

**Imagining school autonomy in high-performing
education systems: East Asia as a source of policy
referencing in England**

Yun You

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UCL Institute of Education

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Signed Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Signed:

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored surface. The signature is stylized and appears to be a name with a surname and a first name, possibly 'J. Smith' or similar, though the letters are not clearly legible due to the cursive style.

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Abstract

The contemporary approach to education policy borrowing uses the features of ‘world-class’ education systems (top performers in international surveys of pupil achievement) as evidence to inform, legitimate and promote domestic changes. East Asia has been frequently cited as ‘inspiration’ for education reforms in many countries, including England. However, the extent to which East Asia education systems portrayed and interpreted by the UK Government are congruent with the policies and practices adopted within East Asia has not been subjected to critical scrutiny. Moreover, there has been a tendency to describe East Asia as a homogeneous and undifferentiated entity.

Using school autonomy as an illustrative example, this thesis investigates how are the education systems in East Asia represented by policy-makers in England since 2010 and does it accord with the ‘reality’ as perceived within domestic contexts. The English representation is explored by analysing policy papers, official statements and their key sources of evidence. The examination of ‘reality’ specifically focuses on secondary schools in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai; and draws on a triangulated analysis of policy documents, literature and interview data with school leaders, policy-makers, academics and education journalists. Moreover, this ‘looking-East’ trend is examined in the discourse of ‘global competition’.

The analysis demonstrates that the nature and degree of school autonomy in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai are both markedly distinctive and reflect the ‘socio-logic’ prevailing in each of those societies. The representation promoted in England is significantly different from the ‘reality’ as perceived within East Asia. The highly-selective evidence used by the UK Government represents distorted images of East Asian education systems to provide external legitimation for its preferred policy agendas. Furthermore, East Asian education systems have been social-imaginarily represented by a western-centred policy network; and ‘East-to-West’ education policy borrowing is discursive and imagined.

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Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCPCC & SC	Chinese Communist Party of Central Committee & State Council
CDC	Curriculum Development Council (Hong Kong)
CMs	Certificated Masters/Mistresses (Hong Kong)
CMOE	Ministry of Education, China
DEB	District Education Bureau (Shanghai)
DES	Department for Education and Skills (UK)
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
DSS	Direct Subsidy Scheme (Hong Kong)
GCE ‘O’	General Certificate of Education ‘Ordinary’
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMs	Graduate Masters/Mistresses (Hong Kong)
EDB	Education Bureau (Hong Kong)
EMB	Education and Manpower Bureau (Hong Kong)
EPB	Education policy borrowing
HKEAA	Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority
HMI	Her Majesty’s Inspectorate
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IMC	Incorporated Management Committee (Hong Kong)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills
PAP	People’s Action Party (Singapore)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SAR	Special Administrative Region (Hong Kong)
SBA	School-based Assessment (Hong Kong)
SBCD	School-based curriculum development
SBM	School-based Management (Hong Kong)
SMC	School Management Committee (Hong Kong)
SMEC	Shanghai Municipal Education Commission
SMI	School Management Initiative (Hong Kong)
SMOE	Ministry of Education, Singapore
SSB	School sponsoring body (Hong Kong)
SWP	Schools White Paper (UK)

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

When I first came to England from China in 2010, I was surprised by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove's (2010, December 28) statement: "I'd like us to implement a cultural revolution just like the one they've had in China". My surprise was twofold: his admiration for the Chinese 'Cultural Revolution' and his enthusiasm for learning from East Asian education systems. Historically, the flow has been in the opposite direction: East Asia has a long record of seeking to imitate 'advanced' models from affluent and industrialised western countries since the mid-19th century. For example, as part of the Meiji Restoration, a Japanese government delegation toured the US and Europe to study their modern education systems (Buruma, 2003). This 'catching-up' trend continues to date. For example, as Forestier and Crossley (2014) note, the UK has become "a significant source of expertise" for the post-1997 Hong Kong reforms.

The reverse of this trend has emerged not just in England but also in other Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the US and Australia. In addition to Finland, East Asia has become the new 'poster boy' (Sellar & Lingard, 2013a) or 'reference society' (Schriewer & Martinez, 2004) in the global discourse of education policy borrowing (EPB). Catching this 'looking-East' fever, an increasing number of politicians and experts have made 'fact-finding' trips to East Asia, claiming that they have discovered the 'secrets' of its education success. Although those 'secrets' are broad, diverse and even sometimes contradictory (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014), East Asia has been commonly described by policy-makers in those Anglo-Saxon countries as an education 'utopia'. Conversely, for German policy-makers, it has served as a 'dystopia' of education. As Waldow, Takayama and Sung (2014) observe, 'Asian education' has been often associated with "metaphors of damnation and torture ('examination hell', 'running the gauntlet')" in German media and provided an example of what German Government does not want (p.7).

My initial research curiosity was sparked by this reverse form of EPB and different western descriptions of East Asian education systems. I was interested in three specific questions: why does East Asia receive such admiration particularly in England¹; how is East Asian education portrayed and interpreted by the UK Government; and what are the features of East Asian education systems identified as worthy of emulation in England.

In addition to ‘policy borrowing’, there are a number of other terms describing the process by which policies in one place/time are used in, or have impact on, the development of policies in another place/time, such as ‘policy transfer’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000), ‘social learning’ (Hall, 1993), ‘lesson-drawing’ (Rose, 1991), and ‘diffusion’ (Stone, 2001) in politics, sociology and social anthropology literature. In comparative education, the most widely and habitually used term is ‘policy borrowing’ (Perry & Tor, 2008), although it is also one of the most controversial (Phillips, 2000). In this thesis, ‘policy referencing’ seems to be more appropriate. The reasons for this terminological choice and the critique of ‘policy borrowing’ are elaborated in the literature review chapter. It is noteworthy here that ‘policy borrowing’ is retained for the present to reflect the literature and to represent the UK Government’s statements about what they have been doing, while ‘policy referencing’ is mainly employed for analysing policies and elucidating the arguments of this study.

Historically, the concept ‘policy borrowing’ can be traced back as far as Plato (Phillips, 1993). However, only in the early 19th century did it start to be developed, and used as a nascent and weak form of evidence-based policy-making (Green, 2003). Since the inception of comparative education as a discipline, EPB has remained a persistent and contentious concern (Beech, 2006), which has helped comparative education to substantiate and legitimate its ‘discipline’ status (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Since then, EPB has been concerned with a series of topics, including ‘whether borrowing is possible’, ‘why and under what circumstances

¹ The focus of this thesis is specifically on England (rather than the UK), because, within the UK, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have gained a certain degree of autonomy in education matters through the process of devolution. In other words, there are significant divergences of education policies and practice between England and the other three countries.

borrowing is made’, ‘what can we borrow from other education systems’, ‘why certain features of foreign systems are attractive’, ‘how contextual factors affect the process of borrowing’, ‘what are the impacts of policy borrowed from elsewhere’ and ‘whether national education systems become similar as a result of borrowing’ (Phillips, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2000; Cowen, 2007).

From Marc-Antoine Jullien to Matthew Arnold, to the later 20th Century leaders, many comparativists have attempted to identify and transfer lessons underlying the improvement of education in foreign countries across nations (Ochs & Phillips, 2002). There seemingly exists a taken-for-granted ‘comparative logic’ that, if a policy action, seen as the reason for desired outcomes in country A, is absent in country B, then the introduction of this policy is assumed to be necessary to improve the education system in country B (Morris, 1998). Cowen (2006) argues that ‘what works elsewhere’ has become an indispensable condition of thinking well of an education system, driven by ‘the ideology of usefulness’. Silova (2012) similarly emphasises that it is the “potential policy utility” of EPB that attracts national policy-makers (p. 229). Therefore, as Morris (2012) points out, an effective approach to the production of legitimacy for policy-making is portraying proposed reform initiatives as salient features of successful education systems elsewhere.

However, the transferability of education reforms, or the feasibility of EPB, has been constantly questioned by another group of comparativists (Phillips, 2006). As Steiner-Khamsi (2004) recognises, “a large rift yawns between those implementing and those studying” EPB (p.1). Sadler’s famous Guildford lecture in 1900 drew specific attention to “the things outside the schools” and warned that:

“We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant.” (Sadler, quoted in Higginson, 1979, p. 49)

Similar criticisms of uncritical and de-contextualised EPB are also made by

Holmes (1971) and Cowen (2000). Nevertheless, transplanting policies and practices from one context to another, either *de jure* or *de facto*, has taken place all over the world, so that Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) remind researchers that “when we are analysing policy change we always need to ask the question: Is policy transfer involved?” (p. 14).

EPB characterised by the normative (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010), or ‘applied’ (Cowen, 2006), tradition of comparative education has been revitalised and redefined since the mid-1980s. There has emerged a growing application of quantitative measurements, big datasets and performance indicators, mandated by a ‘global policy network’ composed of entrepreneurial academics, consultancies, think tanks and international organisations² (Auld & Morris, 2014), which has constituted a ‘global education policy field’ (Sellar & Lingard, 2013a), or, as Carney (2012) terms it, ‘educational policyscape’. More specifically, the network of ‘knowledge brokers’ (Morris, 2015) creates data through organising large-scale international surveys of pupil achievement³ and provides expert-based explanations⁴ (Carvalho, 2012), in which ‘world-class’ models and their ‘best practices’ are interpreted and circulated as a standard package of universal policy ‘prescriptions’, or ‘global panacea’ (Waldow et al., 2014), to cure national education ‘disease’. This kind of international comparative evidence is seen as a scientific and reliable basis for national policy-making (Martens, 2007). EPB is in this sense portrayed as objective, rational and non-ideological (Ozga & Jones, 2006).

Rapplee (2007) notes two parallel trends that have particularly shaped the context for the emerging form of EPB described above. First is the “growing global interconnectedness” (p. 9), which has facilitated the production and popularisation of ‘best practices’ and ‘international standards’ and fundamentally changed approaches to education governance in national settings (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

² For example, consultancies, such as McKinsey & Company and PriceWaterhouseCoopers; think tanks, such as Reform and Policy Exchange; and international organisations, such as World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

³ For example, Programme for International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

⁴ For example, *How the world's best performing school systems came out on top* (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) and *PISA 2009 results: What makes a school successful? – Resources, policies and practices (Volume IV)* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010a).

Although the reception and translation of ‘what works elsewhere’ in local contexts may be diverse, ‘world-class’ models have nonetheless become hegemonic (Alexander, 2010). Second is the “emergence of the ‘Asian century’” (p. 8). East Asia has won massive attention from all over the world, due to high rankings of many of its countries in international league tables and an assumption associated with ‘human capital theory’ that high performance in education has contributed to its dramatic and persistent economic growth (Morris, 2015). As Wolf (2003) opines, “Europe was the past, the US is the present and a China-dominated Asia the future of the global economy”.

In the case of England, the rhetoric and practice of EPB are not new in education reforms. It experienced an ‘epidemic’ in the 19th century (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002) and a ‘renaissance’ in the 1980s (Finegold, McFarland & Richardson, 1993). According to Phillips (2011), at various times, Germany, France and the US provided the source of inspiration for English policy-makers, as did Sweden in the 1960s, Japan during the 1970s and 1980s, and Taiwan in the 1990s. A range of foci were involved, such as pedagogy, curriculum, teacher training, and institutional methods (Morris, 2012). The 2010 Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, DfE, 2010), signalled an apotheosis of the use of outward-looking and evidence-based policy-making in England. To be specific, acknowledging a continuing ‘fall’ in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) over the last decade in contrast to constant East Asian and Finnish success, the UK Government and its policy consultants have verified the necessity and urgency of EPB from high-performing systems, particularly East Asia, to solve domestic education problems.

Driven by my initial research curiosity as mentioned above, four problems emerged from my reading. Firstly, the UK Government has provided limited details about the features of high-performing East Asian education systems from which they have intended to ‘borrow’ policies. Secondly, the assertions about the features of East Asian education systems, both in policy documents and their supporting sources of evidence, have not been subjected to critical scrutiny and, in fact, often

seem to conflict with personal experience in East Asia⁵. Thirdly, the extent of differentiation among East Asian education systems seems to have been overlooked, as, in English official and media discourse, East Asia has been frequently cited as a homogeneous ‘reference society’⁶. Lastly, East Asian education systems are not universally attractive; as demonstrated above, they have served as negative examples in Germany. The reason why England particularly values the glory of East Asia is thus worth looking into.

Given the widespread appeal of ‘world-class’ models as central to the process of policy-making in England, in the context of globalisation and ‘Asian century’, research is necessary to shed light on EPB from East Asia to England.

1.2. Research questions

In examining East Asia as a source of EPB in England, an overarching research question accordingly arises: how are the education systems in East Asia represented by policy-makers in England since 2010 and does it accord with the ‘reality’ as perceived within East Asia. School autonomy is particularly chosen as an illustrative example, because it has featured prominently in England’s education reforms invoking evidence from East Asia. Thus, addressing this overarching research question involves answering three sub-questions:

1. What is the representation of school autonomy in East Asia by policy-makers in England⁷ since 2010?

This research question starts from 2010 when the Coalition Government took office. Since then, East Asia has been unprecedentedly highlighted as the key reference for proposed reforms and has subsequently led to *de facto* policy changes.

Answers to this question can be derived from three sources:

⁵ For example, in China, a career in teaching is far from a prioritised choice for the majority of talented school leavers, which is contrary to the UK Government’s portrayal that teachers in East Asia are from the best cohort of graduates.

⁶ For example, in contrast to the case of China, in Korea, only primary schooling teaching is attractive to high performers (Morris, 2012).

⁷ In addition to England, other national representations of East Asia discussed in this thesis, including Germany, the US and Australia, are the views primarily derived from their official policy papers and policy-makers’ statements.

- (1) school autonomy in East Asia represented in English policy documents and policy-makers' official statements;
- (2) school autonomy in East Asia portrayed in key supporting sources of evidence on which the English representation has been based; and
- (3) policy initiatives, aiming to increase school autonomy, consequently proposed and implemented in England by referencing East Asia.

Particular attention is also given to what and whose evidence has been selected or ignored by English policy-makers; and how has the selected evidence been combined and reproduced to construct the UK Government's preferred images of school autonomy in East Asia.

To better understand these, two brief reviews are additionally provided. The first is concerned with EPB in England from 1985, when overseas exemplars were increasingly 'borrowed' in its education debates, to 2010, when the 'New' Labour era ended. This sets the historical backdrop for examining the current EPB in England. The second focuses on the development of school autonomy in England between 2000 and 2010, because, as a significant move, Academies were introduced in 2000. This provides the context of school autonomy reforms in England since 2010 and facilitates the analysis of the impact of East Asian references on existing policies. By doing so, the connotations and application of the concept 'school autonomy' in English setting are also illuminated.

Subsequently, moving beyond school autonomy and England, the images of East Asian education in different western countries are explored, which is better understood through comparing with the western descriptions of Finland – another global education model popularised by PISA. This attempt locates the present study in a broader 'East/West' frame and renders a more in-depth analysis of EPB from 'East' to 'West'⁸.

⁸ The terms 'East' and 'West' are used with single quotation marks in this thesis to indicate that the categories of 'East' and 'West' are problematic. This study criticises this problem specifically through scrutinising the representation of 'East' as an identical referencing unit.

2. What is the ‘reality’ of school autonomy as perceived within three East Asian societies (i.e. Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai)?

