

**For discussion on 9 February 2015**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education**

**Chinese History Education in Hong Kong**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the Chinese History curriculum in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Chinese history education is stipulated as compulsory at the junior secondary level by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) in 2001, and has since been under continuous refinement during its implementation. The CDC set up an ad hoc Committee in May 2014 to review and revise the two junior secondary Chinese History and History curricula. Consultations with schools and stakeholders will be conducted in mid-2015. Members are also presented with such information in this paper.

**Background**

2. Since the 60s in the last century, secondary schools in Hong Kong have begun to offer Chinese History. From then on, a majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong have been offering two independent history subjects, namely Chinese History and History (with contents in world history). Before reunification with the Mainland, the then Education Department had not stipulated Chinese History as a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level.<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, pre-vocational secondary schools seldom offered Chinese History.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Syllabuses For Secondary Schools - Chinese History Secondary I-III, 1997* (中國歷史科課程綱要 中一至中三 (1997)) compiled by the Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council was “recommended” for use in schools by the then Education Department. It recommended that the teaching periods in Chinese History should not be fewer than two periods per week, but had not stipulated that Chinese History should be a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Guide to the Secondary 1 to 5 Curriculum* prepared by the Curriculum Development Council, Chinese History is an elective subject among the “Humanities subject group” in grammar schools and technical schools (p.22-23), and Chinese History is not an option for pre-vocational schools (p.24) (refer to Appendix I).

3. In the curriculum guide *Learning to learn: The Way Forward in Curriculum Development* promulgated by the Curriculum Development Council in 2001, it is stipulated that all junior secondary students will study Chinese history and culture (refer to “Appendix II”). Currently General Studies for primary schools includes various Chinese history elements such as historical figures, dynasties and stories. It lays the foundation for junior secondary Chinese history education. For the junior secondary level, *The Personal, Social & Humanities Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-Secondary 3)* further lists out the essential learning contents in Chinese history and Chinese culture. Not only is the study of Chinese history made compulsory therein, it is also stipulated that its minimum lesson hours should not be less than one quarter of the total curriculum time spent on that key learning area, (refer to “Appendix III”), i.e. about 2 periods per week for each form. As for the senior secondary level, Chinese History has always been an elective subject. After the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure, the position of Chinese History as an independent elective subject has not been changed. Appendix IV provides facts and illustrations to rectify some biases or unfounded information.

### **Education Bureau (EDB) attaches importance to Chinese history education**

*Chinese history is compulsory for primary and junior secondary levels*

4. **Primary level:** Chinese history elements are included in the learning strand of “National identity and Chinese culture” in General Studies for Primary Schools. At the lower primary level, the focus is to help students know the historical figures and events that had far-reaching impact on Chinese history as well as some significant or interesting current affairs/events of the country. As for the upper primary level, the focus is put on understanding important dynasties and chronology in Chinese history, getting to know the characteristic features of ancient Chinese civilization, the historical figures and stories which had great impact on Chinese history, the historical events which had influenced the society today and the recent developments of the country etc. It is expected that students’ knowledge of their motherland will be enriched and their national identity enhanced, thereby providing a foundation for junior secondary Chinese history education.

5. **Junior secondary level:** currently 88% of secondary schools offer Chinese History as an independent subject. A dynastic chronological approach is adopted to facilitate students’ understanding of the changes in the rise and decline of dynastic regimes in different periods. This type of curriculum arrangement (known as independent subject mode) has been adopted for several decades in Hong Kong. However, during the process of implementing Chinese

history education, individual schools (totally 12% of schools) have developed two other curriculum modes, namely “the curriculum mode of linking two histories”, in which the development of Chinese history serves as the backbone, with the addition of world history elements; and an “integrated curriculum mode” which organises the contents of Chinese history with reference to various themes. Through these modes, students can also study Chinese history well. EDB sees merits in the curriculum modes outlined above and agrees to let schools select the mode that can best address their students’ needs, interest and ability as well as their teachers’ expertise and school contexts. At present all junior secondary students are studying Chinese history and a majority of schools are adopting the independent subject mode (i.e. dynastic chronological approach). Chinese history is also taught in the remaining schools, though different curriculum modes are being adopted.

