and, since the late nineteenth century, had followed the state curriculum in China and inculcated a China-centric identity. The divisive school system created two categories of cultural and linguistic elites – the English- and Chinese-educated – which competed for political and cultural power after the Second World War. The English-educated faction, anointed by the outgoing British, emerged as winners and became the ruling elite of postcolonial Singapore.<sup>7</sup> The cultural divisions and political conflicts engendered by the segmented school system profoundly affect the state of historical inquiry in postcolonial Singapore.

After being expelled by Kuala Lumpur in 1965, Singapore – now a tiny postcolonial city-state sandwiched between two Muslim nations (Malaysia and Indonesia) that considered the island a stronghold of Chinese chauvinism – faced the difficult challenge of national survival.<sup>8</sup> The sense of national crisis under this precarious condition enabled the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew to centralise power and impose authoritarian rule on the island. Moreover, being flanked by two anti-Chinese neighbours and internally dominated by the English-educated (mostly Anglicised Chinese) elites, Singapore underwent a de-Sinicising onslaught after lowering the Union Jack. The PAP expanded English-language schools to replace Chinese-language institutions and suppressed and ultimately closed Nanyang University, a college established by the Chinese community for graduates of Chinese secondary schools.<sup>9</sup> These de-Sinicisation moves depreciated the value of the Chinese language in the academic field.

Furthermore, the nation-building agenda chosen by the postcolonial regime discouraged the practice of historical inquiry in postcolonial Singapore. First, the priority of providing sufficient employment and a decent livelihood in a nation with no natural resources forced the authorities to adopt a highly pragmatic governance approach. This strategy – directing Singaporeans to focus on the present, think of the future and forget the past – marginalised knowledge with no apparent practical value, such as history.<sup>10</sup> Second, Singapore is a new nation constituted by relatively new immigrant groups from China, India and adjacent Muslim regions without a long and common past to support their integration into the nation. Allowing Singaporeans to look back at their history risks exposing them to the pulls of their ancestors' provenance – much larger countries with rich cultural traditions and far longer and more splendid pasts – and hinders the building of a new Singapore nation.<sup>11</sup>

The PAP, however, shifted to promote history education in the early 1980s when realising that new generations growing up in an orderly and prosperous Singapore took

<sup>7</sup>Ting-Hong Wong, *Hegemonies Compared: State Formation and Chinese School Politics in Post-War Singapore and Hong Kong* (New York: Routledge, 2002), especially chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup>Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>9</sup>Ting-Hong Wong, 'Comparing State Hegemonies: Chinese Universities in Postwar Singapore and Hong Kong', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28, no. 2 (2005): 199–218.

<sup>10</sup>Albert Lau, 'Nation-Building and the Singapore Story: Some Issues in the Study of Contemporary Singapore History', in *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2005), 224.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 225.

the nation's success for granted. Through disseminating a state-sanctioned historical narrative, the authorities hoped young people would understand the vulnerability of their nation and become grateful to the PAP for making Singapore successful.<sup>12</sup> By treating history only as a tool for political indoctrination, however, the regime became even more hostile to free inquiry into national history. Thus, historians have largely been denied access to the archival materials deposited at the National Archives of Singapore – especially those after 1965 under the PAP's sole control – and scholars who aim to advance historical discourses at odds with PAP's face immense political pressure.<sup>13</sup>

### *Hong Kong: an ex-British colony returned to China*

When the sovereignty of Hong Kong, a British possession since the early 1840s, returned to the People's Republic of China in 1997, the British left three legacies with significant bearing on historical studies of Hong Kong. First, British colonialism wedded Hong Kong's higher education, like that in Singapore, to academic fields in the West: universities in Hong Kong followed the models of higher learning in Britain and the United States, taught chiefly through the medium of English, and hired many expatriates as faculty members. As Hong Kong's British rule did not end through any anticolonial mobilisation, its academic alignments with the West survived power transfer largely unscathed.<sup>14</sup> Second, both because Hong Kong was colonised by the West as a stepping stone to enter China and because the tiny territory is a mono-racial Chinese society not under threat from any anti-Chinese neighbour, the colonial education system there, unlike that in Singapore, accommodated the language and culture of its Chinese subjects as part of the official knowledge. The learning of the Chinese language had been mandated at English-language schools since the early colonial years; the Chinese language was made the medium of instruction in elementary education in the early post-Second World War decades, and a university that taught mainly in Chinese was established in 1963.<sup>15</sup> Chinese subjects educated in British Hong Kong were therefore culturally hybrid – connected with the West yet in rapport with Chinese cultural roots as well as Hong Kong Chinese society. Third, because of the proactive approach by the British to cultivate people's sense of belonging after the riots in 1966 and 1967, a Hong Kong identity emerged in the 1970s. This, coupled with the contemporaneous appearance of the colony's first generation of local-born intellectuals, who saw Hong Kong as their home, stimulated research on local history and society.<sup>16</sup> This entire background ensured that Hong Kong entered the post-British era with a western-aligned academic field in which the Chinese language had a solid presence and the importance of Hong Kong studies was on the rise.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.; Loh Kah Seng, 'Within the Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 12, no. 2 (1998): 1–21.

<sup>13</sup>Loh Kah Seng, 'Encounters at the Gates', in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*, ed. Loh Kah Seng and Liew Kai Khium (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 2010), 3–27.

<sup>14</sup>It is arguable that the ties between the academic fields of Hong Kong and the West were in fact strengthened because of power transfer, because, with the shadow of China looming large, academics in Hong Kong clung more tightly to the western academic world for self-protection.

<sup>15</sup>Wong, *Hegemonies Compared*; Wong, 'Comparing State Hegemonies'.

<sup>16</sup>John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 167–70.



As Hong Kong's British rule was ended through the territory's becoming part of the People's Republic of China, Beijing's moves also immensely affected historical research in Hong Kong both during the late British era and beyond. Until the 1970s, most historical works concerning Hong Kong were written by British expatriates using almost exclusively English sources and seeing Hong Kong from the perspective of the colonisers. The subsequent rise of Hong Kong-born intellectuals brought about a more Hong Kong-centred historiography. Seeing the historical discourses of the two factions of historians – one colonial and the other Hong Kong-centred – as mitigating the territory's absorption into China, the Chinese authorities sought to replace them with a China-centred discourse, one that could justify reimposing Beijing's rule and help remake Hongkongers into patriotic citizens of China. Starting in the late 1980s, Beijing funded many projects on Hong Kong studies and a considerable number of resultant research products appeared in both China and Hong Kong publication outlets.<sup>17</sup>

Beijing's increasingly oppressive posture has also shaped the state of educational history in the tiny ex-British dependency. After a relatively liberal and tranquil decade beginning in 1997, the escalated tensions caused by China's subduing of Hong Kong's autonomy culminated in the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the Anti-Extradition Movement in 2019. The determined resistance of the Hong Kong people led to Beijing's enactment of the National Security Law in July 2020, with tougher measures to impose a China-centred identity at the expense of the Hong Kong-centred identity, which Beijing now sees as separatist. China's interference with the territory's academic freedom may drive scholars away from researching Hong Kong's history.

## Different educational histories

Before discussing the states of the history of education in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong individually, I first outline a general picture, contrasting both the researchers studying the three places and their research outputs. I start by examining the historians' domicile status – investigating where they come from and where are they now – and the countries where they received their highest academic credentials. Scholars are classified as *local* if they are from the place that they study and remain there when their research is conducted; *sojourner*, if they are from the place they research but no longer live there when doing the research; *expatriate*, if they are from outside but now living in the place they study; and *outsider*, if they are neither from nor living in the places they research. For the sake of parsimony, only first authors of historical works were analysed.<sup>18</sup> I also examine the literature on the three places, comparing their languages and venues of publication. The general patterns revealed serve as a starting point for illustrating how educational histories vary in diverse post-colonial contexts.

Among the three places, Taiwan's educational past has been studied by the most indigenous group of scholars: Table 1 indicates that among the 50 historians studying Taiwan's education, 40 (80%) are locals and only one is sojourner (a

<sup>17</sup>Wong Wang-Chi, *Lishi de Chenzhong: Cong Xianggang Kan Zhongguodalu de Xianggangshi Lunshu* [The heaviness of history: Hong Kong's historical narrative from mainland China's point of view] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7–46.