This research question mirrors the first research question in that it examines school autonomy in East Asia from the perspective of insiders. Hong Kong, Singapore, and Shanghai are chosen as cases because they: (1) have consistently ranked highly in various international league tables, particularly, PISA; (2) have been amongst the most frequently cited models of ‘what works’ in England⁹ (Morris, 2012); and (3) are the places where I have personal contact to approach potential interviewees and there are no language barriers to collect and analyse data. Moreover, this study concentrates on public-funded secondary schools, as: (1) PISA, the start point of this study and the most influential international survey, is taken by 15-year-old pupils; and (2) public-funded schools cater for the vast majority of pupils at this age stage in these three societies. This research question is approached through four steps:

- (1) introducing the historical background of economy, socio-politics and culture in which the education system has been rooted;
- (2) reviewing the historical development of school autonomy;
- (3) examining the current situation of school autonomy; and
- (4) identifying and enunciating the features of school autonomy.

In particular, the current situations of school autonomy in three East Asian societies are summarised and presented as three models. These models are developed by applying a new conceptual framework created on the basis of literature review and drawing on considerable data from three sources: policy documents and official statements, literature and interviews with school leaders, academics, policy-makers and education journalists.

3. Is the ‘reality’ of school autonomy in East Asia congruent with its English representation and how can this be explained?

In answering this research question, the English representation and the ‘reality’

⁹ For example, there are 49 DfE announcements referencing Hong Kong, 83 referencing Singapore and 52 referencing Shanghai since 2010, while the frequencies of reference to Finland and Sweden are respectively 46 and 21 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/announcements>, accessed on 24th September 2015).

of school autonomy in East Asia investigated in the first two research questions are juxtaposed. Comparison is also made amongst the three East Asian models of school autonomy to explore the accuracy and appropriateness of referencing East Asia as a homogeneous and undifferentiated entity. By taking EPB from East Asia in England as an example, this study then allows an in-depth analysis of the rationale, nature, process and implication of reference to external or international sources of evidence in domestic reforms. Additionally, through examining the emerging flow of ‘East-to-West’ EPB from postcolonial perspectives, a better understanding is developed with regard to the socially-imaginary constitution of East Asia as a ‘reference society’ in the global education policy field and the production of hegemonic knowledge about East Asia as a model of ‘world-class’ education system by the global policy network.

1.3. Boundaries and limitations

The purposes and concerns of this study are elaborated above. They are further clarified in this section by setting the boundaries; that is, what is not done in this thesis. Although the present study starts from England’s enthusiasm about ‘learning from East’, there is no intent to make a judgement on which education system is better. Additionally, school autonomy is regarded as a key reason for East Asia’s high performance in the discourse of EPB in England, whether it is indeed attributable to East Asia’s success in international league tables or in general is not the focus here. More importantly, rather than comprehensively comparing school autonomy in England and East Asia, this study concentrates on the similarities and differences between England’s policy initiatives legitimated by the English representation of East Asia and the *de facto* policies and practices adopted within East Asia. It is on this basis that I argue which education system enjoys higher levels of school autonomy.

There are four limitations of this study. First, this study testifies whether the UK Government’s representation accords with the ‘reality’ of East Asia. It is inevitably confronted by a methodological challenge – to what extent that the

‘reality’ constructed in this study is valid. In this study, the data is derived from three sources (perspectives) – policy documents and statements (government), literature (academics) and interviews (practitioners) – to triangulate the analysis. Although qualitative inquiry is not based on ‘hard’ evidence as that used in natural science research, its contextual nature can provide richer descriptions and entail deeper understandings (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995), which enables researchers to better represent a ‘shifting, changing and dynamic’ world (Filstead, 1979). This is explained in detail in the methodology chapter.

The second limitation of this study is the number of interviewees, particularly, school leaders. In addition to 11 academics, policy-makers and senior education journalists, only 18 school leaders were interviewed due to research restrictions and political sensitivity. Details about interviewees, the selection criteria and accessibility issues I encountered during data collection are provided in the methodology chapter. The limited number has eroded the reliability of the ‘reality’ at the school level to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the lack of day-to-day school operation experience and information is partly compensated by including academics who have worked closely with school leaders and in school environment, and partly by referencing previous relevant studies.

The paucity of the voice from policy-makers in England is the third limitation. This is primarily due to the issues of access, which weakens the examination of the English representation to some degree. Notwithstanding, the present study is based on policy and official announcement texts as well as interviews of politicians as reported in the mass media. Through these, English policy-makers make public their interest in East Asia and school autonomy and their link to consequent education reforms. By analysing this documentary data, their perceptions and intentions are taken into account.

Lastly, this study involves four education systems, crossing East and West. The broad geographic scope is one of the fascinating aspects of this comparative study, but also generates difficulties to deal with. As a Chinese, I lived in Mainland China for 26 years before I came to England to do my second masters degree and subsequently PhD. So far I have been living in London for five years. The living

and studying experience have given me some, but maybe still insufficient, background knowledge of these two societies. In order to collect data, I have been to Hong Kong three times and stayed there for three months altogether; and to Singapore for nearly two months. Limited time has weakened the breadth and depth of the understanding of these two societies, although the time was not short for a doctoral level study. Hong Kong and Singapore are part of the Great China region, heavily influenced by Confucianism especially in terms of education development and school management. The language and cultural heritage shared between these societies and Mainland China largely helped me to overcome the shortage of field work time.

1.4. Significance and contributions

The significance and contributions of this study are fivefold. Firstly, in comparative education, research with regard to EPB has focused on the process of borrowing (e.g. Phillips & Ochs, 2003), the political and economic reasons for borrowing (e.g. Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Steiner-Khamsi, 2000), the agencies, international networks and regimes that instigate borrowing (e.g. Sellar & Lingard, 2013b; Jakobi, 2012), and the local adaptation of borrowed systems, agendas and institutions (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006; Akiba & Shimizu, 2012). In recent years, two themes have commonly appeared in this academic field. One is that, in the context of globalisation, benchmarking against ‘world-class’ models results in standardisation and convergence of national education systems. The other is that EPB functions as a tool to provide political legitimacy for contentious domestic reforms (Waldow, 2012).

This study involves both themes. Through examining the congruence between education reforms in England and their external references, it considers whether EPB in England has led to a shared standard of education systems with East Asia, or further, whether education systems in these two regions converge towards international standards under the impact of globalisation. In addition, Phillips (2000) notes that EPB can result from scientific/academic investigation, the superiority of

popular conceptions, politically motivated endeavours and distortion of evidence to highlight perceived deficiencies at home. This study examines the nature, sophistication and reliability of referencing external sources of legitimacy, which demonstrates how these four types of forces have affected England's education reforms through reconstituting the images of East Asia. It is in these respects that this thesis makes an empirical contribution to, and facilitates the disciplinary development of, comparative education.

Secondly, evidence-based policy-making is adopted by English policy-makers under the mantra of 'what matters is what works' since the late 1990s. As mentioned above, although East Asia has discursively become a vital 'reference society' for England, little detailed evidence has been provided by the UK Government and the use of evidence from East Asia in policy-making has seldom been scrutinised. This study concentrates on how this evidence has been selected and has functioned in the national setting of England. By doing so, it has the potential to challenge a widely employed but rarely elaborated assumption in EPB – evidence is faithfully and consistently considered (Morris, 2015). In this sense, the present study contributes to profoundly understand the nature and politics of the evidence-based approach to public policy generally and education policy specifically.

The third contribution of this study is to explore the English (western) representation of the education systems in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai (East) through the lenses of postcolonialism. As Willis and Rappleye (2011) recognise, "political manipulation of images overlaid an earlier Orientalising, an 'Othering' which, we hardly need remind ourselves, is still taking place, producing a body of scholarship that has had an important impact yet equally significant distortions" (p. 18). This study specifically examines whether education policy is genuinely 'borrowed' from 'East' to 'West'; whether this reverse form of EPB designates an accordingly changed power/knowledge relationship between 'East' and 'West'; and whether the constitution of East Asia as a 'world-class' 'reference society' results in hegemonic distortions. No studies, to my knowledge, have scrutinised EPB from this theoretical perspective. This discussion would open the

possibilities for contemplating how postcolonial theoretical resources might be further developed to inform research on EPB in the context of globalisation and ‘Asian century’.

Fourthly, many previous studies have paid attention to the case of borrowing from a single nation (e.g. Phillips, 2011); focused on the inter-attraction between two nations (e.g. Whitty, 2012); and probed the impact from one starring nation to various others (Rappleye, 2007). This study moves away from bilateral frames of reference and beyond comparing between national contexts. Rather, it investigates how a country references to a specific area within which three societies share similarities but are also distinguished from one another in the economic, socio-political and cultural sense. Moreover, it compares the domestic and external perceptions and understandings of education systems in this specific area. This will make a methodological contribution to the study of EPB.

Lastly, school autonomy fits with the broader *zeitgeist* of applying neo-liberalism and the ‘New Public Management’ to the education sector since the 1980s around the globe. As Glatter (2012) points out:

“... ‘autonomy’ has a significantly different connotation in a system in which schools have traditionally had little discretion than in one where they have been used to considerable freedoms. There is a need for comparative research on understandings of autonomy and accountability in different national contexts and their determinants.” (p. 570)

This study examines the historical and recent development of school autonomy in four different socio-political contexts. Furthermore, drawing on the literature review, it creates a conceptual framework for analysing the nature and degree of school autonomy. By employing this framework, models and features of school autonomy in different East Asian societies are developed, identified and compared. Therefore, this study not only empirically and conceptually contributes to the academic understanding of school autonomy, but also has the potential to provide rich descriptions of school autonomy for those in government and civil society *studying* foreign systems and involved in making and critiquing policy.

1.5. Organisation of chapters

In order to achieve research aims and explore arguments, this thesis is divided into eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two reviews literature with regard to EPB and school autonomy and develops a new conceptual framework for analysing the nature and degree of school autonomy. This lays a theoretical and conceptual foundation and offers an analytical tool used throughout the rest of the thesis to examine empirical data. Chapter Three illustrates the rationale and process of research design and the methods for collecting and analysing data, and discuss the extent to which empirical data from various sources guarantees the reliability and validity of this study.

The English representation of school autonomy in East Asia is interrogated and analysed in Chapter Four, which answers the first research question. From Chapter Five to Chapter Seven, the second research question is considered in these three mirrored chapters by investigating the historical and recent development, developing models and identifying features of school autonomy in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai respectively. Chapter Eight compares the English representation and the ‘reality’ of school autonomy in East Asia, and the similarities and differences regarding school autonomy amongst East Asia, to settle the third research question. Drawing on the literature review and these comparisons, it also discusses the process, rationale, nature and implications of EPB influenced by globalisation.

Chapter 2. Literature review: education policy borrowing and school autonomy

2.1. Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I have identified three research questions: how is school autonomy in East Asia represented by English policy-makers; how is school autonomy actually practiced and perceived within East Asia; and does the representation accord with the ‘reality’ and how to understand this. By answering them, the rationale, process, nature and implication of EPB from East Asia in England is concretely examined. EPB and school autonomy are thus the two key themes concerned in this study. This chapter reviews the previous academic efforts to construct theoretical foundations, develop conceptual frameworks and propose explanatory perspectives pertaining to these two themes. It provides in-depth insights into defining core concepts, regarding the English representation as ‘evidence’ constructed and used socio-politically, investigating school autonomy in East Asia and explaining the gap/congruence between the representation and ‘reality’.

More specifically, the review of EPB contains six sections. Following this introductory section, section 2.2 clarifies the crucial concepts ‘policy borrowing’ and ‘policy referencing’ by comparing them with other associated concepts. Section 2.3 examines four conceptual frameworks and models which illustrate how to interrogate EPB as a process and what are the elements and factors should be taken into consideration. Section 2.4 is particularly concerned with the understanding of ‘evidence’ and sees EPB as a specific form of evidence-based policy-making. In section 2.5, the political motives and selective nature of reference to external exemplars are discussed. Section 2.6 investigates whether or not EPB in the context of globalisation results in the convergence/standardisation of national education systems. Understanding EPB from postcolonial perspectives in section 2.7 facilitates a further examination of the ‘East-to-West’ EPB specifically emerged in

this study.

The review of the literature on school autonomy is laid out in three sections. In section 2.8, the meaning of ‘school autonomy’ is clarified and its relationship with other associated concepts is discussed. Section 2.9 examines the rationales and motives of school autonomy reforms from administrative, political and philosophical perspectives. A new framework for this study is developed in section 2.10, drawing on four previous frameworks. A conclusion to this chapter is provided in the last section.

2.2. Clarification of concepts: policy borrowing and policy referencing

The ever-growing focus on the cross-national movement of policy has led to a proliferation of terms in inter- or multi- disciplinary fields (Stone, 1999; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). For example, terms such as ‘copying’, ‘emulating’ and ‘adopting’ would be accurate in describing policy from one context being implemented in another (Phillips, 2000). The use of ‘adaption’, ‘appropriation’, ‘recontextualisation’ and ‘reproduction’ emphasises that local contextual factors determine the actual enactment of foreign policy (e.g. Finegold et al., 1993). The term ‘diffusion’, similar to ‘spreading’, ‘dispersal’ and ‘dissemination’, connotes that policy changes in different settings derive from “a common source or point of origin” (Stone, 2001). ‘Convergence’, as a result of ‘harmonisation’, ‘standardisation’ or ‘de-territorialisation’, refers to a pattern where similar developments take place in various nations (Bennett, 1991).

Thus, it has become customary for literature reviews to begin with a conceptual and terminological discussion. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, ‘policy borrowing’ and ‘policy referencing’ are employed in this study respectively for the purposes of literature review and data analysis. The focus of this section is to clarify the meaning of ‘policy borrowing’ by comparing it with ‘policy transfer’ and ‘policy learning’, as these three terms are the most frequently used in the literature. An attempt is then made to distinguish between ‘policy referencing’ and ‘policy borrowing’. By so doing, this section illustrates why ‘policy borrowing’ is

critiqued for being linguistically inappropriate, while ‘policy referencing’ is seen as more appropriate for this study.

Policy transfer

‘Policy transfer’ is the most generic and widespread term adopted in political science (Evans & Davies, 1999), serving as an ‘overarching label’, and subsequently accepted by comparative education (Perry & Tor, 2008). According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), it covers two forms: the ‘voluntary’ transfer “occurs as a result of the free choices of policy actors”, while the ‘coercive’ transfer involves one “pushing”, or even “forcing”, another to adopt a concrete policy (p. 344). Phillips and Ochs (2004) argue that “imposed policy is not borrowed policy” (p. 775). ‘Policy borrowing’ conveys a sense of unidirectional transfer being voluntary and depending on local actors.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to identify whether or not a policy choice is permeated by extrinsic factors. In many cases, the movement of policies is indirectly fuelled by ‘financial inducement’ (Ikenberry, 1990), recommendations from powerful consultants (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996), pressure from a perceived shortfall in standards (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), or even just a desire to ‘jump on a band-wagon’ and avoid becoming the minority in a global trend (Bennett, 1991). In recent years, the emergent global policy network advocating similar policies across diverse nations has further blurred the boundary between voluntary and indirect coercive transfer.

Policy learning

Hall (1993) argues that ‘policy learning’, (or ‘social learning’), designates the process of the deliberate cognition, redefinition and adjustment of policy goals and techniques in response to past experience and new information. In other words, ‘policy learning’ brings about policy changes inspired by the ‘knowledge’ obtained across time and space. Similar to ‘learning’, ‘borrowing’ also leads to reforms.