### *Continuous refinement of senior secondary Chinese History*

6. **Senior secondary level:** Chinese History has always been one of the electives in the senior secondary curriculum. According to statistics, nearly 90% of secondary schools offer Chinese History for students to choose. In the Compulsory Part of senior secondary Chinese History curriculum, the contents of political history is chronologically arranged, and evenly divided into two parts: ancient history and modern history (up to the year 2000). In the Elective Part, a topical approach is adopted and students may choose one out of six special topics. The number of candidates who applied to sit for the examination of Chinese History in the 2015 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) is 6,320. It showed that the ratio of students taking Chinese History as their electives had risen slightly and Chinese History ranked 7th alongside Information and Communication Technology among the most popular electives. The other more popular subjects, in rank order, are Economics, Chemistry, Biology, Business, Accounting and Financial Studies, Physics and Geography.

7. Since students have acquired basic knowledge of the trend of political development in Chinese history as well as the characteristic features of Chinese culture in their junior secondary education, the Senior Secondary Chinese History curriculum, comprising the “historical development through the ages” (Compulsory Part) and “Special topics in Chinese history” (Elective Part), can facilitate students to have a holistic historical view of the development in Chinese history on the one hand, and enable them to choose different special topics according to their interest on the other. This flexible curriculum design can address students’ differences in terms of their ability and interest.

8. Since the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure in 2009, EDB has conducted continuous review, attended to teachers' and students' views on curriculum and assessment of Chinese History and carried out different fine-tuning measures including the reduction of assessment requirements for students to select only one topic in the Elective Part. At present it is recommended, as a refinement measure over curriculum and assessment, not to continue with School-based Assessment (SBA) in this subject, so that more students will choose this subject according to their interest and needs.

### *Support and training*

9. In order to address teachers' needs and enhance students' interest to study Chinese History, EDB has been developing teaching resources to support teachers to teach Chinese History for many years. Recent production includes a teaching resource in CD Rom for General Studies for primary schools: *Promoting Chinese Culture through Service Learning*《服務同學：弘揚中國文化》(2011), *Change in women's social status: Tradition and change*《女性社會地位：傳統與變遷》(2012), *Historical images of modern China*《歷史影像中的近代中國》(2013) and the *Interactive resource pack on the exhibition of The Majesty of All Under Heaven: The Eternal Realm of Chinese First Emperor*《一統天下：秦始皇帝的永恆國度」展覽互動教材套》(2014) etc.

10. EDB organises seminars and workshops for primary and secondary school teachers every year with an aim to enriching their knowledge of Chinese history and enhancing their skills in using the new resource packs. For primary schools, EDB organises training courses to strengthen teachers' knowledge of Chinese history and local history in adopting diversified teaching strategies to enhance students' interest in appreciation of Chinese culture and history. For secondary schools, EDB has organised training programmes in four aspects, namely 'understanding and interpreting the curriculum', 'learning and teaching strategies', 'enriching knowledge' and 'assessing student learning'. In this school year, EDB will organise various knowledge enrichment courses on ancient history, key figures in modern and contemporary Chinese history, and war history in China. Besides, seminars on the teaching and learning of contemporary history of China, learning Chinese history through museum visits (e.g. organising student tours to visit the exhibition on *Dunhuang — Untold Tales, Untold Riches*) and historical site visits (e.g. leading teachers to visit Gin Drinkers Line and Humen Fortress etc.) will also be organised. The Quality Education Fund also

supports the applications of study schemes on Chinese history and culture.

### **Renew Chinese History to enhance students' interest and strengthen their learning effectiveness**

#### *Setting up an Ad hoc Committee (junior secondary) to renew the Chinese History curriculum*

11. EDB is now renewing the contents of junior secondary school Chinese History curriculum. Through enlivening learning and teaching, and enriching students' learning experiences, students' learning interest and understanding of Chinese history and culture will be enhanced.

12. In alignment with the recent trends in education development, and considering that the two junior secondary Chinese History and History curricula have been implemented for more than one decade, the CDC agreed to set up an Ad hoc Committee (hereafter the Committee) to review the curricula of the two subjects. The Committee was set up in May 2014. It is expected that the relevant work will be completed within two years. In accordance with the CDC guidelines, the Committee was formed by academics from tertiary sectors, practising teachers, personnel from the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority and EDB, as well as professionals from relevant fields. It is expected that consultation with schools and stakeholders will start in mid-2015.