<sup>18</sup>Only four (less than 4%) of the 109 Taiwan items in the database are co-authored; the figures for Singapore and Hong Kong are three (7%) of 44 and six (9%) of 63, respectively.



**Table 1.** Historians' backgrounds

Origin	Domicile status					Total
	Local	Sojourner	Expatriate	Outsider	Unknown	
Taiwan	40 (80%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)	0 (0%)	50 (100%)
Singapore	10 (38%)	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	10 (38%)	1 (4%)	26 (100%)
Hong Kong	16 (39%)	2 (5%)	9 (22%)	13 (32%)	1 (2%)	41 (100%)

  

	Countries of highest educational qualifications						TOTAL
	Local	West	China	Japan	Others	Unknown	
Taiwan	23 (46%)	9 (18%)	0 (0%)	15 (30%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	50 (100%)
Singapore	7 (27%)	14 (54%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	3 (11%)	26 (100%)
Hong Kong	12 (29%)	18 (44%)	7 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)	41 (100%)

Taiwanese scholar teaching in Japan); three are expatriates; and six are outsiders (five of them Japanese). Moreover, Taiwan has the highest proportion of locally trained historians – about half, 23 (46%), earned their doctoral degrees in Taiwan. Scholars studying Singapore and Hong Kong, in contrast, come from more diverse and cosmopolitan backgrounds: only 10 (38%) of a total of 26 scholars researching Singapore are locals; and only 16 (39%) of 41 academics studying Hong Kong are locals. In both Singapore and Hong Kong, moreover, more than half of the sampled researchers come from outside, mostly from other parts of the British Commonwealth and the neighbouring regions: Singapore has three (12%) expatriates (two Australians and one Chinese) and 10 (38%) outsiders (four Malaysians, two British, one Canadian, two Hongkongers, and one Japanese); while those researching Hong Kong include nine (22%) expatriates (most from the UK) and 13 (32%) outsiders – of whom 10 are from China. Furthermore, relatively few scholars studying Singapore and Hong Kong are locally trained, only seven (27%) and 12 (29%), respectively, received their highest degrees from local universities.

Table 1 also highlights that researchers on Taiwan maintain a fairly strong connection with Japan, the island's colonisers before the KMT, while those of Singapore and Hong Kong, both former British suzerainties, are tied more closely with the West. Almost one-third, 15 (30%), of the 50 scholars studying Taiwan – five of them Japanese – earned their doctoral degrees from Japan, from which no one in the database who is researching Singapore and Hong Kong received their PhDs. Moreover, in this sample Taiwan's academic ties with the West are relatively weak: only nine (18%) scholars researching Taiwan earned their highest degrees from counties such as the United States, UK and Australia, whereas about half of those studying Singapore and Hong Kong – 14 (54%) and 18 (44%), respectively – are western-educated. Furthermore, China's influence on Hong Kong is growing, as seven (17%) of the 41 scholars studying the territory earned their highest degrees from China institutions.

The literature on the educational history of Taiwan is also more local than that of Singapore and Hong Kong. Table 2 indicates that Taiwan's educational histories were

**Table 2.** General characteristics of the literatures

Table 2. General characteristics of the mediators						
	Domicile status of author					
Origin	Local	Sojourner	Expatriate	Outsider	Unknown	Total
Taiwan	102 (87%)	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	9 (8%)	0 (0%)	117 (100%)
Singapore	17 (39%)	4 (9%)	5 (11%)	17 (39%)	1 (2%)	44 (100%)
Hong Kong	20 (32%)	9 (14%)	19 (30%)	15 (24%)	0 (0%)	63 (100%)
Language of publication						
	Chinese	English	Total			
Taiwan	109* (93%)	8 (7%)	117 (100%)			
Singapore	12 (27%)	32 (73%)	44 (100%)			
Hong Kong	22 (35%)	41 (65%)	63 (100%)			
Venue of publication						
	Local	Outside	Total			
Taiwan	109 (93%)	8 (7%)	117 (100%)			
Singapore	16 (36%)	28 (64%)	44 (100%)			
Hong Kong	14 (22%)	49 (78%)	63 (100%)			

\*Note: Seven of these 109 items are Japanese works translated into Chinese.

published mostly by indigenous scholars, as 102 (87%) of the 117 items were authored by locals; while sojourner, expatriate and outsider scholars combined produced the other 15 (13%). In sharp contrast, locals contributed only 17 (39%) of a total of 44 and 20 (32%) out of 63 items, respectively, regarding Singapore and Hong Kong; most works on these two places – 26 (59%) for Singapore and 43 (67%) for Hong Kong – were produced by the three types of non-locals. Moreover, while over 90% of the literature on Taiwan was written in Chinese – the language of most people on the island – items on Singapore and Hong Kong were mostly written in English – 73% and 65%, respectively. Furthermore, historical studies of Taiwan in the sample were predominantly (93%) published by local publishers or journals, while those on the other two places were mostly produced externally. Of the total of 44 historical studies of Singapore, 28 (64%) were published outside, with almost two-thirds (17 items) published in the UK; and of the total of 63 items on Hong Kong, most (49, or 78%), appeared externally – mainly in the UK, but also in China and elsewhere.

### Taiwan: thriving history of education gravitating towards Japan

So far, the data suggest that Taiwan's educational history is more local and connected with the academic field of Japan, while educational history in Singapore and Hong Kong is more cosmopolitan and tied with both the West and neighbouring regions. Having contrasted the literature and its authors in the three places, I now delve deeper into history of education in the individual cases. I start with Taiwan, looking at the timings of

**Table 3.** Taiwan histories of education

	No. and percentage of items
<b>Period of publication:</b>	
Martial Law era	9 (8%)
Post-Martial Law era	108 (92%)
Total	117 (100%)
<b>Decade of publication:</b>	
1970s	3 (3%)
1980s	7 (6%)
1990s	10 (9%)
2000s	36 (31%)
2010s	50 (43%)
2020s	11 (9%)
Total	117 (100%)
<b>Period studied:</b>	
Japanese colonialisation (1895–1945)	81 (69%)
Early retrocession (1945–1949)	16 (14%)
Authoritarian era (1949 to about the late 1980s)	17 (15%)
Post-Martial Law era	1 (1%)
Transition era	2 (2%)
Total	117 (100%)

the publication of its literature and the historical periods and issues being focused on by historians of education.

Table 3 suggests that Taiwan's history of education burgeoned when the island was democratised and entered the postcolonial era. Of the 117 pieces of work on Taiwan, only nine (8%) were published when martial law was still in place, and an overwhelming majority – 108 items, or 92% – appeared after the law's abrogation in July 1987.<sup>19</sup> The table also indicates that only three and seven of the works appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, but that the number rose to 10 in the 1990s, 36 in the 2000s and 50 in the 2010s. Educational history thus blossomed when democracy became entrenched, the KMT's colonial rule ended and a Taiwan-centred identity was no longer suppressed.

Table 3 also reveals that the literature on Taiwanese education has focused intensively on the Japanese colonial period. Among the 117 Taiwan historiographies, 81 (69%) examine the era of Japanese rule. This number far exceeds those of all subsequent periods, as 16 items (14%) cover the early retrocession period (from 1945 to 1949, between which dates the KMT retook the island and relocated to Taiwan), 17 the authoritarian era and only one the postcolonial era. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that most items – 66 of 81 – on the Japanese period were produced by local scholars from *benshengren* backgrounds (who, or whose ancestors, had lived under Japanese rule) – with the other 15 mostly written by Japanese historians.