However, as Raffe (2005) distinguishes, ‘learning’ indicates that system and context in one country is well studied and understood by another, rather than simply ‘borrowed’ as a repertoire. From this perspective, Steiner-Khamsi (2012) notes that the use of ‘policy learning’ might create “an excessively positive association” with the purposes, processes and outcomes of the movement of policies, whereas ‘borrowing’ can “avoid some of the interpretive pitfalls” entailed by ‘learning’ (p. 8).

Policy borrowing

A definition of ‘policy borrowing’ is provided by Bennett (1997): “policy-makers are *aware* of policies elsewhere, that they *utilise* that information within domestic policy debates and conflicts, and that this utilisation can help explain policy adoption” (p. 213). In this sense, ‘borrowing’ is conscious, active and intentional (Garratt & Forrester, 2012). As Phillips (2000) notes, it has “become fixed in the literature of comparative education and is the term which is habitually employed” (p. 299). A recent example is that ‘policy borrowing’ was chosen as the title of the 2012 World Yearbook of Education – *Policy Borrowing and Lending in Education*. One of the editors, Steiner-Khamsi (2012) provides three reasons for this deliberate terminological choice, namely, its dominant use in comparative education research, neutral nature and foci on agencies and receivers.

Notwithstanding broad employment, the term ‘policy borrowing’ has always been controversial. Phillips (2000) argues that ‘borrowing’ literally suggests temporariness – temporary solutions to education crises. Additionally, as Morris (2013) points out, it denotes “ownership and repayment/return” (p. 262). More criticisms are concerned with its political nature. Halpin and Troyna (1995) argue that ‘borrowing’ can be highly selective, and not dependent on something being ‘good’ but rather serving political functions. Many academics also note that sometimes ‘borrowing’ occurs symbolically (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Takayama, 2010) or silently (e.g. Waldow, 2009) with specific political considerations or in a particular political culture.

Policy referencing

The term ‘referencing’ originates from Luhmann’s (1981, 1995) theories of ‘self-referential systems’, which has been further developed as the main approach in comparative education to understanding referencing external sources of authority for contested domestic reforms (Schriewer, 1990; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). I shall explain this in more detail later. ‘Policy referencing’ has not been used as commonly as ‘policy borrowing’ in academic circles. Notwithstanding, a growing number of academics (e.g. Sellar & Lingard, 2013a; Waldow et al., 2014) acknowledge the implication of ‘reference societies’ (Schriewer & Martinez, 2004). The reference to Luhmann’s theories and other associated frameworks in this thesis leads to the terminological choice of ‘policy referencing’.

There are another two reasons why this term is considered to be more proper for this study. ‘Referencing’ literally means consulting sources of information in order to inform or make a decision. In contrast to ‘policy borrowing’, it is more a discursive act of providing evidence to produce legitimacy for policy-making; but intrinsically avoids inferring that subsequent policy actions are necessarily in conformity with external references. It is similar to ‘symbolic policy borrowing’ in this respect. Moreover, it draws attention to ‘reference societies’ and the approaches to referencing, which are highly relevant to the focus of this study – how East Asia, an emerging ‘reference society’, has been discursively represented in English education debates.

In this section, I have dealt with terminological issues. I will now move to the examination of conceptual frameworks for analysing the process of EPB.

2.3. Examining education policy borrowing as a process

A number of studies have attempted to elucidate the process of EPB and examine the elements and factors involved. Over the past decades, heuristic frameworks and models have been developed by Dolowitz and Marsh, Phillips and

Ochs, and Rappleye. This section aims to represent these devices and describe the way that they inform this study.

Dolowitz and Marsh's framework

The framework created by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), although rooted in political science, can be applied to education transfer. As shown in Figure 2.1, it concentrates on eight aspects regarding the process of transfer. A list of answers is provided drawing on their literature review. This 'encyclopaedic introduction' of policy transfer was significant as few studies at that time had examined this directly. It is of specific interest in this study because it presents the key aspects that should be taken into account in studying EPB, including the stimuli for and degrees of transfer, the foci of interest, the actors involved and the sources demonstrating transfer. Nonetheless, they admit that although this framework is able to display a "way of organising research", it has limited "explanatory power" (p. 8). In other words, it cannot illuminate how the identified elements interact in ways which initiate transfer and eventually lead to policy changes. Besides, it seems to merely cast light on substantive policy transfer.

Phillips and Ochs' models

Principally using the example of British attraction to German education over a long historical period, Phillips and Ochs have identified and enunciated four sequential stages of EPB and a number of 'filters' influencing EPB.

In the *Composite Processes of Policy Borrowing in Education* model (Phillips & Ochs, 2003), as shown in Figure 2.2, after 'cross-national attraction', EPB then goes through 'decision-making' and 'implementation', and reaches 'internalisation/indigenisation'. The first stage can be broken down into: (1) *impulses* – stimulus or catalyst which spark interest; and (2) *externalising potential* – the elements of foreign systems that are theoretically 'borrowable'. At the second stage, Phillips and Ochs propose four types of decisions: (1) *theoretical*: based on

Why Transfer? Continuum Want To..... Have To			Who Is Involved in Transfer?	What Is Transferred?	From Where		Degrees of Transfer	Constraints on Transfer	How To Demonstrate Policy Transfer	How Transfer leads to Policy Failure	
Voluntary	Mixtures	Coercive			Past	Within-a Nation	Cross- National				
Lesson Drawing (Perfect Rationality)	Lesson Drawing (Bounded Rationality)	Direct Imposition	Elected Officials	Policies (Goals) (content) (instruments)	Internal	State Governments	International Organizations	Copying	Policy Complexity (Newspaper) (Magazine) (TV) (Radio)	Media	Uniformed Transfer
	International Pressures		Bureaucrats Civil Servants	Programs	Global	City Governments	Regional State Local Governments	Emulation	Past Policies	Reports	Incomplete Transfer
	(Image) (Consensus) (Perceptions) Externalities	Pressure Groups Political Parties	Institutions			Local Authorities		Mixtures Inspiration	Structural Institutional Feasibility	Conferences Meetings/ Visits	Inappropriate Transfer
	(Loans) (Conditions Attached to Business Activity)		Ideologies						(Ideology) (cultural proximity) (technology) (economic) (bureaucratic) Language	Statements (written) (verbal)	
	Obligations	Policy Entrepreneurs/ Experts	Attitudes/ Cultural Values	Negative Lessons			Past Relations				
			Consultants Think Tanks Transnational Corporations Supranational Institutions								

Figure 2.1. A policy transfer framework (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000)

theories; (2) *realistic/practical*: drawing on proved success; (3) *quick fix*: meeting immediate political necessity; and (4) *phoney*: rhetorically seeking political effect.

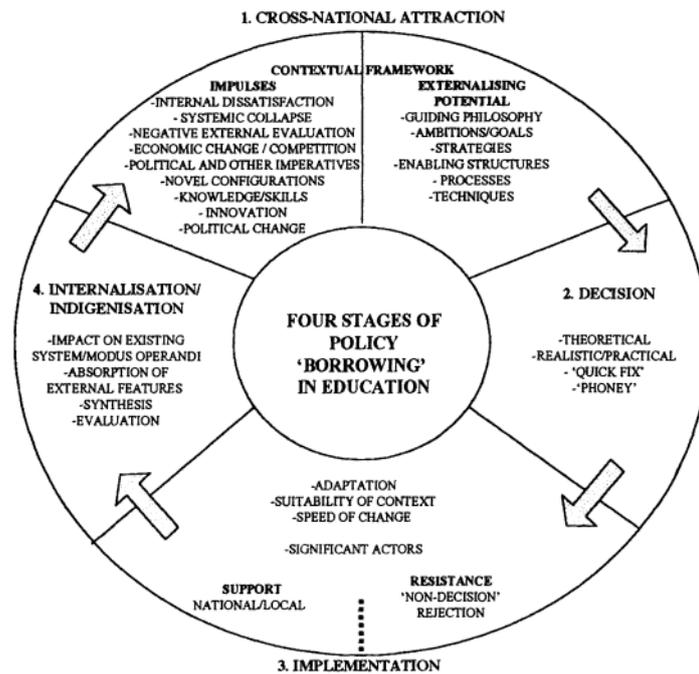


Figure 2.2. Policy borrowing in education: composite processes (Phillips & Ochs, 2003)

As shown in Figure 2.3, Ochs and Phillips (2004) postulate a set of 'filters' to demonstrate how a policy is transformed into another in the process of EPB, after being interpreted by actors and organisations from their perspectives, transmitted by agencies, media and publications according to their agendas, selectively accepted by individuals and institution and implemented by practitioners in specific contexts.

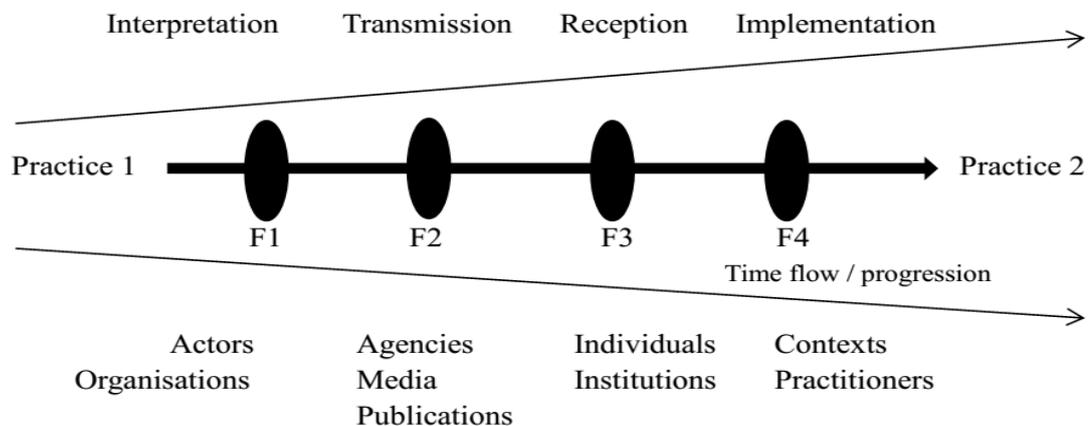


Figure 2.3. Filters in the borrowing process (Ochs & Phillips, 2004)

Similar to Dolowitz and Marsh's framework, Phillips and Ochs' models are mainly used to facilitate a broad understanding of substantive EPB between nations. For example, Ochs and Phillips (2002) identify eight cases of 'borrowing' from Germany to supply England's 'deficiencies' from the 1800s to 1980s, such as the establishment of local education authority system in 1902 and the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. In each case, they describe the main issues of policy concern in England, the nature of the efforts of English policy-makers to make use of the German example and the outcomes in the form of official decisions and recommendations reflecting German influence.

Nevertheless, Phillips and Ochs admit that English enthusiasm in foreign systems often did not result in any policy implementation bearing much resemblance with the original models. In fact, the particular interest I have in their models is the transformation of policy from elsewhere during the process of 'borrowing' and the 'political-speak' of 'borrowing' based on this transformed policy.

Rappleye (2007) is specifically critical of the fact that Phillips and Ochs do not "adequately represent the extreme complexity" of the 'cross-national attraction' stage (p. 70). This is mainly because impulses do not necessarily lead to attraction to foreign systems as indicated in their models. Moreover, Phillips and Ochs do not discuss the interaction between contextual factors, the "malleable nature" of context, the role played by actor agencies and the influence of infrastructure, which are the crucial components of shaping attraction (p. 71). It is on this basis that Rappleye develops a new model to further depict and decode the first stage of EPB.

Rappleye's conceptual map of the context of cross-national attraction

Rappleye's (2006) *Conceptual Map of the Context of Cross-national Attraction*, as shown in Figure 2.4, attempts to improve existing models. It incorporates two opposite transformation orientations – *reform* and *resist*. Both sides involve structural factors and human actors. Based on Ochs and Phillips' (2002) list, Rappleye includes six structural impulses and originally proposes six

structural obstacles. Drawing on the works by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) and Ochs (2005), he incorporates a number of reform and resistance actors into his model, who either promote or prevent 'cross-national attraction'.

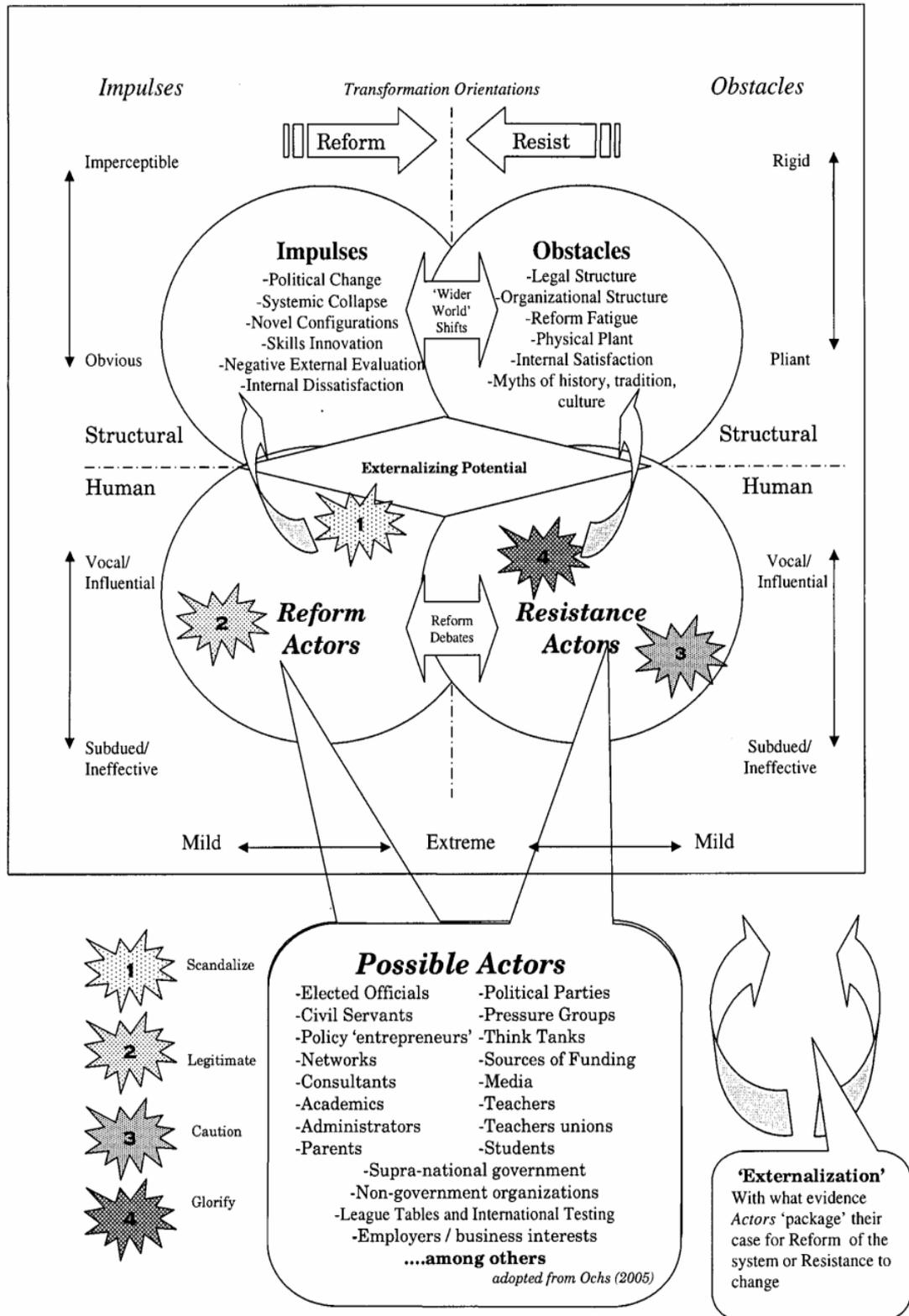


Figure 2.4. Conceptual map of context of cross-national attraction (Rapplepe, 2006)

At the centre of the ‘map’ rests the ‘externalising potential’ and four ‘sparks’, which are related with structural factors and human actors to explain “reasons underpinning attraction, the motives for introducing and using the foreign example” (p. 233). On the ‘impulses’ side, reform actors ‘scandalise’ the ‘home’ system and ‘legitimate’ externalisation; on the ‘obstacles’ side, resistance actors ‘glorify’ the current system at home and ‘caution’ against externalisation (p. 233). In this way, Rappleye’s model not just lists factors and actors involved in ‘cross-national attraction’, but also illustrates why and how they drive education reforms to different directions.