13. At present ancient history and modern history carry equal weight in the Compulsory Part of the senior secondary Chinese History curriculum while ancient history counts for two thirds in the junior secondary curriculum. In order to have a better alignment between the junior and senior secondary curricula, and to enable more students to develop an interest to choose senior secondary Chinese History as their elective, the Committee is discussing to adjust the ratio of ancient and modern history to equal halves. It is hoped that this short-term recommendation, without inducing any changes to the existing textbooks, can be formally implemented in September this year. As mentioned, this short-term recommendation hopes to strengthen students' knowledge of modern history so as to achieve good interface with senior secondary Chinese History. Moreover, as modern history is more relevant to students' life experience, it is hoped that by enriching the contents of modern history and enlivening learning and teaching, students' interest in learning Chinese history will be enhanced. Therefore, the Committee

puts the short-term recommendation as its first priority in the curriculum review exercise.

14. The Committee will then discuss how to revise and refine the junior secondary Chinese History curriculum, such as by increasing the proportion of cultural and social history, adding more elements like war history, history of technology and art which students will find interesting, so as to broaden students' knowledge. Since this medium-term recommendation will lead to corresponding changes in textbooks, it cannot be implemented shortly. However, it will be available for public consultation with schools and teachers as early as in the middle of this year.

#### *Continuous consolidation and development of Chinese history education*

15. In order to consolidate and develop Chinese history education continuously, EDB will adopt the following measures:

- **Improve teaching in Chinese History and enliven classroom learning** : EDB expects the revised curriculum to introduce more diversified teaching strategies such as visits and field trips, e-learning, games and competitions as well as source-based learning to enliven the Chinese History classroom. EDB will also provide more learning and teaching resources to enhance students' knowledge and interest in Chinese history and encourage more students to choose Chinese History at the senior secondary level.
- Disseminate successful teaching experiences and promote professional sharing: EDB will provide more exemplars on learning and teaching, and will arrange more sharing on pedagogies among Chinese History teachers and strengthen professional dialogues. Besides, different activities will be organised to disseminate successful experiences of front-line Chinese History teachers, so that the public will understand more about their fruitful efforts made in refining their teaching.
- Formalise other modes of Chinese history Curriculum : The current work of curriculum review and renewal primarily focuses on the junior secondary Chinese History curriculum, with an aim to catering for the needs of the majority of schools which are offering Chinese History as an independent subject. When this task is accomplished, the Committee will, on a need basis, also

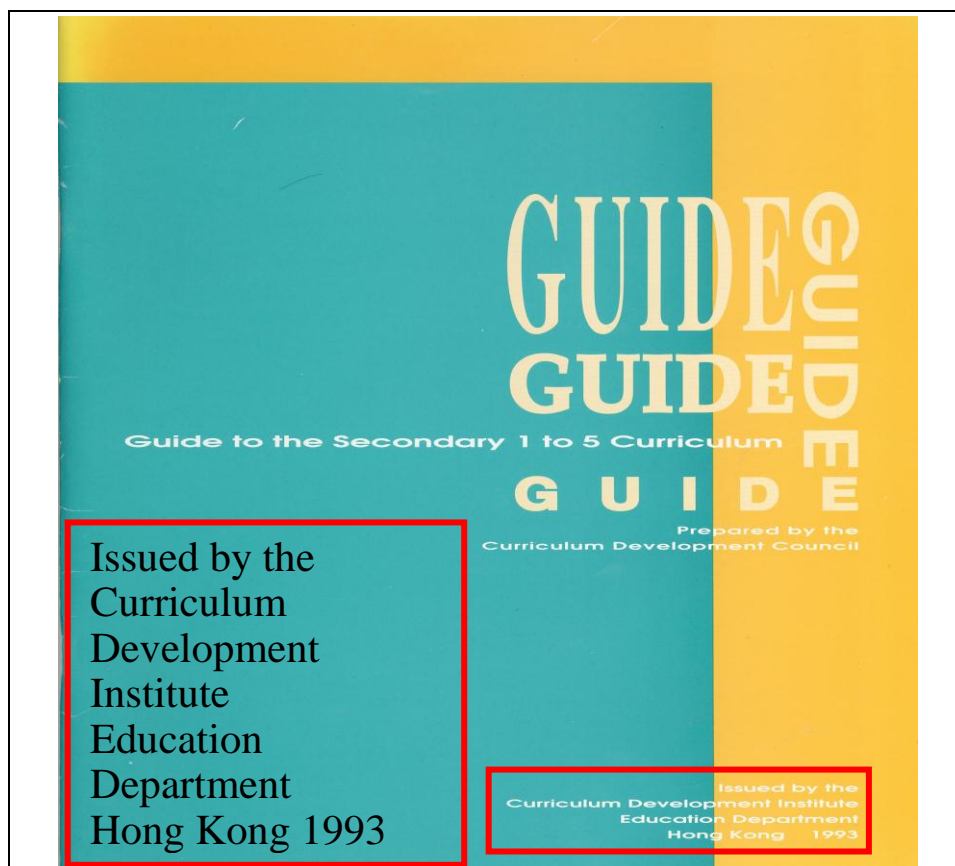
address the needs of the minority of schools that are using other curriculum modes to teach Chinese history (e.g., some schools, according to their school contexts, supplement relevant world history topics into a curriculum which adopts Chinese history as the main axis) by providing them with a more formalised curriculum to follow. However, refinement of the independent Chinese History subject curriculum is still the priority of the Committee.