The literature on the Japanese colonial period – relying mainly on primary and secondary materials in Japanese and Chinese and citing almost no English sources – covers a broad range of subjects that document how Taiwan was internally governed and

<sup>19</sup>It is noteworthy that the best known title on Taiwanese educational history in the Anglophone world – *Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895–1945*, published by Harvard University Press – was written by E. Patricia Tsurumi, an outsider based in Canada, in 1977, when Taiwan was still under martial law.

externally connected with other parts of the Japanese empire. Some studies have explored how the modern education system was established in Japanese Taiwan. They chronicle how after 1895, western-style schools were introduced,<sup>20</sup> a system of educational finance was installed,<sup>21</sup> institutions of industrial education were built<sup>22</sup> and the Taihoku Imperial University in Taipei was inaugurated (in 1928) on the island.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the literature on the Japanese period also examines the ways in which schools were deployed to remake Taiwanese people's identities, turning them into colonial subjects of Japan. For examples, through analysing the textbook on national language (Japanese) and ethics (*shushin* in Japanese) for elementary schools, Chao Wan-yao uncovers the scheme of the Japanese to turn the Taiwanese into pliant and practical-oriented subjects ignorant of Taiwan's history.<sup>24</sup> Chen Pei-feng and E. Patricia Tsurumi track the Japanese moves to culturally assimilate the Taiwanese, and the attendant contradictions and resistances.<sup>25</sup> He I-lin examines political indoctrination in schools when the Kominka Movement – the Japanese's campaign to hasten the Nipponisation of colonial subjects after the Pacific War broke out in 1937 – was under way.<sup>26</sup>

Researchers of the Japanese era have also scrutinised colonial Taiwan's education against the larger context of the Japanese empire. They examine how the Taihoku Imperial University served Tokyo's imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia and southern China,<sup>27</sup> and they explore the experiences of Taiwan students in Manchuria,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Hsu Pei-hsien, *Zhimindi Taiwan de Jindai Xuexiao* [Modern schools in colonial Taiwan] (Taipei, Taiwan: Yuanliu chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>21</sup>Li Kai-yang, *Rizhishiqi Taiwan de Jiaoyu Caizheng: yi Chudengjiaoyufei wei Tantaotzhongxin* [Education finance in Japanese Taiwan: a case study on elementary schooling] (Taipei: Academia Historica, 2012).

<sup>22</sup>Wang Yao-te, 'Rizhishiqi tainan gaodeng gongyexuexiao sheli zhi yanjiu' [Founding of Tainan Technical College during the Japanese colonial era], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* [Taiwan Historical Research] 18, no. 2 (June 2011): 52–95; Yeh Pi-ling, 'Taibei diguodaxue gongxuebu zhi chuangjian' [The founding of the Engineering Faculty, Taihoku Imperial University] *Guoshiguan Guankan* [Bulletin of Academia Historica] 52 (June 2017): 73–124; Zheng Li-ling, 'Rizhishiqi taiwanren de gongyejiaoyu (1912–1925): yi taiwan zongdufu gongye jiangxisuo weil' [Taiwanese's industrial education under Japanese rule, 1912–1925: Industrial Institute of Governor-General of Taiwan], *Taiwan Fengwu* [Taiwan Folkways] 58, no. 2 (June 2008): 95–134.

<sup>23</sup>Wu Mi-cha, 'Zhimindi chuxianle daxue!' [A university was founded in a colony!], in *Diguo de Xuexiao, Diyue de Xuexiao* [Schools of the empire, schools of localities], ed. Hsu Pei-xian (Taipei: Taida chubanzhongxin, 2020), 203–32.

<sup>24</sup>See, for instance, Chao Wan-yao, 'Shiluo de daodeshijie: ribenzhimintongzhishiqi Taiwan gongxuexiao xiushen jiaoyu zhi yanjiu' [A lost moral world: ethics education in Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 8, no. 2 (December 2001): 1–63; Chao Wan-yao, 'Shixuejiaoyu, xiangtuai yu guojiaerentong: rizhishiqi Taiwan gongxuexiao disanqi guoyu jiaokeshu de fenxi' [Education and national identity in colonial Taiwan: the case of 'national language' textbooks, 1923–1937], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 4, no. 2 (December 1997): 7–55.

<sup>25</sup>Chen Pei-feng, *Tonghua zhi Tongchuangyimeng: Rizhishiqi Taiwan de Yuyanzhengce, Jindaihua yu Rentong* [The different intentions behind the semblance of 'douka': the language policy, modernisation and identity in Taiwan in the Japan-ruling period], (Taipei: maitian chuban, 2006); E. Patricia Tsurumi, 'Education and Assimilation in Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945', *Modern Asian Studies* 13, no. 4 (1979): 617–41.

<sup>26</sup>He I-lin, 'Huangminhua qijian zhi xuexiaojiaoyu' [School education under the Kominka Movement], *Taiwan Fengwu* 36, no. 4 (1986): 47–88.

<sup>27</sup>Fan Yan-qiu, 'Diguozhengzhi yu yixue: riben zhanshi zongdongyuanxia de taibei diguodaxue yixuebu' [Imperial politics and medical science: The Medical School of Taihoku Imperial University during total mobilisation for war], *Shida Taiwanshi Xuebao* [Bulletin of Taiwan Historical Research] 1 (December 2007): 89–136; Wang Xue-xin, 'Nanjinzhengcexia de jiminjiaoyu, 1895–1937' [Education for Taiwanese in South China under the Southern Expansion Policy, 1895–1937], *Guoshiguan Xueshu Jikan* [Bulletin of Academia Historica] 14 (December 2007): 97–131; Xu Jin-fa, 'Taibeidiguodaxue de nanfang yanjiu, 1937–1945' [Southern studies of the Taihoku Imperial University, 1937–1945], *Taiwan Fengwu* 49, no. 3 (1999): 19–59; Zheng Li-ling, 'Taibeidiguodaxue yu hainandao' [Taihoku Imperial University and Hainan Island], *Taiwan Fengwu* 49, no. 4 (1999): 19–59.

<sup>28</sup>Hsu Hsueh-chi, 'Rizhishiqi taiwanren de haiwaihuodong: zai manzhou de taiwan yisheng' [Activities of overseas Taiwanese during Japanese colonisation: Taiwanese physicians in Manchuria], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 11, no. 2 (December 2004): 1–75; Hsu Hsueh-chi, 'Zai manzhouguo de taiwanren gaodengguan: yi datongxueyuan de biyesheng weil' [Taiwanese senior officials in Manchukuo: the case of graduates from Tatung Academy], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 19, no. 3 (September 2012): 95–150.

Korea,<sup>29</sup> Japan-occupied Nanjing<sup>30</sup> and Japan.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, some historians have put education in Japanese Taiwan into a comparative perspective, contrasting it with other territories that were then under Japanese rule, such as Korea and Manchuria, in matters such as history education, higher education policies and the implementation of the Kominka Movement.<sup>32</sup>

The literature on the early retrocession period mostly takes a critical view of the KMT regime, chronicling how the Nanjing authorities used education to oppress the Taiwanese people shortly after retaking the island. Chen Tsui-ling, for instance, demonstrates that the earliest officials from China, despising the islanders as having been enslaved by the Japanese for 50 years, de-certified the academic qualifications they had earned during the Japanese period and imposed a large-scale re-education plan.<sup>33</sup> Chen also records that the mainlanders' distrust of islanders, together with panic incurred by successive setbacks in the civil war in China, led to the banning of the Yanping Academy, a school established by islander elites with a view to creating a university;<sup>34</sup> the massive arrest of college students in April 1949, an event known as the April Sixth Incident (*siliu Shijian*);<sup>35</sup> and tightening up school surveillance after the February 28 Incident.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the only historical studies portraying a positive picture of the period are two articles on the undertakings of Fu Ssu-nien – a prominent historian from China, a critic of the KMT and Chiang Kai-shek, and a stern defender of academic freedom – to reform the National Taiwan University into a high-quality academic

<sup>29</sup>Jin Jung-won, 'Fangyan diguo, sijerdong: zai chaoxian xueyi de taiwanren' [Seizing opportunities in the empire: Taiwanese medical students in colonial Korea], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 19, no. 1 (March 2012): 87–140.

<sup>30</sup>Hsu Hsueh-chi, 'Dongya tongwen shuyuandaxue de taiwan xuesheng (1900–1945)' [Taiwanese students of Toa Dobun Gakuin University, 1900–1945], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 25, no. 1 (March 2018): 137–82.

<sup>31</sup>Chen Tsui-Lien, 'Dazhengminzhu yu Taiwan liurixuesheng' [Taisho democracy and Taiwanese overseas students in Japan], *Shida Taiwanshi Xuebao* 6 (December 2013): 53–100; Ho I-lin, 'Zhanhouchuqi Taiwan liurixuesheng de zuoqingyanlun ji dongxiang' [Left-wing views and political sentiments of Taiwanese students in immediate post-war Japan], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 19, no. 2 (June 2012): 151–92.