Rappleye (2007) demonstrates the use of this framework by applying it to his own empirical work – the US and China’s attraction to the Japanese education system. Drawing on his model, this study can better understand the rationale and nature of English attraction to East Asian education systems and, in particular, school autonomy, which then further explore whether this attraction leads to policy being ‘borrowed’ and in what way.

Rather than limiting this study to any one of the frameworks and models reviewed in this section, as explained above, their core features are all valuable in investigating the process of EPB. The focus next is on evidence and its utilisation, as East Asia is represented by English policy-makers as the key source of evidence about ‘what works’.

2.4. Policy borrowing: a specific form of evidence-based policy-making

EPB has emerged as using ‘what works elsewhere’ to inform and refine domestic policy-making (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), which in this sense can be seen as a specific form of evidence-based policy-making. In recent years, evidence, derived from various international comparisons and interpreted by the global policy network, has increasingly shaped national education reforms. The aim of this section is to examine the ‘evidence’ as a basis of policy-making generally and the ‘international comparative evidence’ used in EPB specifically.

What is meant by evidence?

Evidence-based policy-making has been popularised in England since the late 1990s, then gradually in the US, Continental Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Oancea & Pring, 2009). It originally evolved from ‘evidence-based medicine’ which is a systematic review of the evidence collected through the randomised controlled trial for clinical decision-making (Marston & Watts, 2003; Timmermans & Mauck, 2005). Put differently, evidence-based medicine seeks to identify the most effective intervention through scientifically designed and operated experiments. Therefore, ‘evidence’ can be essentially seen as a result of systematic and scientific investigation (Davies, Nutley & Smith, 2000). As Tröhler (2015) notes, it is in this “medical ‘paradigm’” that evidence-based policy-making has been subsequently spread to social research (p. 749).

Brown (2011) defines ‘evidence’ in policy-making as “data that has been gathered via a process of research, which has been interpreted and which subsequently has or could be used to address a particular policy issue” (p. 269). With regard to its interpretive nature, he (2014) further explains that evidence “is not simply the raw data produced by the research process, but also the significance ascribed to the data by the researcher” depending on the questions that researchers deal with and their intentions (p. 12). Thus, the interactive relation between national governments and a variety of evidence providers has attracted extensive attention (Solesbury, 2001; Perry & Tor, 2008). Additionally, there is a conspicuous lack of clarity between the concepts of ‘evidence’ and ‘knowledge’; in some studies, they are used interchangeably (Mulgan, 2005). Sanderson (2003) argues that ‘evidence’ seems to be self-explanatory and inherently empowered when it is linked with or labelled as ‘causal/scientific knowledge’.

Although ‘basing-upon-evidence’ has increasingly dominated the approach to policy-making around the world, as Bridges and Watts (2009) argue, it remains debatable what sort of research/knowledge can and should be taken into account as evidence. Similarly, Cartwright, Goldfinch and Howick (2007) stress that there is a paucity of “practicable theory of evidence, one which is philosophically-grounded

and yet applicable for evidence-based policy” (p. 6).

Why evidence matters?

The link between evidence and policy is portrayed as a “logical – perhaps rational – pathway” (Bridge & Watts, 2009, p. 45). As Montuschi (2009) argues, the use of “appropriate evidence” is thus believed to be able to “eliminate bias and decisions taken on arbitrary grounds” and eventually lead to “optimal, legitimate and publicly acceptable” policy (pp. 425-427). According to Sanderson (2003), the rise of evidence-based policy-making is a surface-level manifestation of the predominant ‘modernism’ in human society. Rose asserts that “to govern is to be condemned to seek an authority for one’s authority” (quoted in Mulgan, 2005, p. 216). For modernists, the first ‘authority’ is often associated with ‘scientific knowledge’ which is regarded to be capable of guiding human affairs and changing the world (Silova, 2012). The second ‘authority’ suggests that legitimacy for a modern government stems from the use of ‘scientific knowledge’ in policy-making (Wiseman, 2010).

As the pioneer, England made a clear, passionate and formal commitment to evidence-based policy-making in its 1999 White Paper, *Modernising Government*. As reported in the *Times Higher Education* (Reisz, 2012), Charles Clarke, the former UK Secretary of State for Education and Skills from 2002 to 2004, called on education researchers to provide useful answers to questions which preoccupy policy-makers, such as “does class size make any difference at all” and “what is the best way of teaching training”. However, Morris responded that “extensive research” does not offer “the simple answers”, and researchers should not define themselves as “providers of policy briefs” and “focus on the search for ‘what works’”, because this could lead them to “take for granted the prevailing structures of schooling and fail to address the underlying values and political questions about what is desirable”.

What makes (good) evidence?

Sorell (1994) argues that the term ‘scientism’ refers to the belief that empirical science research is the only or the most authoritative source of genuine factual knowledge about man and society. In the field of social research, ‘scientism’ is concretely manifested as the prioritisation and popularisation of quantitative methods and analysis (Whitty, 2007; Wiseman, 2010). Vulliamy (2004) considers this phenomenon as an “increasing hegemony of a positivist global discourse of educational research and policy-making” (p. 277). Grek and Ozga (2010) similarly argue that there has emerged a “‘scientisation’ of education governance, where it is only knowledge, closely intertwined with action (expressed as ‘measures’) that can reveal problems and shape solutions” (p. 272). However, ‘scientism’ has confronted considerable questioning. For example, Heisenberg (1962) argues that limited reality can be revealed through scientific approaches; and Lather (2004) points out that scientific methodology potentially oversimplifies complex contexts.

Furthermore, whether certain scientific knowledge can be used as evidence and how to interpret it largely depends on the practicalities and politics of evidence-based policy-making (Marston & Watts, 2003). As Nutley, Powell and Davies (2013) argue:

“There is no simple answer to the question of what counts as good evidence. It depends on what we want to know, for what purposes, and in what contexts we envisage that evidence being used. Research data only really become information when they have the power to change views, and they only really become evidence when they attract advocates for the messages they contain. Thus endorsements of data as ‘evidence’ reflect judgements that are socially and politically situated.” (p. 24)

Similarly, Cable (2004), in an analogy to the oil industry, argues that evidence is extracted from “upstream” by researchers, and then gets passed “downstream” where politicians conduct trade on it in terms of “speed, superficiality, spin, secrecy and scientific ignorance” (p. 11). It is thus problematic to draw a simple or linear relationship between evidence and policy. The politics of using ‘scientifically’

produced evidence to support policy-making is examined in this study.

International comparative evidence

As discussed above, evidence serving the purposes of EPB can be defined as ‘knowledge’ of ‘what works’ in ‘reference societies’. Recent years have witnessed two significant shifts regarding ‘reference society’, which has accordingly resulted in changes to the source of evidence. Firstly, the form of ‘reference society’ has shifted from individual nations to ‘world-class’ systems (Morris, 2012). Although there is no agreement what the latter actually mean, as Steiner-Khamsi (2014) argues, the term is linked with global market competition and thus generates reform pressure. Secondly, the constitution of ‘reference society’ has no longer been based on their traditional reputation, but rather on their comparative performance in large-scale international surveys (Sellar & Lingard, 2013a). Crossley (2014) notes that this shift is underpinned by the ever-growing “legitimizing influence” of big databases which “speak the language of power” (p. 19).

Evidence in this scenario has increasingly derived from various international comparisons. The global policy network, serving as ‘expert’, has obtained the authority of interpreting comparative evidence, advocating ‘best practices’ and formulating policy recommendations for national education reforms (Auld & Morris, 2014; Tröhler, 2015). There has thus emerged a discernible ‘governance turn’ characterised by comparisons and performativity (Ozga, 2009). “Numbers”, as Grek (2009) notes, have become “an indirect, but nonetheless influential tool of the new political technology of governing” (p. 23). In particular, as the most influential international comparison, PISA has become “a very powerful policy instrument that is able to penetrate different kinds of policymaking regimes and very diverse political circumstances” (Ozga, 2012, p. 19). As Gorur (2015) puts it, “even those who are opposed to PISA are unable to think outside of PISA”.

However, the enhanced importance of international comparative evidence has encountered wide criticisms. For example, as Crossley (2014) points out, many stakeholders involved in international studies are actually economists, statisticians

and data analysts with limited first-hand experience in education. Auld and Morris (2014) argue that the comparative method used to manipulate international comparative evidence by the global policy network is “reductionist; downplays context and non-educational factors; tends to confirmation bias; uses correlations to infer causality” (p. 21). As Nóvoa and Yariv-Marshall (2003) highlight, politicians seek appropriate ‘international education indicators’ in order to formulate policy agendas that are “legitimated by a kind of ‘comparative global enterprise’” (p. 425). Gorur and Wu (2015) specifically note that PISA often functions as a ‘policy object’ to “make up the neoliberal imaginary” (p. 650).

This section has investigated EPB as a specific form of evidence-based policy-making and particularly focused on the concept ‘evidence’, which provides insights into the (political) nature of evidence from East Asia – an emerging ‘reference society’, its production by the global policy network and the manipulation of it in the context of England.

2.5. Externalisation, legitimacy production and symbolic policy borrowing

Steiner-Khamsi (2014) divides the study of EPB into two groups: one uses comparison to identify what should be borrowed; the other is concerned with “why and when such external references are made” and “the impact of such imports on existing policies and power constellations” (p. 154). This section reviews the second approach, concentrating on the politics of EPB. It begins with drawing on systems theory and its core concept ‘externalisation’ to understand ‘policy referencing’. Then, it seeks to explore how EPB has been used and abused to produce legitimacy through constructing ‘social imaginaries’. It ends with a discussion on ‘symbolic policy borrowing’, which can be seen as a specific form of EPB serving political purposes.

Systems theory and externalisation

One prominent conceptual and theoretical approach to studying policy-making

based on evidence from elsewhere derives from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and its core concept 'externalisation'. This has been elaborated, adopted and developed in many comparative studies, especially in the work of Schriewer (1990, 2000) and Steiner-Khamsi (2004, 2014). Luhmann's modern society consists of various social *systems* (e.g. education, religion and politics) that follow their own distinctive meanings and orders, and are surrounded by infinite *environments* (Rappleye, 2012). These social systems are made up of 'internally linked *communications*' (Waldow, 2012, p. 418) and communications from one system cannot directly connect to another. Rather, the external can 'irritate' the internal and the 'irritation' is then processed within the system (Waldow, 2012). This is what Luhmann conceptualises as 'externalisation'.

Luhmann and Schorr (1988) identify three possible 'external points of reference' that an education system can utilise, namely, values, organisations, and the principles and results of science. Schriewer (1990) adds 'tradition' and the 'world situation' to the list. The former is embedded in the history of education practices and ideas and the latter refers to the knowledge conventionally titled 'education abroad' or 'international (development) education'. Waldow (2012) notes that the current trend of education reforms, referencing 'world-class' models / international standards and drawing on 'big databases', has created a form of externalisation which combines the 'principles and results of science' and the 'world situation'. All these external references, as Steiner-Khamsi (2004) argues, have a 'certification' effect on national policy-making¹⁰. Nevertheless, Schriewer (2000) maintains that only when domestic reforms become contentious, and the self-referential system is contested or fails, is evidence about foreign education systems introduced as a reference.

However, externalisation does not necessarily lead to policy changes; external sources of evidence may only be 'referenced' rather than 'borrowed'. According to Luhmann (1995), social systems allow "no other forms of processing in their self-determination" (p. 4). Schriewer and Martinez (2004) use the term 'socio-logic'

¹⁰ The term 'certification' was coined and defined by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) as "the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities" (p. 12).

to stress “the idiosyncrasy of meaning” in specific societies (p.33). They argue that every society inherently and freely filters and selects a limited amount of information from the international environment, and “rearranges” it depending on the domestic system’s “internal needs for ‘supplementary meaning’” (p. 32).

Luhmann (1981) thus argues that “system- internal interpretative acts... do not provide reliable information on... what is actually going on in the world” (p. 40). A good example is that policy-makers in Germany, Australia and Korea provide considerable different interpretations for Finnish success in PISA to serve their domestic reform debates (Takayama, Waldow & Sung, 2013).

The production of legitimacy and the ‘social imaginary’

Max Weber identified three sources of political legitimacy, namely, charismatic, traditional and rational-legal authority (Schmitt, 2004). Drawing on Beck’s (1992) discussion of the ‘risk society’, Giddens (1999) argues that “we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures” (p. 3) and the past can provide very little experience on dealing with this risk. Therefore, the self-referential system, specifically referencing to tradition, beliefs and organisation (Schriewer, 1990), can no longer be taken for granted as a reliable source of legitimacy for education reforms in ‘risk society’. This inevitably drives policy-makers to seek other rational sources of legitimacy.

Drawing on Suchman’s (1995) definition of ‘organisational legitimacy’, Waldow (2012) defines the ‘production of legitimacy’ in a process of social construction as legitimating policy agendas and social structures to be “desirable, proper, or appropriate” (p. 417). In contrast to innovatively developing new “desirable, proper, or appropriate” solutions, borrowing other countries’ ready-made and tested policies seems to provide a ‘quick fix’ with cheap and minimal effort, especially when facing a controversial problem (Bennett, 1991; Robertson & Waltman, 1993; Phillips, 2000). Additionally, Rose (1991) points out that, if the lesson is negative, policy-makers may learn “what not to do from

watching the mistakes of others” (p. 4). EPB thus becomes a rational source of legitimacy.

By referencing to the experience of former British senior civil servants, Halpin and Troyna (1995) argue that, however, EPB has been at times used to pursue personal motives and short-term political interests. For example, Ponting told the inside story of how Whitehall and ministers work in policy-making:

“The instinctive reaction of most Ministers when confronted by an issue is not to think in terms of analysing a complex problem to seek out the optimum solution but instead to see it in political terms. The questions they ask are: ‘How can this issue be exploited politically to maximum advantage?’, ‘How can the party gain and how can we maximise problems for the opposition?’, and finally: ‘Does this issue increase my political exposure and will it benefit my career?’” (Ponting, 1986, quoted in Halpin & Troyna, 1995, p. 308)

In addition, politicians tend to show their understanding of ‘what works’ elsewhere when they face highly controversial problems, election/party competition, or politically contested reforms (Rose, 1991; Phillips, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). As Robertson (1991) notes, the ‘borrowed’ policies are presented as “politically neutral truths” and used as “political weapons” to obtain strategic advantage in political conflicts (p. 55). Similarly, Steiner-Khamsi (2000) argues that EPB can “prevent arduous bargaining” among stakeholders, build policy coalitions, and offer “leverage” to prioritise certain policies (p. 170).