**Comments are invited**

16. Members are welcome to give comments on the details of the above implementation and the direction of future development for Chinese history education.

Education Bureau  
9 February 2015

Appendix I: *Guide to the Secondary 1-5 Curriculum*, Education Department, Hong Kong, 1993



**Table 1 : Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time Allocation for Grammar Schools**

Subject Groups	Suggested Time Allocation	Subject Selection Guidelines
Languages	35-40%	Both Chinese and English Languages should be offered. For non-Chinese speaking students, they can take either French or German instead of Chinese. Putonghua can be offered as an optional subject.
Mathematics & science	20-25%	Both Mathematics and Science should be offered. Computer Literacy can be offered as an optional subject.
Humanities	15-20%	<u>At least two subjects from:</u> Social Studies Economic And Public Affairs Geography History Chinese History
Cultural, practical & technical	15-20%	Physical Education and at least two subjects from: Art & Design * Design And Technology * Home Economics Music
Other learning activities	5%	Cross-curricular activities such as: Civic Education Environmental Education Ethical/Religious Education Moral Education Sex Education and other topical issues

**Table 1: Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time**



## Allocation for Grammar Schools

**Table 2 : Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time Allocation for Technical Schools**

Subject Groups	Suggested Time All-ocation	Subject Selection Guidelines
Languages	30-35%	Both Chinese and English Languages should be offered. For non-Chinese speaking students, they can take either French or German instead of Chinese. Putonghua can be offered as an optional subject.
Mathematics & science	20-25%	Both Mathematics and Science should be offered. Computer Literacy can be offered as an optional subject.
Humanities	15-20%	At least two subjects from : <u>Social Studies</u> Economic And Public Affairs Geography History <u>Chinese History</u>
Cultural, practical & technical	25-30%	<u>cultural subjects</u> Physical Education and at least one subject from : Art And Design Music  <u>practical/technical subjects</u> For technical stream : Technical Drawing plus at least one subject from : Electronics And Electricity Design And Technology For commercial stream : Any two subjects from : Home Economics Pottery Book-keeping Typing

**Table 2: Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time Allocation for Technical School**

**Table 3 : Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time Allocation for Prevocational Schools**

Subject Groups	Suggested Time All-ocation	Subject Selection Guidelines
Languages	25-35%	Both Chinese and English Languages should be offered. For non-Chinese speaking students, they can take either French or German instead of Chinese. Putonghua can be offered as an optional subject.
Mathematics & science	15-20%	Both Mathematics and Science should be offered. Computer Literacy can be offered as an optional subject.
Humanities	5%	One subject from : <u>Social Studies</u> Economic And Public Affairs
Cultural, practical & technical	40-50% (Please see Notes 2 & 3)	<u>cultural subjects</u> : Music Physical Education  <u>practical/technical subjects:</u> At least four subjects from : Technical Drawing Art And Design Accommodation And Catering Services Air-conditioning and Refrigeration Automobile Repairs Bookkeeping/Office Practice/Typing Construction (Interior Decoration) Construction (Wood) Electrical Studies Engine Studies Fabrication Fashion And Clothing Light Metalwork And Finishing Marine Engineering Metalwork Printing Retail Merchandising Silversmithing And Jewellery Textiles