<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, Chao Wan-yao, 'Cong bijiaoguandian kan taiwan yu hanguo de huangminhua yundong, 1937–1945' [Comparing the Kominka Movements in Taiwan and Japan, 1937–1945], in *Taiwanshi Lunwen Jingxuan* [Taiwan history: an anthology], ed. Zhang Yan-hsien, Li Xiao-feng and Dai Bao-cun (Taipei: Yushanshe, 1996), 161–201; Chao Wan-yao, 'Lishi de tonghe yu jiangou: riben diguoquannei taiwan, chaoxian he manzhou de guoshijiaoyu' [The integration and construction of history: national history education in Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria under Japanese imperial rule], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 10, no. 1 (June 2003): 33–84; Yeh Pi-ling, 'Taibei diguodaxue yu jingcheng diguodaxue shixueke zhi bijiao' [Comparison of history courses offered at Taihoku Imperial University and Keijo Imperial University] *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 16, no. 3 (September 2009): 87–132; Zheng Li-ling, 'Ribei zhimindi gaodengjiaoyuzhengce de zhuanzhe yu fazhan: yi jingcheng diguodaxue yu taibei diguodaxue de sheli weili' [The twists and developments of Japan's higher education policies in colonies: the founding of Keijo Imperial University in Korea and Taihoku Imperial University in Taiwan], *Taiwan Fengwu* 51, no. 2 (2001): 87–137.

<sup>33</sup>Chen Tsui-lien, 'Quzhimin yu zaizhimin de duikang: yi yijisiliunian taren nuhua lunzhan wei jiaodian' [Decolonisation vs. recolonisation: the debate over 'tai-jen nu-hua' of 1946 in Taiwan], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 9, no. 2 (December 2002): 145–201.

<sup>34</sup>Chen Tsui-lien, 'Zhanhou taiwanjingying de chongjing yu duncuo: yanping xueyuan chuanglei shimo' [Vision and frustration of post-Second World War Taiwanese intellectuals: the case of Yan-ping College], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 13, no. 2 (December 2006): 123–67.

<sup>35</sup>Chen Tsui-lien and Li Kai-yang, *Siliushijian yu Taiwandaxue* [The April Sixth Incident and the National Taiwan University] (Taipei: National Taiwan University Library, 2017).

<sup>36</sup>In late February 1947, Taiwan people's accumulated frustrations with the KMT's misrule erupted into armed islanders taking over the island. The uprising was bloodily suppressed by Chiang Kai-shek. See Ou Su-ying, 'Zhanhouchuqi Taiwan zhongdengxuexiao zhi xuefeng yu xunyu' [Academic atmosphere and discipline in secondary schools in early post-war Taiwan], *Guoshiguan Xueshujikan* 2 (December 2002): 1–41.

institution free from external political interference when he headed the university from 1949 to 1950.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike earlier periods, the authoritarian era (from 1949 until Taiwan's democratisation in the late 1980s) has been researched by the most non-*benshengren* group of scholars. Among the 17 works covering that era, nine (53%) are by six mainlanders (mostly second-generation *waishengren* scholars), three (17%) by an expatriate from Hong Kong, and with only two (12%) confirmed as written by islander historians. Many non-*benshengren* scholars, interestingly, focus intensively on influences on Taiwan's education from the West and mainland China. For instance, among the nine items by *waishengren* historians, three examine educational exchanges between the United States and Taiwan,<sup>38</sup> and the other six discuss the contributions to Taiwan's educational developments after the Second World War of political leaders,<sup>39</sup> scholars<sup>40</sup> and medical professionals who retreated from China.<sup>41</sup> None of these works mention the influences of *benshengrens* and the Japanese legacy, as if Taiwan's post-war education was affected only by mainlanders and the United States.

### Singapore: history of education externalised and divided

Dominated by an authoritarian regime keen to impose an official historical narrative and to de-Sinicise the island, postcolonial Singapore discouraged free inquiry into national history (especially into the period after the island came under the PAP's sole control in 1965) and anointed English as the dominant language at the expense of Chinese. These state practices curtailed local scholars' involvement in historical research, prompted historians studying Singaporean history to focus on pre-PAP eras, and led to a field of

<sup>37</sup> Lee Tong-hwa, 'Guangfuchuqi taida wenxueyuan de zhuanzhe yu dianji: fussenian xiaozhang shiqi' [Transition and formation: the Arts College of the National University of Taiwan under the Presidency of Fu Ssu-nien, 1948–1950], in *Guangfuchuqi Taida Xiaoshi Yanjiu, 1945–1950* [History of the National Taiwan University in the early retrocession period, 1945–1950], ed. Lee Tong-hwa (Taipei: Taida chubanzhongxin, 2014), 135–65; Ou Su-ying, 'Kongxian zhege daxue yu yuzhou de jingshen: tan fusinian yu Taiwandaxue shizi zhi gaixian' [To contribute this university to the universe: on Fu Ssu-nien and the improvement of the National Taiwan University's teaching staff], *Guoshiguan Xueshu Jikan* 12 (2007): 205–44.

<sup>38</sup> Zhang Peng-yuan, 'Cong taiwan kan zhongmei jinsanshinian zhi xueshujiailiu' [Examining U.S.–Taiwan educational exchanges in the past thirty years from Taiwan], *Hanxue Yanjiu* [Chinese Studies] 2, no. 1 (1984): 23–56; Zhao Qi-na, 'Guancha meiguo: taiwan jingying bixia de meiguo xingxiang yu jiaoyu jiaohuanjihua, 1950–1970' [Observing America: American images in Taiwan elites' writings and American educational exchange programmes, 1950–1970], *Taida Lishi Xuebao* [Historical Inquiry] 48 (December, 2011): 97–163; Zhao Qi-na, 'Meiguo zhengfu zai taiwan de jiaoyu yu wenhua jiaoliuhudong, 1951–1970' [The US Government's cultural and educational exchange activities in Taiwan, 1951–1970], *Oumei Yanjiu* [Euramerica] 31, no. 1 (March 2001): 79–127.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Guan Mei-rong and Wang Wen-long, 'Jiangzhongzheng jiaoyuguan yu yijiuwuling niandai taiwan-jiaoyu' [Educational thought of Chiang Kai-shek and Taiwan education in the 1950s], in *Chongqiluzao: Jiangzhongzheng yu Yijiuwuling niandai de Taiwan* [Making a fresh start: Chiang Kai-shek and Taiwan in the 1950s] (Taipei: National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, 2013), 191–229.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Yang Tsui-hwa, 'Hushi dui Taiwan kexue fazhan de tuidong: xueshuduli mengxiang de yanxu [Hu Shih and the promotion of scientific development in Taiwan: keeping the ideal of academic independence alive], *Hanxue Yanjiu* 20, no. 2 (December 2002): 327–52; Yang Tsui-hwa, 'Taiwan kezhengce de xiandai: Wudayou yu kedaohui' [Planning science and technology in Taiwan: Wu Ta-you and the Commission for Science Development], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 10, no. 2 (December 2003): 67–110.

<sup>41</sup> Kuo Shih-ching, 'Ershishiji xiehe junyi zai taiwan' [Medical surgeons from Peking Union Medical College in Taiwan], *Taiwan Yixue Renwen Xuekan* [Formosan Journal of Medical Humanities] 15/16 (September 2015): 114–60; Liu Shi-yung and Kuo Shih-ching, 'Linkesheng, 1897–1969: anshenghuiying de zhongyanyuan yuanshi yu guofangyixueyuan yuanzhang' [Robert K. S. Lim, 1897–1969: academician of Academia Sinica and chancellor of National Defence Medical Center in a Silent Shadow], *Taiwanshi Yanjiu* 19, no. 4 (December 2012): 141–205.