Rapplee (2012) proposes the metaphor of theatre to elaborate how EPB has been subsumed under the political strategies of catalysing and framing education reforms. In the political theatre, attraction and ‘borrowing’ are taken as “political stagecraft”, political players write their own “script” on the basis of “pre-existing ideological convictions”, then perform the “drama” of ‘borrowing’, attempting to “produce salutary effects among the audience – other policy makers, media, general public and so on” (p. 125). In other words, a “powerful coalition of actors”, who adhere to their long-standing ideological agendas, drive domestic reform by discursively using external references, and then “erase” its “political origins” to normalise and legitimate the policy outcomes (p. 141). Hence, he insists that

academics should avoid imagining authentic ‘borrowing’, and move beyond studying policy documents and official statements, to critically observe education knowledge, discourse and power flows.

Policy actors gain public support by convincing them that external exemplars can achieve their own goals or domestic problems fit existing international solution packages. This is related to the concept of ‘social imaginary’ which is defined by Taylor (2004) as views of social reality (how things usually go) and norms (how things ought to go) shared by ordinary people and embedded in everyday notions, images, theories and policies. He argues that it is these common understandings that generate sense and legitimacy for social practices. Drawing on this conceptual understanding, Rizvi (2006) argues that social imaginaries “play a major role in making policies authoritative, in securing consent and becoming legitimate” and it is important for governments to develop and exercise “a social imaginary within which policy practices are located” (p. 198).

Appadurai (1996) argues that, in this highly mediated global world, more people than ever before can routinely imagine various possibilities of living elsewhere; the imaginaries spanning across national boundaries and cultural identities enable people to redefine themselves and reconstruct their relations to others. Drawing on this, Takayama (2010) argues that images of other successful education systems, created and reinforced by PISA rankings, mass media, experts and politicians, have become a “cultural repository” onto which the public can project their desires, fantasies and dreams of “alternative approaches to education reform” in the domestic system (p. 58). Policy actors thus seem to be more interested in using the images of ‘reference societies’ to mobilise the public’s feelings of anxiety, fear, despair and hope in their favoured direction for education reforms, rather than pursuing their ‘reality’.

An example of examining social imaginaries of education systems is provided by Waldow et al. (2014), who focus on the media discourse of ‘Asian Tigers’ PISA success in Australia, Germany and South Korea. According to them: (1) while Asian education is described as ‘utopia’ in Australian education reform debates, it “provides the dystopian mirror image” in Germany (p. 7); (2) within Germany, in

contrast to Asia, “Finland serves as the image of an educational utopia” (p. 7); and, (3) as one of the Asian societies, Korea’s self-perceptions of its educational characteristics are divided into “strengths” and “oppressive features” (p. 15). These social imaginaries of educational ‘utopia’ and ‘dystopia’ and accordingly the selection and construction of ‘reference society’ in different nations, as they further argue, are determined by local factors, including: “(1) *national auto- and heterostereotypes* and their interplay; (2) *economic relations* between countries; and (3) the *decline or increase of the results of a country* in large-scale assessments relative to potential reference countries” (p. 14).

Symbolic policy borrowing

The rhetoric construction of ‘reference society’ does not necessarily lead to *de facto* borrowing. Halpin and Troyna (1995) argue that the significance of EPB has sometimes “more to do with form than content” (p. 308). Put differently, the ‘borrowed’ policy is more valued for its political symbolism than its details (Whitty & Edwards, 1992; Green, 1993). As Schriewer (2000) points out, ‘symbolic policy borrowing’ is likely to result in a gap between policy talk/rhetoric/discourse and policy action/practice/initiative. A similar concept, ‘phony policy borrowing’, as termed by Phillips (2000), indicates that ‘borrowing’ takes place, either without the intention of ever implementing the policy, or with the intent of eradicating the ‘borrowed’ policy once the domestic reform is put into practice. Lynch (1998) describes EPB as a ‘flag of convenience’ to secure public support and international funding. This also explains why policy-makers claim the introduction of policy is based on lessons learned from overseas, even though similar practices are already implemented in their own backyards (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000).

For the analysis of the present study, this section has provided theoretical and conceptual foundations for understanding the high selection of external references to authenticate policy concerns and naturalise given solutions. The following section explores the perceived implications of EPB.

2.6. Convergence, standardisation and globalisation

As Waldow (2012) and Steiner-Khamsi (2012) note, it is contested whether EPB has made national education systems converge towards international standards and practices in the context of globalisation. Crucial questions that arise are: whether education convergence/standardisation is authentic and substantive, and how EPB associated with globalisation comes into play. This section examines education convergence/standardisation from various perspectives. Among them, world culture theory is highlighted as it has been one of the most powerful approaches to analysing this theme. It lastly focuses on the concept of the ‘spatial turn’ which signals that EPB has increasingly occurred within a global space.

Education convergence/standardisation in the context of globalisation

Steiner-Khamsi (2000) summarises three approaches to global education convergence. The consensus model is rooted in the assumption that all education systems are likely to confront similar challenges in the context of globalisation, or be affected by globalisation in similar ways. This results in the adoption of similar solutions across nations. The conflict model draws on neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism. It argues that international standards do not derive from “a consensual act of borrowing”, but are “propagated” by advanced wealthy countries which have more access to information, expertise, technology, networking and representation in international organisations (p. 161). In this regard, ‘western’ or ‘American’ standards seem to be more accurate than ‘international’ and ‘global’.

In contrast, the culturalist model emphasises how local factors respond to global challenges in diverse ways. Drawing on Appadurai’s (1996) work, Steiner-Khamsi notes that transnational flows – such as people, technology, media images and information, and ideologies – do not necessarily cause conjuncture, but also disjuncture. Besides, there is “a plurality of cultures” (p. 161) within a country; people construct the meaning of education issues and privilege certain education interests and concerns depending on class, race, gender and ethnicity. EPB might

not result from a global consensus on what constitutes the ‘best’ education system and bring about convergence, but result in local forces and lead to diversity in its implementation.

The global policy network has significantly shaped the ‘planetspeak’ (Nóvoa, 2002) of education governance and schooling through promoting standardised tests and recommendations and ‘world-class’ models. Gorur (2015) criticises PISA as “an exercise in making education systems legible and manageable” through reducing and standardising education into “a single rank” and a set of ‘best practices’. Meanwhile, Alexander (2010) argues that the quest for ‘world class’ by national governments has been more like a concept, slogan, aspiration or claim, meaningless in practice. Similarly, Steiner-Khamsi (2014) points out that, terms, such as ‘international standards’ and ‘21st century skills’, serve as “empty vessels” which can be filled with different local meanings according to specific needs.

World culture theory

Instead of seeing ‘convergence’ as a result of common challenges and contexts (i.e. consensus model), proponents of ‘world culture’ theory, such as John Meyer and Francisco Ramirez, emphasise that the driving forces behind ‘convergence’ are “the logic of science and the myth of progress” (Carney, Rappleye & Silova, 2012, p. 366). This theory was first established by arguing that mass schooling systems around the world spread from a common source and share similar features over time (Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal, 1992). The education model has been subsequently developed into a more general culture model of the modern nation-state (Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997). As Rappleye (2012) argues, this is based on a belief that human society should be organised around “a set of ‘rationalised myths’” – believing in process, rationality and science; and institutions – such as states, organisations, schools and firms – are supposed to “embody, reflect and promote” this consensus and eventually become ‘isomorphic’ (p. 124).

In recent years, academics adopting the world culture stances have increasingly engaged in the discussion about EPB. For example, Wiseman and

Baker (2005) consider that ideas and concepts for policy-making, starting from a few nations, “flow out to others” and eventually “become a part of policy-makers’ fundamental understanding of educational systems and schooling” (p. 4). From this perspective, EPB is authentic and substantive (Rappleye, 2012). By employing the concept of ‘loose coupling’, they have, at least implicitly, acknowledged the existence of education divergence (Carney et al., 2012). As Meyer and Ramirez (2000) put it, “standardisation is a manual cut and paste process in which what exactly gets cut and how precisely it gets pasted varies” (p. 128). They have highlighted the generic themes promoted around the globe, such as decentralisation, marketisation, privatisation and accountability, and from this claimed that there is a convergence towards a ‘world model’ (Silova, 2012).

However, world culture theory has triggered considerable criticisms. As Rappleye (2014) argues, the methodological strategy that it adopts sets its own conceptual categories and defines the “parameters” of those categories (p. 22); empirical evidence is then gathered in ways which confirm the convergence envisaged. Carney et al. (2012) note that it creates an ‘imagined world society’ characterised by consensus and homogeneity, but lacks a “deep engagement” with the world in which “one can experience coherence and chaos, ambition and ambivalence” (p. 385). Comparing to the conflict model, world culture theory fails to recognise the uneven flow from ‘powerful’ western countries to the rest of the world. As highlighted in the culturalist model, global models tend to be resisted, reinterpreted, and indigenised locally, which leads to ‘hybridisation’ and ‘new local particularities’ (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Hence, Silova (2012) argues that education convergence, as a consequence of ‘world culture’ seems to be “primarily discursive and imagined” (p. 239).

The stance of world culture theory and the position of culturalists and anthropologists seem to be the opposite, or as Carney, Rappleye and Silova (2012) put it, has reached “an impasse”. Nevertheless, Anderson-Levitt (2003) and Waldow (2012) both argue that these two approaches are complementary to each other and capture different but valid aspects of social reality. Schriewer (2003) thus conceptualises the ‘global/local nexus’ to examine EPB, which involves the

global-level interaction and the local context which interprets and recontextualises global forces.

The ‘spatial turn’

EPB has been long examined in the geographical sense – how policy moves across national territorial borders (Lawn & Nóvoa, 2002). Many academics argue that there is a growing ‘spatial turn’ in education, which overlaps and integrates geographic and social space. For example, Carney (2012) coins the term ‘policyscape’ to ‘decentre’ physical landscape and construct a ‘scape’ in which local education phenomena are “constituted mutually and dialectically” and “mediated through transnational bodies and agencies” (p. 350). Wiseman (2010) similarly acknowledges an “intellectual space” which is “bounded by the extent of the legitimated evidence used to support one decision or policy versus another” (p. 18). Dale and Robertson (2012) take the Bologna Process as an example to illustrate how the global and the national interact relationally across “diverse cultural, political and economic topographies” (p. 35). With the growing influence of large-scale international surveys, Sellar and Lingard (2013a) specifically define the ‘global education policy field’ as a “commensurate space of measurement of the comparative performance of schooling systems” (p. 201).

This section examines the perceived implication of EPB in a broader sense of education ‘space’. This is one of the foci in this study – whether EPB from East Asia in England results in education convergence between these two regions and whether East Asian education systems can be homogeneously portrayed as a ‘world-class’ model reflecting international standards. After examining all the factors and elements involved in EPB, the next section specifically reviews postcolonial theories and conceptions to enunciate ‘East-to-West’ EPB.

2.7. Postcolonial approaches to understanding education policy borrowing

In the field of comparative education, postcolonial approaches have been sought to examine education systems which have their origins in the colonial era and the continued hegemony of western forms of education (Tikly, 1999; Crossley & Tikly, 2004). Nevertheless, Takayama and Apple (2008) point out that there has been “little attempt to situate educational borrowing within the legacy of western cultural imperialism” (p. 290). This study aims to make a contribution in this respect. In doing so, this section gives a brief introduction to the concept ‘postcolonialism’. It then specifically examines Edward Said’s conception of ‘Orientalism’ as well as Homi Bhabha’s concept ‘ambivalence’. Lastly, how to approach the ‘East-to-West’ EPB is discussed from postcolonial perspectives.

Postcolonialism

The term ‘postcolonialism’ is also written with a hyphen as ‘post-colonialism’. As Blunt and McEwan (2000) explain, ‘post-colonialism’, refers to “a temporary aftermath”, that denotes the period after colonialism, while ‘postcolonialism’, refers to “a critical aftermath”, that indicates a challenge to colonialism but remaining closely influenced by it (p. 3). However, both of these two forms/meanings are controversial (Crossley & Tikly, 2004). With regard to ‘post-colonialism’, direct military occupation still exists in many parts of the world and there have emerged more indirect forms of political, economic and cultural domination, known as ‘neo-colonialism’. A response to this criticism draws on the work of Quayson (2000), which suggests conceiving of post-colonialism as a gradual “process of post-colonialising”, rather than “chronological supersession”, which characterises it as “a process of coming-into-being and of struggle *against* colonialism and its after-effects” (p. 9).

‘Postcolonialism’ is often criticised as it has reinforced rather than resisted the western dominance of interpreting non-western world. As Hall (1996) argues, postcolonialism is represented as the kind of language and knowledge that can only

be comprehended by westernised intellectual elites. Moreover, Tikly (1999) notes that ‘old binaries’ (e.g. First/Third World and ‘Black’/‘White’) are not replaced by, but rather intertwined with, ‘new binaries’ (e.g. hegemony and counter-hegemony) and continue to engage in current political struggles. Notwithstanding these critiques, I prefer the unhyphenated version for this study for two reasons. Firstly, it appears dominant in academic discussions. Secondly and more importantly, it goes beyond the geographical and historical sense and gets closer to the issues of power, hierarchy and hegemony, which signifies an epistemological shift in the way that the ‘East/West’ relationship is described and interpreted.

A wide range of topics have been examined within postcolonial frameworks, including migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, language and identities in colonial and neo-colonial contexts (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995). In contemporary postcolonial studies, Said (2003) identifies a binary geopolitical division – Occident/ Orient, us/other and normal/abnormal – created by western European. However, one of the critiques to Said’s work is that he fell into the same trap of binarism which he himself attempted to oppose and transcend (Chakrabarti, 2012). Taking up Said’s work, Bhabha (1994) develops a series of interconnected concepts to elaborate the resistance of the colonised people who hybridises the colonial identity and culture. Said and Bhabha provide profound insights into the hierarchical and hybrid relationship between ‘East’ and ‘West’ for this study and are specifically reviewed below.

‘Orientalism’ and ‘ambivalence’

The concept ‘Orientalism’ was not created by Said. But it has entered academic discourse since the publication of his book *Orientalism* in 1978, which has become one of the most influential texts for postcolonial studies. Central to this concept is the assumption that there has been a long tradition of prejudiced western interpretations of the Orient, shaped by the attitudes of European Imperialism, which has little to do with the reality of the ‘Orient’. As Said (2003) puts it,

“...that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’ in discourse about it. And these representations rely on institution, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.” (p. 22)

According to Said, the purpose of knowing the Orient is to help the West to define itself. In western interpretations, all Oriental societies are simply and imaginarily envisioned as significantly similar to one another, whether Near, Middle or Far East, but fundamentally antithetical to Occidental societies. Drawing on Gramsci’s concept of ‘cultural hegemony’, Said argues that these interpretations are based on the idea of European identity as superior and predominant. Thus, the Oriental is portrayed as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’”, whereas European is “rational, virtuous, mature and ‘normal’” (p. 40). The Occident gains strength through this preconceived archetype which sets itself against, and beats, the Orient. The Orient is accordingly alienated and marginalised as the ‘other’.

Based on Foucault’s theory of ‘power/knowledge’, Said develops the idea of the West’s privileged position in defining and articulating the Orient, which is a process of “Orientalising the Orient” (p. 49). As he elaborates, “...because his [West’s] was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery...” (p. 44) and “the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it” (p. 32). In other words, the western knowledge of the Orient is the Orient. Furthermore, since “to have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it”, we “have authority over ‘it’” (p. 32). Colonial rule is therefore legitimated.