**Table 3: Suggested Guidelines on Subject Selection and Time**

Allocation for Prevocational Schools
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### *The Issue of Chinese History and Culture*

- The study of Chinese history will be strengthened in the 9-year of basic education by the following:
  - ⇒ National identity and Chinese culture is one of the six strands in the new framework for General Studies for Primary Schools (Consultation Document on Learning to Learn - The Way Forward in Curriculum Development, November 2000).
  - ⇒ Students in all types of junior secondary schools will study Chinese history and culture, because Chinese history and culture are part of the Essential Contents for Learning in the PSHE KLA.
  - ⇒ Chinese History will remain as independent subjects in junior secondary, secondary 4-5, and secondary 6-7 levels.
  - ⇒ Traditionally, Chinese history and world history have been studied separately. The one-history approach should use Chinese history as the main thread of study. It will be piloted as a mode of study in PSHE among other modes.
  - ⇒ In 9-year basic education, Chinese will be used as the medium of instruction for the learning and teaching of Chinese history.

Appendix III: *Personal, Social & Humanities Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1–Secondary 3)*, The Curriculum Development Council, 2002

2.2.3 Enhancement of the learning of Chinese history and culture (See 1.6, Booklet 1, *Basic Education Curriculum Guide - Building on Strengths* (2002).)

According to *Learning to Learn - the Way Forward in Curriculum Development* (2001), the study of our national history and culture should be strengthened during the 9 years of basic education in the following ways:

- National identity and Chinese culture will be one of the six strands in the new curriculum framework for General Studies throughout the six years of primary education.
- Students in all types of school will study Chinese history and culture, which is part of the Essential Content for Learning in PSHE.
- Chinese History will remain as an independent subject in Key Stages Three and Four, i.e. both junior and senior secondary levels.
- For schools adopting the one-history mode (the study of Chinese history and world history through the single subject mode of History and Culture) at junior secondary level, Chinese history and culture will be the main thread of study.
- In 9-year basic education, Chinese will be used as the medium of instruction for the learning and teaching of Chinese History in schools adopting the local school curriculum.
- Regardless of the mode of curriculum organization a school adopts in organizing the S1-3 PSHE curriculum, schools should devote one quarter of the total curriculum time spent on PSHE (see 1.2.2) to the learning and teaching of Chinese history and culture.

**Appendix IV: About Biases and Facts of Chinese History (9 February, 2015)**

Biases or unfounded information	Facts and illustrations
<p>1. Is Chinese History's status as an independent compulsory subject cancelled as a result of the curriculum reform?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese History was stipulated as a junior secondary compulsory subject by the SAR government in 2001, and about 5% of the teaching time should be allocated to its contents (i.e. about two periods per week). Before that, Chinese History had never been a compulsory subject, as both pre-vocational schools and technical schools did not offer Chinese History. EDB also provides guidelines for formalising its teaching contents.</li> <li>• In alignment with the characteristic features of the senior secondary curriculum, the position of Chinese History as an independent elective subject has not been changed both before and after the curriculum reform.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Currently, are the majority of junior secondary students deprived of their chance to study Chinese History?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorrect information. Currently, 88% of secondary schools adopt an independent subject mode to teach Chinese history; 4% of schools adopt the curriculum mode which uses Chinese history as the main axis, supplemented with contents in world history; the other 8% of schools offer an integrated Chinese history curriculum based on specific topics. Though schools are using different modes, junior secondary students are all studying Chinese history. Since there is a minimum requirement for teaching time and contents in Chinese history, students will not study fewer teaching contents because of different modes.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Is EDB planning to combine the two junior secondary histories?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EDB will continue with the policy to affirm Chinese History as an independent subject. There is no intention to replace the conventional status of Chinese History by combining the two histories.</li> <li>• As mentioned before, a minority of secondary schools are exploring to teach Chinese history</li> </ul>