**Table 4.** Singapore histories of education

	Domicile status of author					
	Local	Sojourner	Expatriate	Outsider	Unknown	Total
1960s to 1990s	12 (57%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	6 (29%)	1 (5%)	21 (100%)
2000s and 2010s	5 (22%)	4 (17%)	3 (13%)	11 (48%)	0 (0%)	23 (100%)
All periods	17 (39%)	4 (9%)	5 (11%)	17 (39%)	1 (2%)	44 (100%)
Period researched	No. of items					
Single-period studies						
Pre-World War Two (before 1942)	13 (30%)					
Japanese Occupation (1942 to 1945)	2 (5%)					
Decolonisation (1945 to 1965)	13 (30%)					
Postcolonial (after 1965)	1 (2%)					
Sub-total	29 (66%)					
Cross-era studies						
1. Pre-war to decolonisation	4 (9%)					
2. Decolonisation to postcolonial	9 (20%)					
3. Pre-war to Postcolonial	2 (5%)					
Sub-total	15 (34%)					
Grand total	44 (100%)					

educational history dominated by external agents and divided into a powerful English section and a subordinated Chinese one.

Table 4 shows that the historians studying Singapore's educational history became progressively non-local. From the 1960s to the 1990s, more than half (12 of 21) of the sampled items of literature were written by locals; in the 2000s and 2010s, however, only about one-fifth (five of 23, or 22%) were by them, while those by sojourner scholars increased from zero to four (17%), and about half (11 items, or 48%) were produced by outsiders. These figures hint that local Singaporeans are withdrawing from researching their own educational history, and that the amount of literature on Singapore is maintained only because the void vacated by local scholars has been filled by a large enough number of scholars from outside.

The postcolonial state's hostility towards free historical inquiry, and its resultant refusal to make accessible archival materials dating from after 1965, have also affected educational history by skewing historians' choices over the historical periods to research. Table 4 indicates that most (29 of 44, or 65%) works in the sample on Singapore are single-era studies on one of four periods – the pre-Second World War era, the Japanese years, the two post-war decolonisation decades, and the period after Singapore became independent and completely under the PAP in 1965 – and 15 items (35%) cut across these periods. The decolonisation decades – when Singapore was still under London's control and most archival data was made available by the British under certain rules – is the most-studied period among the four, covered by 26 (60%) items, half of them single-era and half cross-period. The postcolonial period, in sharp contrast, has been vastly under-researched, probably because of the unavailability of materials and scholars' fear of running foul of the PAP authorities. Only one item – an article on student activism at Singapore Polytechnic in the 1970s by a Singaporean scholar working in Australia and depending heavily on data from interviews – focuses exclusively on the post-independence years.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Loh Kah Seng, 'Polytechnicians and Technocrats: Sources, Limits, and Possibilities of Student Activism in 1970s Singapore', *Southeast Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2018): 39–63.



Furthermore, though the post-1965 phase also features in 11 cross-era historiographies, the related narratives are much briefer than those on earlier phases, often comprising a short epilogue appended to a main text concerning the pre-independence periods.<sup>43</sup>

The postcolonial state's policies also modified Singapore's educational history by creating an intellectual field divided by a robust English-language sector and a marginalised Chinese-language one. Educational histories of Singapore published in English outnumber those in Chinese – Table 2 indicates that almost three-quarters (32, or 73%) of the 44 pieces of literature on Singapore were published in English, with only 12 (27%) in Chinese. Authors of these two categories of literature are linguistically segregated. Among the 26 scholars producing the 44 studies, only three – two of them outsiders from Hong Kong – have published in both English and Chinese. Few authors in the sample are linguistically capable of drawing on both English and Chinese sources: most of the English-medium literature cites exclusively or predominantly English materials, which is not a trivial defect, given that most of these works examine the decolonisation period, when the political influence of the Chinese-speaking masses was at its zenith. Meanwhile, many publications in Chinese relied chiefly on Chinese sources and rarely, if ever, consulted English materials.

Moreover, the two categories of historian are divided by their diametrically opposed outlooks. The horizons of scholars publishing in Chinese appear to be restricted, as they seldom look beyond the Chinese education sector to study English, Malay and Tamil schools – the other institutions within Singapore's education system. Among the 12 pieces of Chinese literature in the database, 10 cover topics such as *si-shu* (traditional Chinese schools) in early nineteenth-century British Malaya,<sup>44</sup> the founding of the first Chinese middle school in Singapore in 1919,<sup>45</sup> and political struggles over the Nanyang University.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, when external factors related to Singapore's schools are discussed, the Chinese literature concentrates only on influences from mainland China and other Chinese societies such as Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>47</sup> Historians writing in English, in sharp contrast, are more broad-minded. First, some authors using English have crossed the border to study non-English institutions,

<sup>43</sup>For instance, a 20-page article on Singapore Polytechnic from 1950s to the early 1970s dedicates only one page to the post-1965 years: Loh Kah Seng, 'Rupture and Adaptation: British Technical Expertise to the Singapore Polytechnic and the Transition to a Nation-State', *History of Education* 44, no. 5 (2015): 575–94.

<sup>44</sup>Teh Liang Soo, 'Lun xinma zaoqide sishu jiaoyu' [On early Chinese *Sishu* education in Singapore and Malaya], *Asian Culture* 20 (1996): 136–46.

<sup>45</sup>Wang Kang Ding, 'Yijiuyijiunian xinjiapo nanyang huaqiaozhongxue chuanguanbian nanyanggedi qiaojiao fazhan shikuang tanxi' [Chinese education in Southeast Asia before the foundation of the Chinese High School in Singapore in 1919], *Nanyang Xuebao* [Journal of South Seas Society] 57/58 (2006): 23–65; Yeap Chong Leng, 'Nanyang huaqiaozhongxue de chuanshe: gainian de chansheng yanjin yu xianshi' [The establishment of the Nanyang Chinese High School], *Asian Culture* 16 (1992): 125–36.

<sup>46</sup>See, for instance, Khe Su Lin, *Lixiang yu Xianshi: Nanyangdaxue Xueshenghui Yanjiu, 1956–1964* [Ideal and reality: Student Union of Nanyang University, 1956–1965] (Singapore: Centre for Chinese Language and Culture, Nanyang Technological University, 2006); Zhou Zhaocheng, *Yuyan, Zhengzhi yu Guojiahua: Nanyangdaxue yu Xinjiapo Zhengfu Guanxi, 1953–1968* [Language, politics, and nationalisation: the relations between Nanyang University and the Singapore Government, 1953–1968] (Singapore: Centre for Chinese Language and Culture, Nanyang Technological University, 2012).

<sup>47</sup>Luo Le-ran, 'Boyue yu zhuanze: xinjiapo de huawenjiayou yu zhongguo daxue jiaoyu de guanlianxing' [Extensiveness and professionalisation: the relationship between university education in China and Chinese language education in Singapore], *Nanyang Xuebao* 73 (September 2019): 179–205; Yeap Beng Leng, 'Chenjiageng chuanguan nanyang huaqiao shifanxuexiao shimo' [Tan Kah Kee and the Nanyang Normal School], *Asian Culture* 10 (1987): 64–73; Yeap Beng Leng, 'Chenjiageng ban nanyanghuaqiao shuichanhanghai xuexiao shimo' [The founding of Nanyang Overseas Chinese Maritime and Navigation School by Tan Kah Kee], *Asian Culture* 14 (1990): 150–60.

including Chinese schools.<sup>48</sup> Some have looked at the whole Singaporean education system, tracing the genesis, development and influences of the school system fragmented by institutions teaching in different languages and upholding the cultural traditions of diverse ethnic groups.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, historical studies written in English tend to be better connected with the wider world of historical scholarship. For instance, Kevin Blackburn, an Australian expatriate, invokes the Halévy thesis – a theory advanced by French historian Élie Halévy to explain Methodism's role in safeguarding the social order in nineteenth-century England – to explicate how Methodist schools in Singapore helped stabilise British imperial rule by inducing the relatively well-off Chinese to focus on personal advancement.<sup>50</sup> Janice N. Brownfoot, from Britain, assesses how educational enterprises operated by European women in British Malaya altered the consciousness of colonised females and subsequently disrupted the colonial order.<sup>51</sup> My own work has used the history of Chinese schools in Singapore – sometimes in conjunction with the comparative case of Hong Kong – to interrogate and modify the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and British sociologist Basil Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the narrative style of the English literature is more polemical than its Chinese counterparts. For instance, through their research on student activists in the 1950s and 1960s at the University of Malaya – the first university in Singapore, an English institution founded by the British in 1948 – Huang Jianli, Loh Kah Seng and Yeo Kim Wah debunk an oversimplified view of Singapore history that unilaterally emphasises the activism of Chinese-educated students.<sup>53</sup> Blackburn traces the origin of Singapore's education–economic nexus to the British colonial period and disputes the official narrative that Singapore's economic boom began only after the PAP came to power.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, through comparing pedagogies, curricula and the extra-curricular activities of Chinese and English schools from the 1850s through to the 1960s, Karen M. Teoh

<sup>48</sup> Lee Ting Hui, 'The Anti-Japanese War in China: Support from Chinese Schools in Malaya in 1937–41', *Asian Culture* 17 (1993): 140–8; Karen M. Teoh, *Schooling Diaspora: Women, Education, and the Overseas Chinese in British Malaya and Singapore, 1850s–1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Wong, *Hegemonies Compared*.