Images of the Orient, constructed and interpreted by the West, precede experience. Even though empirical evidence is included in the description of the Orient, it was only fitted into western knowledge frameworks to support and verify the West’s expectations and needs. In addition, the power is generated and maintained by the knowledge produced through a whole system of “scholarly discovery, philosophical reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and

sociological description” (p. 12). Orientalism is developed to be “a career” for Orientalists (p. 3) who do not seek to renew or deepen the perception of the Orient, but rather to stymie the challenge of the existing interpretation.

In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) argues that Said revealed the strategy/logic that the West/powerful used to create and heighten its superiority over the ‘East’/powerless; but he succumbed to it and failed to acknowledge the resistance from the colonised, which confirmed and consolidated western hegemonic control. Starting from this critique, he develops a range of the field’s neologisms and concepts, such as ‘hybridity’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘mimicry’, to emphasise that the colonised translates the culture that the coloniser imposed on them rather than simply submit to it; cultural difference remains, which distinguishes the oppressed colonised from the dominant coloniser. Thus, for the coloniser, the imagination, construction and interpretation of the colonised are by no means straightforward, but rather characterised by ‘ambivalence’. The coloniser expects a reformed and recognisable ‘other’, but as an inferior, which is, in Bhabha’s words, “a subject of difference... almost the same, but not quite” (p. 86). The colonised is thus an object of both desire and derision and ‘ambivalence’ results in the coloniser experiencing mastery and pleasure on the one hand, and anxiety and defence on the other.

Understanding education policy borrowing from postcolonial perspectives

As mentioned earlier, comparative education has made limited efforts to study EPB from postcolonial perspectives. One of the notable exceptions is the work of Takayama and Apple (2008), which investigates how Japanese conservatives criticised *yutori* reform¹¹ and reconstitute people’s common sense about the current situation and future course of Japanese education by borrowing the “crisis-and-success narrative of British education” (p. 289). They argue that, although Japan has become one of the most important economic powerhouses since the 1980s, it

¹¹ ‘Yutori education’ can be translated as ‘relaxed education’ or ‘education free from pressure’. It was introduced in the 1970s and has since reduced the hours and content of curriculum in primary education.

has remained a passive and marginal recipient of western ‘advanced’ knowledge. This is corroborated by the work of Apple, Kenway and Singh (2005), which points out that the deterritorialisation of economic power has not changed the fact that the ‘global standard’ stemming from the ‘West’ continues to normalise ‘other’ people’s ways of being and knowing.

Another exception is Rappeley’s (2007) study of American ‘feverish’ attraction to Japanese education during the 1980s, which, similar to this study, observes a flow in contrast to the long tradition of ‘West-to-Rest’ EPB. He argues that this attraction was driven by Japanese economic competitiveness and the US’ domestic political agendas; and notes that it resulted in the loss of the US’ self-superiority and the worries of being left behind. The portrayal and interpretation of Japan as a model at that time seem to share some common features with that of East Asia in the current western education debates. However, as Rappeley is specifically concerned with cross-national attraction, whether the attraction leads to policy being ‘borrowed’ and how to understand the ‘power/knowledge’ relationship embedded in the representations of East Asian education have not been explored, which are focused in the present study.

The above six sections have discussed the concept, process, nature, rationale and implication of EPB from various theoretical and conceptual perspectives/ approaches. The following three sections review the meaning of, the rationales and motives of, and the conceptual frameworks for, school autonomy.

2.8. Clarification of the concept: school autonomy

Education reforms designed to increase school autonomy have spread globally since the 1980s. Nevertheless, the concept ‘school autonomy’, used extensively by policy-makers and intellectuals, has remained vague and been used interchangeably with the concepts ‘decentralisation’ and school-based management. The meanings of, and the relations between, school autonomy and these associated concepts are elaborated in this section. Additionally, school accountability is described as a

mechanism that ensures education quality particularly in a relatively autonomous system. This section also examines the concept ‘accountability’ and how it interplays with ‘autonomy’ in the school context.

School autonomy

Literally, the term ‘autonomy’ derives from ancient Greek and means ‘self-legislation in the sense of self-administration or self-governance’ (Berka, 2000, p.4). ‘Self-’ does not exist within a vacuum. Being ‘self-’, as Katz (1964) and Lindley (1986) argue, particularly means being independent from external controls. For example, in Europe, the notion of autonomy historically served the desire to emancipate education from the control of the Church. With the rise of the modern state in the 19th century, the acquisition of autonomy resulted from confrontation with the State. During recent decades, the State has stepped back and left increasing room for market power (Berka, 2000).

As Lindley (1986) points out, the concept of ‘autonomy’ has its root in individuals mastering “over one’s self” and “not being subservient to others” (i.e. ‘individual autonomy’); and may also indicate social groups “being in control of their own affairs” (i.e. ‘group autonomy’), such as nations, government departments, professional associations and committees (pp. 5-6). More specifically, Berlin (1958) elaborates on the meaning of an individual being autonomous:

“I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes.” (p. 131)

For Kant, this is possible and important because human beings possess rationality – the capacity for autonomy – and should be morally and equally treated as an end rather than a means. Similarly, Hume argues that the ultimate ends of human beings are diverse and thus they should have the right to run their own lives as long as one does not use faulty reasoning. These philosophical perspectives on

individual autonomy significantly shape liberal democratic thought and justify the basic features of political systems in Anglo-Saxon countries.

In contrast, Asian cultures and values, profoundly influenced by Confucian ethics, are often thought to emphasise the centrality of interpersonal relationships and membership of communities rather than the self (Rosemont, 2004; Ihara, 2004). Until the late 19th century, the view of human beings as free autonomous individuals was introduced to Asian societies by academics, such as *Yan Fu* and *Hu Shi*, who studied abroad (Lin, 1991). Nevertheless, individual autonomy has often been promoted on the premise that it would contribute to the common good (Wong, 2004).

Shirley (1984) and Oslen (2008) both describe autonomous social groups, including educational institutions and schools, as the ones with freedom to define their mission and strategic plan, manage fiscal affairs and determine organisational and personnel actions, according to their own normative principles and behavioural logic. With regard to school autonomy, a similar definition is provided by Arcia, Macdonald, Patrinos and Porta (2011):

“School autonomy is a form of school management in which schools are given decision-making authority over their operations, including the hiring and firing of personnel, and the assessment of teachers and pedagogical practices.” (p. 2)

Drawing on this definition and the discussion above, school autonomy first and foremost denotes the power to make decisions within the school as a unit. Secondly, it probably can only be understood as a form of ‘relative autonomy’, given the extent to which schools are subject to external influence and higher authorities have the ultimate power to transfer decision-making powers to individual schools. Thirdly, there are a range of areas of school management that autonomy can be transferred to. Moreover, although this definition is only concerned with the power in “operations”, many academics (e.g. Lauglo, 1995; Karlsen, 1999) make a distinction between different types of power. Among them, Winstanley, Sorabji and Dawson (1995) use the terms ‘criteria power’ and ‘operational power’ to respectively designate the power of defining the aims,

purpose and framework of service provision and the power of deciding how service is delivered.

Therefore, references to school autonomy seem often to be of generic nature. It is necessary to determine the precise context and socio-political setting in which it operates so as to, clarify to what degree and in which areas the school is authorised to make what kind of decisions, and illustrate who grants power, to whom, and within what limits.

Decentralisation

The process of transferring power from a higher authority to a lower authority can be defined as ‘decentralisation’ (Hanson, 1998; Bray, 1999). In theory, decentralisation, as a reform strategy, brings about an increase of autonomy at the local/site level (Bottani, 2000; Sayed, 2010). School autonomy in this sense can be understood as an outcome of decentralisation when power is delivered to individual schools. As McGinn and Welsh (1999) argue, decentralisation implies ‘dispersal’, ‘increased space’ and ‘a permit for individuality or diversity’ (pp. 19-20). Nevertheless, the motives and specific initiatives adopted for decentralisation vary. For example, as Hanson (2006) observes, decentralisation reforms range from introducing market forces as in Chile in 1980 to empowering local educators and parents as in Nicaragua in 1994.

A completely decentralised system seems not to exist. Turner and Hulme (1997) argue that almost all decisions in the process of governance retain degrees of centralisation and decentralisation. According to Tatto (1999), the processes of centralisation and decentralisation are often interwoven with ‘recentralisation’ to ensure against the loss of central/state control. The concept ‘decentralised centralism’ was introduced by Karlsen (2000) to refer to the paradoxical and dynamic interactions between decentralisation and centralisation. Bray (1999) emphasises that decentralisation is a dynamic ‘-isation’ process rather than a ‘static situation’ (p. 208). It probably occurs in systems which are previously centralised; but also applies to systems which are already decentralised but become more

decentralised. By means of establishing various regulatory frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms, the central government can govern and supervise local authorities and schools at a distance, without detailed control (Neave, 1995). The concept ‘centralised decentralisation’ is employed to portray this phenomenon in education (e.g. Watkins, 1993; Mok, 2002).

Therefore, drawing on the work of Simkins (1997), it is crucial to ask three questions in examining decentralisation: who is empowered and who is disempowered by the reform actions; in respect to what are their powers increased or decreased; and under what forms of control and constraint must these powers be exercised?

School-based management

In the words of Malen, Ogawa and Kranz (1990), school-based management can be viewed conceptually as:

“...a formal alteration of governance structures... [and] a form of decentralisation that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvement might be stimulated and sustained.” (p. 290)

Nonetheless, as Arcia et al. (2011) note, schools implementing school-based management are usually responsible for “most managerial decisions” (p. 3). Moreover, Caldwell (2005) emphasises that those ‘operational/managerial’ decisions are made “within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountability” (p. 1).

School-based management in terms of the curriculum is specifically termed as school-based curriculum development (SBCD). As many studies (e.g. Bolstad, 2004; Marsh, Morris & Lo, 2014) demonstrate, while SBCD has been promoted as an effective means to empower teachers on the design and delivery of curriculum, it does not necessarily vary significantly from the central curriculum. For example,

Brady (1992) argues that, SBCD in Australia is “selective or adaptive rather than creative” (p. 24).

Murphy and Beck (1995) identify three forms of school-based management. In ‘administrative control school-based management’, school leaders are given the main decision-making power over managing schools, while, according to Caldwell (2005), they are expected to respond to policies initiated by higher authorities. ‘Professional control school-based management’ encourages teachers to develop their professionalism especially with regard to curriculum and pedagogy, although Marsh (1992) argues that, in reality, their power is restricted by the shortage of time, expertise and resources, and influence from other stakeholders. ‘Community control school-based management’, driven by market forces, stresses local values and preferences in the curriculum. In particular, the promotion of parental choice and education privatisation is an example for this form (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

In a nutshell, school-based management and SBCD are the most widespread forms of decentralisation reform, including in East Asia and England. In studying them, it should be borne in mind that the power enjoyed by schools is “managerial” (operational) and restricted by various central control mechanisms. It is also necessary to identify whom school-based management empowers (e.g. principals, teachers, or parents) to and in which areas.

Accountability

In parallel to the global promotion of school autonomy, accountability has been seen as an indispensable mechanism of guaranteeing education quality in increased autonomous systems (Arcia et al., 2011). As Simkins (1997) illustrates, Party A is accountable to Party B suggests an expectation that A should act in ways which are consistent with the legitimised rules and requirements of B; A is supposed to report to B who has the oversight authority over the school; and B has the legitimised power to influence the behaviour of A. School accountability, according to Wossmann, Ludemann, Schutz and Martin (2007), is specifically

composed of achievement standards, measurement of achievement and consequences (rewards or sanction) for measured achievement.

Anderson (2005) distinguishes three types of school accountability differentiated by 'for what' and 'to whom'. In the first type, educators are accountable for adherence to legislation and regulations, and accountable to the bureaucracy. For example, the central government determines the aims and purposes of education through national curriculum and examinations. The second type requires compliance with professional norms. Educators are accountable for adherence to standards of good practice set by professionals and accountable to their peers. The third type is driven by the learning results of pupils. Simkins (1997) terms this as 'market accountability', as educators find themselves accountable to their customers – the general public.

As contended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011a), the best-performing education systems are the ones that have combined greater autonomy with a culture of accountability. However, Hannaway (1993) argues that, the tight school accountability framework adopted in decentralisation reforms might mitigate the degree of school autonomy. Thus, the key issue in examining school accountability is to identify how schools are evaluated and/or inspected and how this influences the nature and degree of school autonomy (Macpherson, 1998; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004).

This section has clarified the key concepts related to school autonomy. I shall now move to discuss why school autonomy has become popularised globally.

2.9. Rationales and motives for promoting school autonomy

This section is concerned with the underlying rationales and motives of reforms designed to transfer greater autonomy to schools from administrative, political and philosophical perspectives. It is noted that, in practice, reforms have been often fuelled by multiple driving forces which may complement or contradict one another.

Administrative perspectives

Increasing autonomy is adopted as a vehicle for improving the efficiency of managing education services, and particularly public funds (Sleegers & Wesselingh, 1995). As McGinn and Welsh (1999) point out, the rationale is that the school, which is closer to its 'clients', is better able to identify diverse needs, local issues and appropriate solutions, allocate resources and reduce bureaucracy. Meanwhile, centralisation and bureaucratisation of decision-making are considered to account for the lack of motivation for schools' self-improvement (Fitz, Halpin & Power, 1993). Consequently, there has emerged a global movement towards marketisation and implementing New Public Management. It is ideologically driven by neo-liberalism, applying private sector principles, managerial culture and business management techniques to the creation of a 'free market' / 'quasi-market' in the education sector to enhance its productivity and competitiveness (Apple, 2000). This sentiment, and variants of it, has been used in official documents and discourse to legitimate increasing school autonomy and competition in many countries (Bolstad, 2004).

From this perspective, high levels of school autonomy and competition have been used to explain the effective delivery of education services and further the high performance of education systems (e.g. Clark, 2009; Machin & Vernoit, 2011). For example, based on the 2009 PISA results, the OECD (2011b) concludes that:

“...a student who attends a school with more autonomy in allocating resources than the average school tends to score five points higher on the PISA reading test than a student who attends a school with less autonomy.” (p.480)

Nevertheless, whether schools with more autonomy outperform their less autonomous counterparts, or whether high levels of school autonomy and competition bring about high attainment, and to what extent they are relevant, are still controversial (Grosskopf & Moutray, 2001; Allen, 2010).

Political perspectives

The political perspectives can be divided into four categories. Firstly, the demands for autonomy in education are linked with the promotion of democratisation and citizen participation (Hanson, 2006). According to Eurydice (2007a), this was the case in Europe during the 1980s, which required schools to be more open to their local communities; and in Latin America during the 1990s, which attempted to reduce the role of ideology in the content of public education. McGinn and Welsh (1999) point out that people want to be “consulted and involved in decision-making that concerns them directly” (p. 9). Decentralised systems seem to be more likely to encourage and enable stakeholders from different cultural, political and social groups to express their desires (Sleegers & Wessingh, 1995).

Secondly, Weiler (1990) argues that governments freely choose to give up a portion of their power in order to gain ‘compensatory legitimation’ in the political arena (p. 441). Based on a series of theoretical works (Habermas, 1975; Wolfe, 1977; Offe, 1984), he argues that politicians, policy-makers and administrators are aware that the modern state faces an increasingly serious erosion of legitimacy. Therefore, the purpose of designing policy is not just to achieve outcomes such as efficiency, equality and democracy, but also to recapture compensatory legitimacy from being or at least appearing to be efficient, equal and democratic. Nevertheless, he recognises a dilemma between the benefit of enhancing legitimacy and the cost of losing control.