	<p>through different curriculum modes. We opine that these curriculum modes should be allowed, when the conditions are met, to accumulate more experiences so far as the schools are targeting for the active promotion of Chinese history education in junior secondary.</p>
<p>4. Is it not necessary to revise the junior secondary Chinese History curriculum, as it has long been implemented smoothly?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are voices from education sectors, students, parents and society asking for revision of the curriculum, including the adjustment of the ratio between ancient history and modern history, and to increase elements in social aspects, culture, technology and art etc.</li> <li>• The Ad Hoc Committee attaches importance to the views of school teachers and stakeholders. If the major views received during the consultation consider that there is no need for revision, the Committee will respect their views.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Will the inclusion of Hong Kong history in Chinese History lead to the rise of the idea of an independent Hong Kong?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hong Kong is a part of China; many events in Chinese history are closely related to Hong Kong. The current curriculum has also included this part of history. In order to enhance students' interest in studying Chinese history, it is worth exploring the way to strengthen the relevancy to students' life and experience in the Chinese History curriculum.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Is studying ancient history the only way to nurture students' patriotic passion which includes loving the nation and its culture?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern Chinese history is closely related to students' life, and students may find it relatively more interesting;</li> <li>• Only students with adequate understanding of the recent historical development of our nation can be able to have a shared memory, feeling and passion with their compatriots.</li> </ul>
<p>7. All students in Hong Kong should study Chinese History</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At present all junior secondary students are studying Chinese history, with stipulated lesson hours and contents;</li> <li>• Though Chinese history education is essential in</li> </ul>

<p>because Chinese History is the foundation of national education as well as its vehicle?</p>	<p>nurturing national identity, it is not the only way to do so;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other subjects like Chinese Language, Chinese Literature, Visual Arts and Music are also the important vehicles of national education; Geography, Life &amp; Society, etc. can also help students understand the current situation and affairs of our country.</li> </ul>
<p>8. Is the recent drop in the number of senior secondary students taking Chinese History due to the fact that the Government has not given enough care and attention to Chinese history education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recent drop in the number of senior secondary students taking Chinese History reflects the continuous decrease in the whole student population. In fact, there is no significant change in the proportion of students enrolled in public examination to the entire student population, and approximately 90% of secondary schools offer Chinese History at the senior secondary level.</li> <li>• From another perspective, as a university entrance examination, the number of students enrolled in the HKDSE Examination is even larger than that enrolled under the old academic structure. In the 2015 HKDSE Examination, the number of day-school students taking Chinese History is 6320, and in the last cohort of HKAL Examination (2012), the number of day-school students taking Chinese History was only 4415.</li> <li>• Under the new academic structure, all senior secondary students, including those not taking Chinese History as their elective, will learn essential and fundamental contents related to Chinese traditional culture, contemporary China, etc. in Liberal Studies.</li> </ul>
<p>9. In the Mainland and other countries, content of national history is compulsory. Should Hong</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The senior secondary academic structures and its articulation to further studies in the Mainland and other countries are different from that of Hong Kong. Therefore, the matter of making a subject compulsory in the HKDSE should be consulted widely. The views from schools, students, parents, universities and other stakeholders in the society</li> </ul>

Kong therefore imitate this too?	should be taken in consideration.
10. Is the curriculum reform a de-Sinicization policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since the reunification with the Mainland, to understand our nation is reasonable and also the consensus view of society. In fact, since the launch of the education reform, Chinese elements are continuously strengthened in the primary and secondary curricula.</li> <li>• These include: CDC in 2000 which stipulated that developing national identity was one of the 7 learning goals; in <i>Learning to Learn</i> (CDC, 2001) “students in all types of schools will study Chinese history and culture ... Chinese History will remain as an independent subject in key stages 3 &amp; 4”; “Chinese culture and national identity” is made a core strand in primary General Studies, and its contents increase two-folds, including imperial dynasties, festivals, culture and key historical figures; Chinese culture and morals as core strands in the Chinese Language Key Learning Area; contents related to China increased to 30% in Geography at the junior secondary level; Chinese music and art are added to Music and Visual Art, etc.</li> </ul>