<sup>49</sup> Saravanan Gopinathan, *Towards a National System of Education in Singapore, 1945–1973* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1974); Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya, 1874–1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975); H. E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore: Educational Policies and Social Change, 1819–1972* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978).

<sup>50</sup> Kevin Blackburn and Pauline Fong Lai Leong, 'Methodist Education and the Social Status of the Straits Chinese in Colonial Singapore (1886–1914)', *Paedagogica Historica* 35, no. 2 (1999): 333–57.

<sup>51</sup> Janice N. Brownfoot, 'Sisters under the Skin: Imperialism and the Emancipation of Women in Malaya, c.1891–1941', in *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 46–73.

<sup>52</sup> Wong, *Hegemonies Compared*; Wong, 'Comparing State Hegemonies'; Ting-Hong Wong, 'Institutionally Incorporated, Symbolically un-Remade: State Reform of Chinese Schools in Postwar Singapore', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 5 (2006): 633–50; Ting-Hong Wong, 'Reappraising the Pedagogic Device's Evaluative Rules: State-Reformed Examinations of Chinese Middle Schools in Singapore', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38, no. 3 (2017): 364–83.

<sup>53</sup> Huang Jianli, 'The Young Pathfinders: Portrayal of Student Political Activism', in *Path Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2008), 188–205; Loh Kah Seng, *The University Socialist Club and the Contest for Malaya: Tangled Strands of Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Yeo Kim Wah, 'Student Politics in University of Malaya, 1949–51', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1992): 346–80; Yeo Kim Wah, 'Joining the Communist Underground: The Conversion of English-Educated Radicals to Communism in Singapore, June 1948–January 1951', *Journal of Malaysian Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* 67, part 1 (1994): 29–59.

<sup>54</sup> Kevin Blackburn, *Education, Industrialisation, and the End of Empire in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

**Table 5.** Hong Kong histories of education

	Works in		
Decade of publication	English	Chinese	Total
1970s	1	0	1 (1%)
1980s	5	2	7 (11%)
1990s	5	3	8 (13%)
2000s	21	7	28 (44%)
2010–2020	9	10	19 (30%)
Total	41 (65%)	22 (35%)	63 (100%)
Domicile status			
Local	12 (29%)	8 (33%)	20 (32%)
Sojourner	7 (17%)	2 (9%)	9 (14%)
Expatriate	19 (46%)	0 (0%)	19 (30%)
Outsider	3 (7%)	12 (55%)	15 (24%)
Total	41 (100%)	22 (100%)	63 (100%)

Author location by period	Local	Sojourner	Expatriate	Outsider	Total
1970s–1990s	6 (38%)	1 (6%)	4 (25%)	5 (31%)	16 (100%)
2000s–2021	14 (30%)	8 (17%)	15 (32%)	10 (21%)	47 (100%)
Total	20 (32%)	9 (14%)	19 (30%)	15 (24%)	63 (100%)

shows that the model of femininity propagated by Singapore's Chinese schools after the May Fourth Movement in China – a campaign for national rejuvenation through science and democracy – was more avant-garde than that of English schools, which clung to a conservative Victorian model of femininity. Teoh contests the received view that western education institutions advanced modernity while eastern ones embraced traditionalism.<sup>55</sup>

### Hong Kong: history of education in an ex-British colony now part of China

Historical inquiry into Hong Kong's education was vibrant during the late British and early post-1997 periods. As Hong Kong remained liberal in the late British and first post-changeover decade, many Hongkonger and expatriate historians who were curious about the city in the face of an uncertain future committed themselves to studying its past. Their endeavours, together with increased involvement of scholars from China, boosted publications on Hong Kong's educational history: the number of Hong Kong educational histories rose from seven in the 1980s to 28 in the 2000s, with more than 70% of these items appearing after 1997, as may be seen in [Table 5](#).

Moreover, a considerable number of educational histories have been published in Chinese, both because of Hong Kong's merger with China in 1997 – a development elevating the status of the Chinese language – and, as mentioned earlier, the bilingual education policies of the British, which ensured that educated Hong Kong Chinese were also competent in the Chinese language. Regardless of the numerical superiority of the English-medium literature, as indicated in [Table 5](#), the number of Chinese-language studies, though only one-third of the total, has continued to rise over time and matched the amount of English-medium literature in the 2010s.

The literature on Hong Kong in both English and Chinese has been produced by authors with discernible backgrounds. [Table 5](#) discloses that almost half (19 of 41, 46%)

<sup>55</sup>Teoh, *Schooling Diaspora*.

of the English items were written by expatriates from the West (seven of 10 expatriates from Britain, and one each from Australia, the United States and Germany), while more than half (12 of 22) of the items in Chinese were written by Chinese outsiders (10 in total, nine living in China and one in Canada). Hongkongers are the only scholars straddling the English and Chinese sections, as local and sojourner scholars combined published more than 40% of the items in both English and Chinese.

All works of the expatriate scholars have been published in English, with almost none showing in their publications that they have sufficient Chinese-language proficiency to liberally consult Chinese sources. This linguistic limitation restricts both their research topics and their competence in grappling with the roles of the Chinese, the demographic majority, in the educational development of Hong Kong.<sup>56</sup> This deficiency notwithstanding, expatriate historians have made crucial contributions to the study of Hong Kong's education. First, some expatriates have brought in valuable academic traditions and standards from the West. For instance, Peter Cunich of the History Department of Hong Kong University (HKU), a Cambridge-educated Australian, followed the model of university history launched by the University of Oxford when asked by the HKU authorities in the late 1990s to compile a volume for the university's nineteenth anniversary.<sup>57</sup> The Oxford paradigm prescribes exploring both the triumphs and failures of the institutions in the most scholarly and objective manner, instead of one-sidedly praising the institution's achievements, as many previous university histories do. Cunich's insistence on this approach brought about a highly scholarly and well-balanced edited volume with carefully researched and insightful articles covering many aspects of the university in its first half-century. Moreover, when his monograph on HKU's history came out a decade later in 2011, Cunich reiterated at the book launch that academic independence is the *sine qua non* for doing good history and thanked the HKU for respecting his autonomy as he undertook the research for the book.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, expatriate historians have linked the case of Hong Kong education with debates in the western academic world and situated it against larger regional and transnational contexts. For instance, Anthony Sweeting and Edward Vickers, as well as Stephen Evans – all British scholars – use the example of colonial Hong Kong's language policy to intervene in the debates over cultural imperialism initiated by western scholars (though the versions of cultural imperialism they interrogated are crude and outdated).<sup>59</sup> Cunich uncovers how struggles between missionary bodies in Britain led to the HKU's founding of the Arts Faculty and the expansion of residential facilities for students in its earliest decades.<sup>60</sup> Bert Becker, a historian of diplomacy from Germany, examined the

<sup>56</sup>The volume by Anthony Sweeting, who is Welsh, on post-war Hong Kong education is a case in point. Many policies of the British in early post-war Hong Kong were responsive to the sentiments and moves of the Chinese residents. Relying predominantly on English sources, however, Sweeting's portrayal of Hong Kong's education politics is far less nuanced than those using both English and Chinese materials extensively. See Anthony Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed: The Reconstruction of Education in Post-War Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>57</sup>Peter Cunich, 'Preface', in *An Impossible Dream: Hong Kong University from Foundation to Re-Establishment, 1910–1950*, ed. Chan Lau Kit-Ching and Peter Cunich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), x–xi.

<sup>58</sup>Cunich's book-launch speech for his *A History of the University of the Hong Kong, Vol. 1, 1911–1945* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnfXtoiaiSs> (accessed January 12, 2022).