Thirdly, decentralisation reforms essentially lead to the redistribution of decision-making power among different levels of authorities. Certain groups (e.g. teacher unions) may be included or excluded from the exercise of control (Bray, 1999). As Bjork (2006) notes, “protecting the power that you enjoy is a natural political reflex” (p. 241). Thus, redefining a power relationship might result in competition and resistance. Fourthly, decentralisation reforms are sometimes driven by financial considerations (Rhoten, 2000). Bray (1999) similarly states that reducing the central power can be a way of discarding the state’s responsibilities for education, in particular, when the central government confronts fiscal stringency.

McGinn and Welsh (1999) argue that although fiscal decentralisation allows the participation of new resources, it may result in local disparities.

Philosophical perspectives

In the West, especially Anglo-Saxon countries, autonomy *per se* is an inherently persuasive, even seductive concept. Like ‘freedom’, it is highly esteemed in society (Berka, 2000) and seen as a fundamental principle of the western liberal tradition (Lindley, 1986). Since the 19th century, school autonomy was specifically developed in Europe and later in East Asia where academic freedom was promoted (Eurydice, 2007a) and believed to be an essential necessity for the pursuit of true knowledge (Polanyi, 1958). It seems that if an action is taken in the name of ‘autonomy’, which then would be seen as worthwhile and praiseworthy; autonomy therefore justifies itself. Although the definition of ‘autonomy’ is rather ambiguous and varied in different reform contexts, the emphasis has remained ubiquitous. As Berka (2000) argues, autonomy, like an ‘empty jar’, can be “filled with different spirits” needed in the discourse of education reform to mobilise the public’s emotion and camouflage vested interests and political purposes (p. 5).

With reference to East Asia, the causal link between the high level of school autonomy and outstanding pupil performance has been claimed as the reason for increasing school autonomy in England. This section has investigated the rationales and motives for such reforms from different perspectives. Below, a new conceptual framework for analysing school autonomy is created and elaborated on the basis of the review of previous work.

2.10. Conceptual frameworks for analysing autonomy

A number of academics have developed frameworks to analyse autonomy and the transfer of autonomy – decentralisation – in education. This section illustrates three of them; each has a different emphasis. Drawing on these previous studies, a

new conceptual framework is proposed for this study, which is specifically designed to examine the nature and degree of autonomy at the school level.

Bray: three modes of transferring autonomy.

Bray (1999) distinguishes three modes of territorial decentralisation which refers to the transfer of autonomy among “different geographic tiers of governments” (p. 176):

Deconcentration	The transfer of authority for the implementation of rules, but not for making them;
Delegation	The transfer of decision-making authority from higher to lower hierarchical levels, but that authority can be withdrawn;
Devolution	The transfer of authority to an autonomous unit which can act independently and only informing the centre, but not asking permission, and the centre is responsible for collecting and exchanging information.

This framework indicates three degrees of autonomy, increasing from ‘deconcentration’ to ‘delegation’, and then to ‘devolution’, between hierarchical levels. Moreover, there are two types of power transferred – the power in implementation and the power in decision-making. In other words, a decentralised system can be a unit only given great power to decide how the service determined by higher authorities should be delivered. Similar frameworks can also be seen in other studies, such as Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema (1984) and Hanson (1998). Bray does not include privatisation as one of the forms of decentralisation as other academics do (e.g. Turner & Hulme, 1997). He explains that, in some cases, the authority is centrally controlled by private organisations or churches, which is still a kind of centralised organisation.

OECD: three dimensions of examining autonomy

The OECD has conducted a number of surveys on decision-making patterns since the early 1990s (Bottani, 2000). The key findings of the most recent were summarised in the 2012 *Education at a Glance*. According to this report,

decision-making autonomy can be examined, in terms of levels (loci), fields (domains) and modes (degrees):

Levels of decision	Central government, state governments, provincial/regional authorities or governments, sub-regional or inter- municipal authorities or governments, local authorities or governments, and schools or school boards or committees;
Fields of decision	Organisation of instruction, planning and structure, personnel management, and resource allocation;
Modes of decision	Full autonomy, after consultation with bodies located at another level within the education system, independently but within a framework set by a higher authority, and other.

Overall, this framework is characterised by taking three dimensions into account, which demonstrates the division of power between levels of authorities, among different areas, with (no) limits/control.

Karstanje: task areas of school management in three different grades of autonomy

Karstanje's (1999) framework outlines how systems, differing in their degrees of autonomy, work in a range of task areas of school management. Two dimensions are used for analysing autonomy – the degree and the areas – are combined in an analytical table. From it, five major task areas are identified, namely, teaching and curriculum, staff, school organisation, finances, buildings and facilities, and external relations; and each major area contains several sub-areas. To be specific, in a centralised and regulated system, the government regulates school management in all areas; in a moderately centralised and regulated system, the government only executes its control over some specific areas; and the government in the decentralised and deregulated system allows schools to make decisions with their own resources and limited by few/no rules. In particular, this framework is helpful in developing the interview design for this study. I shall provide more details about this in the methodology chapter. Table 2.1 shows part of this analytical table:

Table 2.1. Examples of task areas of school management in three different grades of autonomy

Areas	Sub-areas	Centralised + regulated	Moderately centralised + moderately regulated	Decentralised + deregulated
Teaching and curriculum	Subjects	Prescribed subjects	Compulsory + optional school subjects	Free choice of subjects + groups of subjects
	Timetable	Prescribed timetable	Prescribed for the total number of lessons for the entire school period	Free timetable

(Karstanje, 1999, p. 39)

A new conceptual framework for analysing school autonomy

Overall, there are two key dimensions of ‘autonomy’ identified in the aforementioned frameworks and in earlier conceptual discussions: the nature of the power that is transferred to the lower authority and the external mechanisms used to regulate the power transferred. It is necessary to create a new conceptual framework which combines these two themes, but with a specific focus on the autonomy enjoyed at the school level.

Firstly, drawing on the ‘operational power’ and ‘criteria power’ defined by Winstanley et al. (1995), I distinguish the nature of school autonomy between ‘operational power’ and ‘policy and operational power’ for the new framework. ‘Operational power’, similarly, refers to the power that enables schools to determine how to implement policies formulated by the higher authority. ‘Policy and operational power’, covering both ‘operational power’ and ‘criteria power’, means that schools are able to make policies in terms of goals, standards and frameworks of school management and how to implement these policies. Secondly, these two types of power are exercised with strong or weak control imposed by the higher authority. Thus, four degrees of school autonomy are identified as shown in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2. Degrees of school autonomy in the new framework

1. Operational power + Strong control	3. Policy and operational power + Strong control
2. Operational power + Weak control	4. Policy and operational power + Weak control

In addition, there are another two extreme degrees: (1) no autonomy: when no power is given to schools; and (2) full autonomy: when all kinds of decisions are made by schools. Thirdly, the analysis of school autonomy has to be made with reference to a specific area of school management. Based on the previous frameworks, six major areas and 29 sub-areas are identified and presented in Table 2.3:

Table 2.3. Areas of school management in new conceptual framework

Areas	Sub-areas
Organisation and governance	Organisation structure and functions; governance mechanism; and types of schools
Finance	Source(s) of funding; expenditure; land, buildings and facilities; and financial report and its availability
Curriculum, teaching and examination	Textbooks; subjects; content of subjects and curriculum delivery; SBCD; curriculum time allocation; school calendar; and entrance exams
Teachers	Qualification and training; hiring and dismissal; continuing professional development; appraisal; promotion; salary and bonuses; and legal status
Accountability	Goals and standards; evaluation and inspection; annual report; and availability of information
Pupil admission and external relations	Pupil admission; relationship with other schools and business; level of parents' involvement; and relationship with mass media (or interview requests in general)

The nature and degree of school autonomy can only be meaningful when a certain type of power granted by a higher authority is assessed in a specific area. For example, if a school can only choose a textbook from a list of approved textbooks, it means that this school is given operational power with weak control; if a school can decide teachers' salary within its budget, but the budget plan needs to be approved by a higher authority, then this school can be categorised as enjoying

policy and operational power with strong control. It is possible that a school enjoys different degrees of autonomy in different areas of school management.

Figure 2.5 shows a complete picture of this new conceptual framework, which is constituted by reference to the nature and degree of the power, the external control and the area of school management. A benchmarking scheme is drawn up and presented in Appendix 1, which provides detailed descriptions of different natures and degrees of school autonomy in each sub-area. Later in this thesis, the three East Asian education systems are graded according to the scheme, drawing on the analysis of policy documents, literature and interview data.

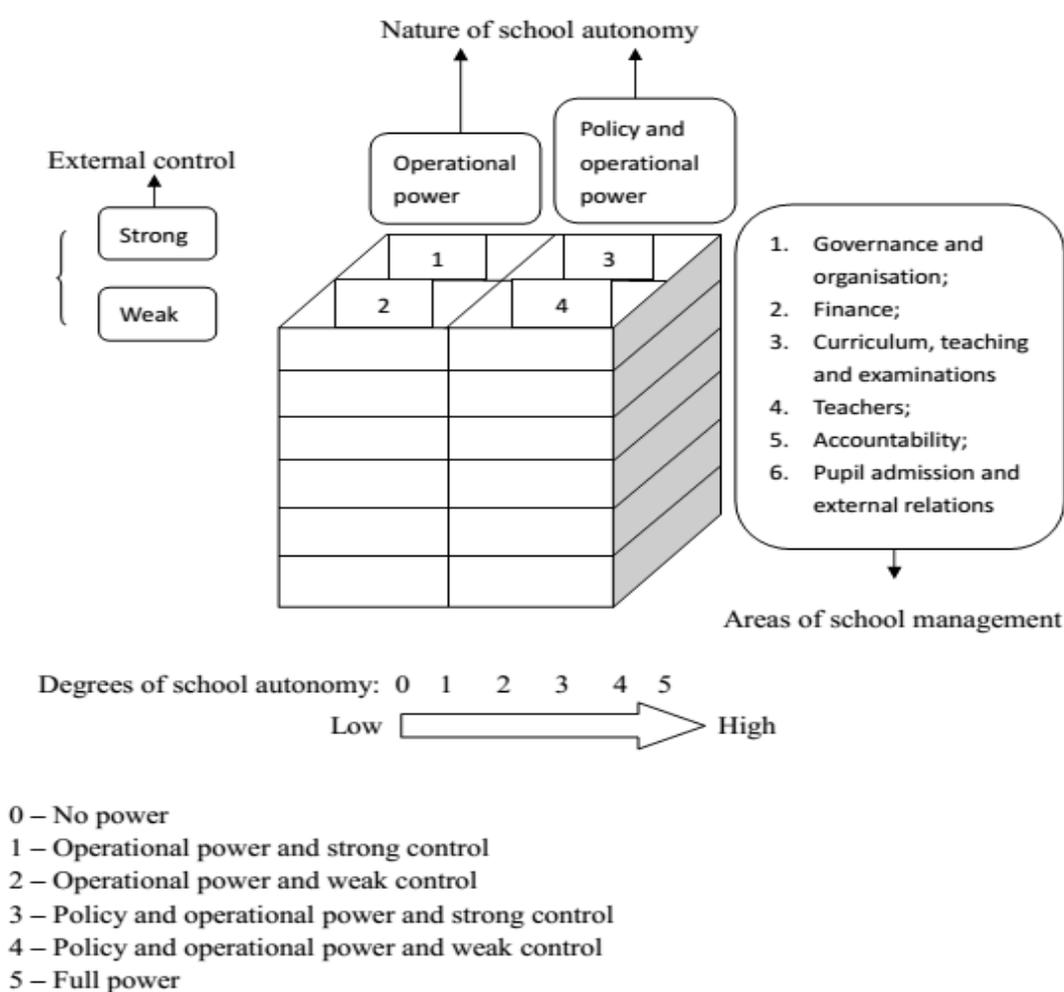


Figure 2.5. New conceptual framework for analysing school autonomy

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter firstly investigated why and how EPB has emerged, developed

and spread, what elements and factors facilitate the production and management of evidence with regard to ‘what works’ in ‘reference societies’, how to understand the (political) motives and nature of EPB, the implications of this global trend and how to understand EPB from East to West from postcolonial perspectives. Two critical features of EPB are identified, which inform the analysis in this study.

Firstly, the ‘socio-logic’ of domestic systems determines why external references are made, what evidence from ‘reference societies’ is considered as ‘good’ and selectively ‘borrowed’, and how policy-makers manipulate the selective ‘good’ evidence to reform their education systems. Secondly, an emerging ‘global policy network’ has increasingly intervened in the production, interpretation and circulation of deterritorised and decontextualised ‘world-class’ models and international standards in different national settings. These two features can assist the examination of why and how East Asian education systems have been imagined, constructed and utilised in the ‘global education policy field’, whether the policies and practices in East Asia have been ‘borrowed’ in England or merely ‘referenced’ for legitimacy seeking and who has dominated the knowledge production about East Asia as a ‘world-class’ system and ‘reference society’.

School autonomy is taken as an illustrative example to examine EPB in this study. In official discourse, school autonomy reform is promoted as an administrative decentralisation strategy; however, it may also be employed to camouflage fiscal considerations and political purposes as ‘autonomy’ is seen as intrinsically moral and good. In understanding school autonomy, it is crucial to examine what type of power (operational and/or policy-oriented) is granted from higher authorities to schools in which areas, with or without external controls. These dimensions constitute a new framework created for this study to assess the nature and degree of school autonomy in East Asian societies.

The theoretical, conceptual and explanatory foundations of understanding EPB and school autonomy have been established in this chapter. The next chapter demonstrates the design and process of collecting and analysing empirical data to address research questions.

Chapter 3. Methodology and methods

3.1. Introduction

Thus far, I have elaborated the research questions, reviewed the literature on EPB and school autonomy, and developed a conceptual framework for answering my overall research question: how is school autonomy in East Asia represented by policy-makers in England since 2010 and does it accord with the ‘reality’ as perceived domestically. This chapter explains my methodological approach. Section 3.2 clarifies the ontological and epistemological stances adopted for perceiving reality, knowledge and ways to gain knowledge. Section 3.3 presents an overview of the research design in terms of three research questions, explains the accessibility issues faced collecting data and corresponding adjustments, and then specifically illustrates the development of the interview design. The data is introduced in section 3.4 through providing examples and enunciating the ways of collection. In section 3.5, the employment of qualitative document analysis and qualitative content analysis in data analysis is demonstrated. Ethical issues are considered in section 3.6.

3.2. Ontological and epistemological stances

In general, the acknowledgment of ontological and epistemological stances, which address questions of the nature of reality and what is (should be) accepted as knowledge (Flew, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), underlies researchers’ perspectives, approaches and methods, and guides research design and process (Trede & Higgs, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). These considerations are of particular significance to the present study as it specifically aims to examine the ‘reality’ of East Asian education systems as well as its English representation.

Positivism advocates that reality is objective and external to social actors; ‘genuine’ knowledge exists in natural phenomena; and researchers gain knowledge

through identifying neutral facts (Miller & Brewer, 2003). From this perspective, the quantitative approach and methods of natural sciences can and should be applied to the study of social world (Bryman, 2012). A researcher locating himself/herself in this tradition, as Alderson (1998) depicts, is like:

“A scientist gazing through a microscope symbolises positivist objective examination, the distance and difference between the observer and the observed, the effort to examine intensely the tiniest part isolated from its context, the use of reliable, visible ‘hard’ data.” (p. 1007)

In contrast, from the view of social constructionists, such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Gergen and Gergen (1991), reality is socially constructed through shared objects and activities and reciprocal interactions between individuals and groups. Accordingly, knowledge is not a “mirror of reality”, but rather “the interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the world” embedded within history, context, culture, language and experiences (Kvale, 1996, p. 41). To gain knowledge is thus to “examine the process by which social world is constructed” (Walsh, 1972, p. 19) and “understand shared and co-constructed realities” by employing qualitative methodology (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 62).