<sup>59</sup>Stephen Evans, 'The Introduction of English-Language Education in Early Colonial Hong Kong', *History of Education* 37, no. 3 (2008): 383–408; Anthony Sweeting and Edward Vickers, 'Language and the History of Colonial Education: The Case of Hong Kong', *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 1–40.

<sup>60</sup>Peter Cunich, 'Godliness and Good Learning: The British Missionary Societies and HKU', in Kit-Ching and Cunich, *An Impossible Dream*, 39–64.

effects of Anglo-German educational rivalry in China on the founding of the HKU.<sup>61</sup> Mary Turnbull, a British scholar with extensive experience in Singapore and Malaysia, explored how donations and students from British Malaya affected the growth of the HKU in its first half century.<sup>62</sup>

Although expatriates have made significant contributions to scholarship of Hong Kong's educational history, it is uncertain whether they can continue to bring in academic traditions from the West, uphold the standards and autonomy of academia and freely explore the territory's educational past under the current political situation in Hong Kong.

In contrast to the precarious position of expatriate scholars, outsider scholars' presence in Hong Kong's history of education is becoming increasingly visible. Table 5 suggests that outsiders have produced 15 items, almost one-quarter, of the literature in the sample. Among the pieces they published, most (12) were written in Chinese by Chinese scholars working in China. These publications by Chinese outsiders, almost none with a previous record of researching Hong Kong, constitute more than half (55%) of the 22 Hong Kong histories published in Chinese. Most of these works appeared after Hong Kong entered the period of sovereignty transition – one in 1989, and the rest in 1997 and later.

The China outsiders' works show room for improvement. Many of their journal articles – some less than 10 pages long – are far too short for nuanced and source-grounded historical argument. Some of them repeat topics already researched by Hongkonger and expatriate scholars – such as western-style schools in early colonial decades,<sup>63</sup> the development of HKU's Chinese Studies programme in the interwar years,<sup>64</sup> re-establishment of the school system after the Second World War<sup>65</sup> and the United States's role in the founding of the Chinese University in the 1960s<sup>66</sup> – without advancing novel arguments. Many rely on only a limited amount of published, official materials, failing to demonstrate adequate mastery of related secondary materials, and seldom use archival sources – especially from the archives of Hong Kong and Great Britain.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Chinese outsiders' analyses of Hong Kong education have been incapacitated by politics. For instance, in an article on education in Japanese-ruled Hong Kong, the author, encumbered by Chinese nationalistic sentiment, one-sidedly deprecates the

<sup>61</sup>Bert Becker, 'The "German Factor" in the Founding of the University of Hong Kong', in Kit-Ching and Cunich, *An Impossible Dream*, 23–37.

<sup>62</sup>C. Mary Turnbull, 'The Malayan Connection', in Kit-Ching and Cunich, *An Impossible Dream*, 99–118.

<sup>63</sup>Liu Shuyong, 'Shijiushiji xianggang xishixuexiao lishipingjia' [Western-style schools in nineteenth-century Hong Kong: an appraisal], *Lishi Yanjiu* [Study of History] 202 (December 1989): 38–48.

<sup>64</sup>He Lifang and Fang Jun, 'Laijixi yu zaoqi xianggang zhongwenjiaoyu de fazhan' [Lai Ji-xi and the development of Chinese education in early twentieth-century Hong Kong], *Beijing Shifandaxue Xuebao, Shehuikexueban* [Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences)] 236 (2012): 38–45.

<sup>65</sup>Ding Bangping, 'Lun zhanhou xianggangjiaoyu de fazhan yu gaige' [Development and reform of education in post-war Hong Kong], *Bijiaojiaoyu Yanjiu* [Comparative Education Research] 4 (1997): 1–5; Zou Weixin, 'Zhanhouchuqi xianggang jiaoyuweiji ji gangyingzhengfu duice, 1945–1955' [Education crisis and the British Hong Kong Government's counter-measures in the early post-war period], *Mudanjiang Shifanxueyuan Xuebao, Zhesheban* [Journal of Mudanjiang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)] 135 (2006): 71–3.

<sup>66</sup>Zhang Yang, 'Yazhoujijinhui: xianggang zhongwendaxue chuangjian beihoude meiguo tuishou' [The Asia Foundation: the US and the establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong], *Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiu* [Contemporary China History Studies] 22, no. 2 (March 2015): 91–102.

<sup>67</sup>Only two pieces by China outsiders have used archival materials: Cao Bihong, 'Rijushiqi de xianggang zhimin jiaoyu' [Colonial education in Japanese-occupied Hong Kong], *Kangri Zhanzheng Yanjiu* [Research on the anti-Japanese War] 1 (2006), 64–86; Zhang, 'Yazhou jijinhui'. The former, on Hong Kong education under Japanese rule, quotes (perfunctorily) classified government files left behind by the KMT when they fled to Taiwan, now deposited in the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, China. The latter, on the Asia Foundation of the US and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, uses materials from the Asia Foundation Records housed in the Hoover Institute Archives of Stanford University.

Japanese era as a dark age of destructions and oppression. This position hinders him from capturing the nuanced and contradictory effects of Japanese colonisation on schools in Hong Kong.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the apolitical approach of history writing adopted by *Xianggang Jiaoyu Tongshi* (General History of Hong Kong Education), a 640-page volume edited under the leadership of Fang Jun from China – a PhD from the University of Toronto, and a historian of the Ming Dynasty now teaching in Canada – delivers an extremely biased and shallow picture of Hong Kong's education history. The book's chapters covering the post-Second World War decades provide only fragmentary information on the evolution of the educational administrative system and the nomenclatures of different levels of schools. They completely ignore many political events that had profound ramifications for Hong Kong's schools, such as the assumption of power by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the subsequent rivalry between supporters of Beijing and Taipei in the colony, and the riots in 1966 and 1967 – turbulences attributable to the Cultural Revolution in China and the instigation of pro-Beijing elements in the colony. Furthermore, probably because of the Beijing authorities' dread of the unsettling effects of student activism, the volume gives perfunctory treatment to student movements in Hong Kong – some protesting against the corruption and injustice of the school authorities and the British administration, and some provoked by politics in China, such as the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and the democratic movement and massacre in Beijing in 1989.<sup>69</sup> Omitting these sensitive issues – probably caused by both the contributors' insufficient mastery of Hong Kong history and fear of recrimination by taking an 'incorrect' political position – undermines the volume's value in understanding Hong Kong education.

Hongkonger scholars are the most consistent tenders of the field of Hong Kong educational history. Table 5 reveals that local and sojourner scholars combined have contributed 46% of Hong Kong histories over time: even though after 2000 the percentage of local scholars' contributions dipped slightly, from 38% to 30%, the decline was compensated for by the increased outputs of sojourner scholars. Thanks to the bilingual education policies begun in the colonial period and continued after 1997, most Hongkonger scholars straddle the western and the Chinese worlds – at least 10 of the 18 Hongkonger scholars (16 locals and two sojourners) have published in both English and Chinese and most can comfortably use research materials in both languages.

Working proficiency in two languages therefore gives Hongkonger historians an edge over both the expatriate and the outsider scholars of Hong Kong education history. First, being able to freely use English materials and connect with the western academic world, Hongkonger scholars can explore the western impacts on education in Hong Kong and intervene in debates in educational history outside – as Cheng Mei-bao has done by showing how the British return of their share of the Boxer Indemnity changed the Chinese Studies programme of the University of Hong Kong in the 1920s;<sup>70</sup> Grace

<sup>68</sup>Cao, 'Rijushiqi de xianggang zhiminjiaoyu'.

<sup>69</sup>This volume was published by Ling Kee Publishing Company, a publisher of textbooks for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong in 2008, and then in 2010 by the Hunan People's Press in China: Fang Jun and Xiong Xianjun, *Xianggang Jiaoyu Tongshi* [A general history of Hong Kong education] (Hong Kong: Ling Kee Publishing Company, 2008).

<sup>70</sup>Cheng Meibao, 'Gengzipeikuan yu xianggangdaxue de zhongwenjiaoyu' [The Boxer Indemnity and the education of Chinese culture in Hong Kong University], *Zhongshandaxue Xuebao* (Shehui Kexue) [Journal of Zhongshan University (Social Sciences)] 6 (1998): 60–73.



Chou, by documenting the role of American non-governmental organisations on Hong Kong's higher education in the 1950s;<sup>71</sup> Anita Chan, by demonstrating the combined effect of colonialism and gender and racial politics on teaching professionals in Hong Kong;<sup>72</sup> and myself, through explicating the effects of the British Empire's dismantlement on the governance of Hong Kong Polytechnic.<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, I have also enlisted the case of the educational development of post-war Hong Kong to interrogate western literature using Gramsci's theory of hegemony and to intervene in debates on education privatisation.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the experience of growing up locally, coupled with their familiarity with the preserved artefacts of Chinese language and culture, stands Hongkonger scholars in good stead to study Hong Kong education from below. For instance, my own work, written in Taiwan, examines 'black market' schools in post-war Hong Kong;<sup>75</sup> and the late Lu Hongji, who worked in Canada, chronicled the history of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union – the largest teachers' union in Hong Kong and a pro-democracy association dissolved in August 2021, a year after the imposition of the National Security Law – in his three-volume magnum opus published in 2016. Lu's volumes, proclaimed as being written from the standpoint of the Hong Kong people, recount the development of the teachers' union and its role in the forming of civil society since its founding in the early 1970s.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, bilingual and bicultural Hongkonger researchers are better poised than others to examine how the combined effects of factors from China, the West and inside colonial society shaped education in Hong Kong. For example, Ng-Lun Ngai-ha, a veteran Hong Kong educational historian, demonstrates how the factors related to political change in China (such as reforms and political upheavals in late-Qing and the Double Tenth Revolution in 1911), educational developments in Great Britain (the enactment of Forster's Education Act in 1870, for example), and the evolution of the local Chinese community (the emergence of a more settled community of Chinese elites in the colony) converged to influence the Hong Kong colonial government's policies for the medium of instruction, funding and school supervision in the early twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> Finally, as they are not blinded by any nationalistic zeal (so far), Hongkonger scholars growing up at the meeting point of the East and the West are well positioned to observe the subtle and nuanced connections among culture, education

<sup>71</sup> Grace Ai-Ling Chou, 'Cultural Education as Containment of Communism: The Ambivalent Position of American NGOs in Hong Kong in the 1950s', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 2 (2010): 3–28.

<sup>72</sup> Anita Kit-wa Chan, 'From "Civilizing the Young" to a "Dead-End Job": Gender, Teaching, and the Politics of Colonial Rule in Hong Kong (1841–1970)', *History of Education* 41, no. 4 (2012): 495–514.

<sup>73</sup> Ting-Hong Wong, 'Crossing the Binary Line: The Founding of the Polytechnic in Colonial Hong Kong', *History of Education* 43, no. 4 (2014): 524–41.

<sup>74</sup> Wong, *Hegemonies Compared*; Ting-Hong Wong, 'The Unintended Hegemonic Effects of a Limited Concession: Institutional Incorporation of Chinese Schools in Postwar Hong Kong', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33, no. 4 (2012): 587–606; Ting-Hong Wong, 'Social Foundations of Public–Private Partnerships in Education: The Historical Cases of Postwar Singapore and Hong Kong', *History of Education* 44, no. 2 (2015): 207–24.

<sup>75</sup> Ting-Hong Wong, 'Colonial State Entrapped: The Problem of Unregistered Schools in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 3 (2011): 297–320.

<sup>76</sup> Lu Hongji, *Zuokan Yunqishi: Yiben Xianggangren de Jiaoxieshi* [A people's history of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union], vol. 3 (Hong Kong: City University Press, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Ng Lun Ngai-ha, 'Consolidation of the Government Administration and Supervision of Schools in Hong Kong', *Journal of the Chinese University of Hong Kong* 4, no. 1 (1977): 159–81; Ng Lun Ngai-ha, *Interactions of East and West: Development of Public Education in Early Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984).



and power in Hong Kong – as both Luk and myself have shown in our work on the complicity of Chinese culture in maintaining British colonial rule in Hong Kong.<sup>78</sup>

Regardless of these strengthens of Hongkonger historians, deteriorating political conditions currently may hinder them from realising their full potential and making further and more valuable contributions to research on educational history. With the Chinese authorities becoming increasingly resolute in imposing a Chinese nationalistic identity on Hong Kong's people, historians are facing ever-escalating pressure to align themselves with Beijing's official discourse concerning Hong Kong history. The regime's distrust of Hong Kong's people and its hostility to free intellectual inquiry may prompt it to tighten control over access to public archives – as the Singapore government did after 1965. These two factors combined are likely to restrict historical materials for research, intimidate scholars into self-censorship and force local historians to flee the territory.

### Concluding remarks

As the total global geographical areas that have recently been subjected to colonial rule are arguably larger than those that have not, previous negligence by scholars of the impacts of postcolonial conditions on education history has cost us salient insights into knowledge production on the history of education in many parts of the world. To take the first steps to tackle this long overdue research agenda, I have demonstrated the connections between postcoloniality and research in the history of education in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. This article has shown that postcolonial conditions do shape historical inquiry into education, as factors such as lingering imperial influences and their tensions with anti-colonial forces, the extent of the cultural hybridity of colonial and postcolonial elites, the identities that emerged amid decolonisation and political developments after power transfer have ramifications for matters such as who researches the educational pasts of ex-dependencies, for whom and what the studies are conducted, which historical periods are being focused on, in which languages and venues the research products are published, and to what extent archival materials are available for historical investigation and scholars are given freedom to study history.

The findings of this article have important implications for the circulation of knowledge of educational history in the global academic world. These findings suggest that experiences of colonial subjugation and decolonisation have affected the possibilities for knowledge produced in various countries and territories to appear in western academic forums. In postcolonial societies descending into authoritarianism or subjugated to a new metropolis, the regimes typically suppress free historical inquiry, commission researchers to produce academic outputs that serve the authorities' political agendas and withhold archival materials from scholars. These undemocratic and neocolonial conditions subordinate scholarship to politics and, consequently, limit the production of histories of education that are publishable in serious academic outlets in the West.

Moreover, the fragmentation of postcolonial academic fields by agents with different types of cultural and linguistic capital affect the likelihood that their research products will be distributed transnationally. The works of scholars embodying the cultural capital

<sup>78</sup>Hung-Kay Bernard Luk, 'Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism', *Comparative Education Review* 35, no. 4 (1991): 650–68; Wong, *Hegemonies Compared*.

of western colonisers – whether from outside or not – are more likely to appear in outlets in the West, compared with those from scholars who have only the language of the colonised. Expatriate and outsider scholars from the West can make crucial contributions by bringing in valuable western scholarly standards and connecting the historical cases of the ex-dependencies to the intellectual debates happening in wider transnational contexts. Nevertheless, unless these scholars are sufficiently culturally and linguistically hybrid – which involves mastering the language of the colonised majority – their research agendas and approaches to writing the educational histories of the former colonies will be circumscribed. Although their research products circulating in channels in the West are valuable, they are unlikely to adequately reveal the educational experiences of the colonised masses and the ways in which forces from below have shaped education during the colonial period and afterwards.

Finally, the provenance of the former colonisers also affects the dissemination of knowledge concerning educational history that is produced by scholars in postcolonial societies in the West. This article has demonstrated that because of the dominance of the Chinese language entrenched by the Chinese KMT invaders after the Second World War and the lingering pull of Japan, the coloniser before the KMT, the field of educational history in Taiwan has gravitated more towards the academic world of Japan than towards the West, and the histories of education produced there have mostly been written in Chinese. The conditions that emerged after colonisation by two Oriental powers resulted in a burgeoning field of educational history with a high yield of solid and useful works that sadly may not have the chance to appear in leading western venues of education history such as *History of Education*, *History of Education Quarterly* and *Paedagogica Historica*, and thereby inspire readers in the Anglophone world.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on contributor

*Ting-Hong Wong* is a Research Fellow in the Sociology Institute of Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He studies the impacts of imperialism and colonialism on education in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. His publications appear in journals such as the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *History of Education* and *History of Education Quarterly*. He spent a year in 2022 in Washington, DC, to research the effects of American assistance on education in post-Second World War Taiwan.