Nevertheless, objectivism and a qualitative methodology are not mutually exclusive. As Ratner (2002) argues, “subjectivism is often regarded as the *sine qua non* of qualitative methodology. However, this is untrue. Qualitative methodology has an objectivist strand as well”. According to him, many qualitative methodologists accept objectivism in the sense that it is an “impersonal, reified, distorting concept” and able to “discount the subjectivity of subjects and researchers”. From this perspective, the ‘reality’, or more specifically, how school autonomy is operationalised and understood in each of the three East Asian societies, is approached by qualitatively collecting and analysing data. In other words, this study presents things as they are through gathering and examining the descriptions in documents and of interviewees. Besides, qualitative data provides ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) and has “strong potential for revealing

complexity” of real life (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 11). In this sense, qualitative approach and data enable me not only to capture the ‘real’ state of school operational affairs, but also to understand the socio-political meaning behind it.

These methodological considerations draw me to regard the researched and the researcher – myself – as “co-constructors of knowledge rather than conveyors and receivers of it” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 63). In addition, I am aware that a gap might exist between interviewees’ ‘on-message’ utterances and their actual perceptions. Therefore, the ‘reality’ of school autonomy in East Asia is studied by analysing the data collected from various sources and perspectives. Its validity and reliability are warranted through triangulation that they are interwoven with each other to provide as in-depth a picture of the ‘reality’ as is possible. Meanwhile, as Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (1992) stress, researchers are “socially located persons” who “inevitably bring biographies and... subjectivities to every stage of research process” (p. 5). Inherent in this view of social research is the need of a further validation of data analysis, or as Miles et al. (2014) term ‘conclusion drawing and verification’. By doing so, the meanings emerging from the data is tested for their confirmability.

Moreover, this study is concerned with the representation of the ‘reality’ of school autonomy in East Asia by the UK Coalition Government, which involves the analysis of policy papers, official documents and politicians’ statements producing and delivering the ‘knowledge’ about foreign societies. According to Mannheim (1936), knowledge can be distorted and ideological if it is coloured by specific interests, purposes and points of view. Foucault (e.g. 1974, 1980 and 1982) emphasises that what counts as reality/truth is determined by the interaction between knowledge and power. Central to this argument is that knowledge and power are inseparable: “no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge” (Foucault, quoted in Sheridan, 1980, p. 131); and knowledge is in turn produced and constrained by power.

Saarinen (2008) observes that policy documents are often mistaken as

something that really exists, but rather what is seen as ‘real/true’ largely depends on what is constructed as ‘reality/truth’ by policy-makers. The socio-political understandings of reality and knowledge lead me to paying specific attention to the selection and interpretation of the ‘knowledge’ used as evidential basis in the political arena and linking this to the examination of the rationales and motivations of EPB in England.

3.3. Research design, accessibility issues and adjustments

Drawing on the philosophical stances and correspondent methodological considerations explained above, this section illustrates how this study, especially the interview, was designed and implemented to address the three research questions. It also elaborates the accessibility issues faced during the data collection and the adjustments adopted to solve them.

Overview of the research design

The first research question investigates the representation of school autonomy in East Asia by policy-makers since 2010. Qualitative document analysis is adopted to analyse the texts collected from: (1) official documents (i.e. policy papers, government-commissioned reports and announcements); (2) politicians’ statements published in or reported by mass media; and (3) key sources of evidence for official documents and politicians’ statements.

Public-funded secondary schools in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Shanghai are focused to answer the second question – the ‘reality’ of school autonomy perceived within East Asia. Three sources of data are collected and analysed by using qualitative content analysis to determine the nature and degree of school autonomy in the three societies studied. The first is policy papers in relation to school governance and management; the second refers to academic literature that provides analyses of school autonomy in East Asia; the third involves interviews with school leaders, academics, policy-makers and education journalists.

Drawing on these three sources of data, I grade areas of school management in each system, according to the conceptual framework created in the literature review chapter. Then, I formulate three models of school autonomy for respective societies. Two school leaders from each society are invited to review and validate the models. In addressing the third research question, the English representation and the ‘reality’ perceived domestically, models of the three East Asian societies, are respectively compared and discussed. A diagram demonstrating the research design is shown as Figure 3.1.

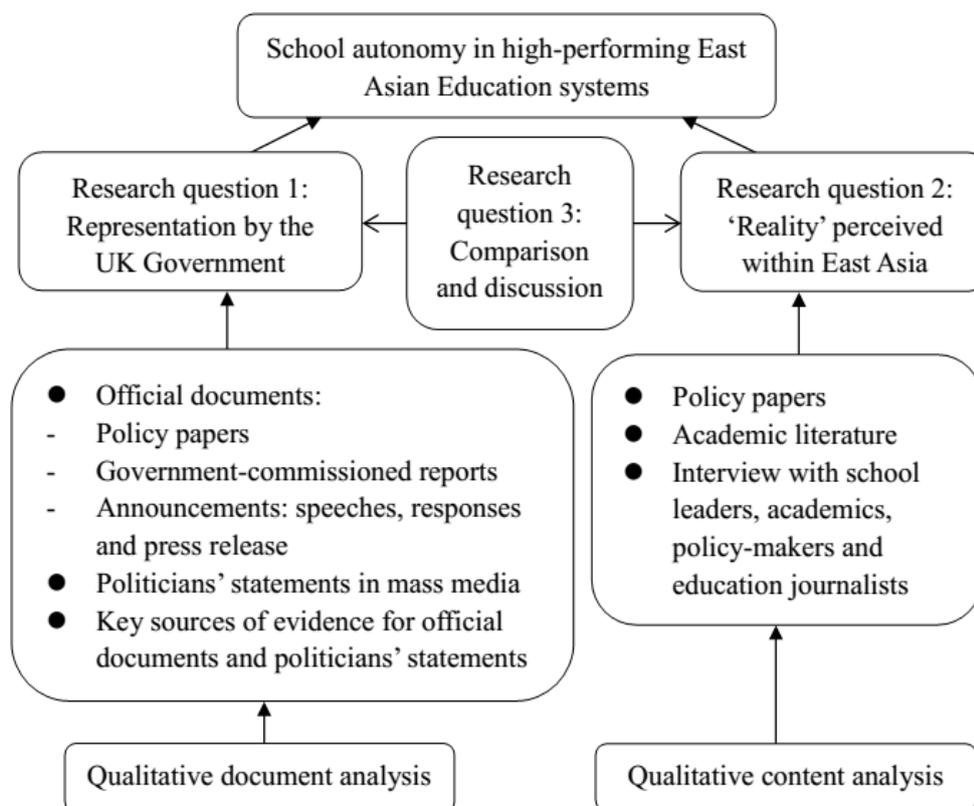


Figure 3.1. Overview of the research design for this study

Accessibility issues and adjustments

A major problem emerging from the process of data collection was access to interviewees which rendered necessary adjustments of the interview design. In Singapore, researchers are strictly required to apply for permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct data collection in schools. The application documents include a form explaining the purpose, methodology, sample and time

period of the research, a list of interview questions and a reference letter from the supervisor. Before submitting the application, my interview request was accepted by four Singaporean principals whom I was introduced to through personal contacts. However, my research request was rejected by Singapore Ministry of Education without explanation. When I arrived in Singapore, I again attempted to gain permission to carry out my research. The rejection was repeated. Because of this, the four principals were no longer officially able to contribute to my study, as teachers and principals are civil servants in Singapore and are required to comply with the rule.

The situation in Shanghai was better, although still not ideal; there was no formal application required, but ‘restrictions’ were manifested in another way. I provided a detailed information sheet and a consent form in advance to explain that this study would not be making any political judgement, a number of measures would be in place to protect private information, and interviewees’ rights would be always prioritised during the interview. However, school autonomy is still a politically sensitive topic from some potential interviewees’ points of view. In the end, the number of school leaders that I managed to talk to was fewer than I had hoped. The data collection in Hong Kong went much more smoothly than that in Singapore and Shanghai. As I demonstrate in the analysis chapters, compare to their counterparts in the other two societies, Hongkongers, including school leaders and teachers, are more used to freely express their opinions in public.

In order to cope with the insufficient interview data in Singapore and Shanghai, firstly, I changed the interview sample by including more sources of interviewees, such as academics who have worked in secondary schools and/or are experts in school governance and management, policy-makers from education authorities and experienced education journalists.

This adjustment has in fact broadened and deepened my interview design and the whole study. Academics can perceive education systems in the historical and social background, and some of them, who have been worked in more than one East Asian society, were able to provide a comparative perspective. Additionally, the accessibility issues demonstrate a powerful example of autonomy in school settings

and in the broader political and social contexts of East Asia – there appear to be both visible and invisible hands controlling school leaders’ (or in general individuals’) speech and actions. Whether or not schools can achieve high levels of autonomy in a relatively less autonomous and democratic society, or what kind of school autonomy is possible in this kind of society, although they are beyond the scope of this thesis, may to some extent further my understanding of school autonomy in East Asia.

Secondly, I managed to informally meet those Singaporean principals who initially agreed to my interview requests and had conversations with them about school management at their schools. During these informal ‘interviews’, I was asked not to record and quote the data directly in my thesis due to the lack of official permission. Nevertheless, the data, kept as footnotes, significantly facilitate my understanding of school governance and management and the whole education system in Singapore. Therefore, I still counted them as the ‘interviewees’. This is further discussed in the section of ethical considerations.

Interview design

The use of interviews in qualitative research is to understand *what* – the activities of everyday life, as well as *how* – people make meanings of their activities of everyday life (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Seidman, 2013). The purpose of the interview in this study is to explore the nature and degree of autonomy that schools enjoy at the implemented level in various areas of school management. The focus is more on interviewees’ experience as ‘avenues’ to reliable factual information rather than their own perspectives upon the events (Kvale & Brikmann, 2009). Thus, the interview questions developed here were structured and standardised to a certain extent; that is, they were initially based on the analysis of the different elements of school management identified in Karstanje’s (1999) conceptual framework of school autonomy which was explained in the literature review chapter.

Nevertheless, the interviews also required some flexibility for two reasons.

Firstly, each of the three East Asian education systems has different types of schools, organised and managed according to different legislations and frameworks. It is necessary to adjust the interview questions in terms of specific national settings. Secondly, the interview seeks to elicit rich and detailed answers, as “deep information” allowing the interviewer to achieve the same level of knowledge and understanding as the “real-life members” of the events focused (Johnson, 2002, p. 106). Therefore, the interviews were designed to be semi-structured, which enabled me to follow pre-set questions but also to flexibly react to interviewees’ replies (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Drawing on Bryman’s (2012) description of semi-structured interview, the list of interview questions in this study was referred as an interview guide specifying the areas to be covered; the order of the questions was not fixed; and “similar wording” was used from interviewee to interviewee (p. 471).

As mentioned above, school leaders, including principals, vice-principals, recently retired principals and heads of department, academics, policy-makers and education journalists were targeted as the sources of interviewees. I did not establish a number as to how many interviewees would be ‘enough’ for my study. As Seidman (2013) suggests, “‘enough’ is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process... [and] practical exigencies of time, money, and other resources also play a role, especially in doctoral research” (p.58). Therefore, I was prepared to be open to all the potential interview opportunities during data collection. Most interviews were carried out face-to-face; but in order to overcome the limitations of time and space, I also did four interviews via email and telephone, as interviewees’ social cues are not critical information sources in this study (Opdenakker, 2006).

Interview questions

In the literature review chapter, I have developed a conceptual framework for analysing school autonomy. But when I first started to design the interview questions, that framework had not been created. At that time, I was interested in

Karstanje's framework and organised the interview questions preliminarily according to 21 sub-areas of school task identified in that framework, as shown in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1. School task areas and sub-areas in Karstanje's framework

Task areas	Sub-areas
Teaching and curriculum	subjects, timetable, content, and exams
Staff	qualification of staff, in-service training, appointment and dismissal, and appraisal
School organisation	structure of school, differentiation (streaming and setting) and decision-making structure
Finances, buildings and facilities	source of finances, management of finances, responsibility for buildings and facilities, information system, salary of staff, and legal status of staff
External relations	recruitment of pupils, competition between schools, relationship with other schools and business, and negotiations with unions

As elaborated in the literature review chapter, Karstanje's framework also describes three different levels of school autonomy in each sub-area, which further facilitated the refining of the interview questions. Table 3.2 shows the examples of the interview questions developed in the task area of 'Teaching and Curriculum'.

Table 3.2. Examples of the interview questions derived from Karstanje's framework

Sub-areas	Centralised + regulated	Moderately centralised + moderately regulated	Decentralised + deregulated	Interview questions
Subjects	Prescribed subjects	Compulsory + optional school subjects	Free choice of subjects + groups of subjects	Can school make the decision about which subjects should be taught?
Timetable	Prescribed timetable	Prescribed for the total number of lessons for the entire school period	Free timetable	Who make the timetable about school terms and days and the timing for school events and examinations?

Content	Content of lessons is prescribed	National core curriculum specified	Indications of broad aims	How do teachers in your school plan and deliver their lessons?
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Karstanje’s framework provides a comprehensive list of areas of school task. However, there are still some areas missing but worthy of consideration. Therefore, when I was designing the interview questions, I added one new area and three sub-areas to Karstanje’s categories (as shown in Table 3.1). They are:

- ‘Textbooks’ in ‘teaching and examination’: day-to-day teaching and learning in East Asia are mainly based on textbooks (Morris & Adamson, 2010; Ho & Gopinathan, 1999). Here, I focus on who approves textbooks can be used in schools and who chooses textbooks for a specific school.
- SBCD in ‘teaching and examination’: SBCD has been increasingly promoted in East Asia since the 1980s (Marsh et al., 2014; Gopinathan & Deng, 2006; Tan, 2013). The interview is concerned with how SBCD is organised in schools in terms of the teaching materials, time allocation and examinations.
- ‘Parents’ in ‘external relations’: to what extent that parents have the power over managing schools in East Asia is of particular interest in this study, as their counterparts in England are allowed to set up schools.
- ‘Accountability’ – the increase of school autonomy has been companied by the promotion of school accountability in many societies, including East Asia (Law, 2007; Ng, 2008; Tan, 2013). In this study, I mainly concentrate on how schools are evaluated, what are the domains and criteria evaluated, who is responsible for determining the criteria and to what extent the information from evaluations is made available to the public.

As more interviewees from different backgrounds have been included in this study, questions related to the historical development of school autonomy, the tension between the central government and local authorities regarding the redistribution of power, and the contextual factors impacting on school autonomy, were particularly raised in the interviews with academics, policy-makers and education journalists. The revised categories of school task areas and the full list of

interview questions are provided in Appendix 2.

3.4. The data

The sources of the data used to answer the research questions are briefly mentioned earlier. This section demonstrates the ways of collection and presents examples of the data collected.

The English representation of school autonomy in East Asia

EPB is likely to be initiated in order to promote and legitimate new policy reforms. Thus, one way of collecting the data to answer the first research question is to identify the key official texts related to significant changes of school autonomy. The terms such as ‘autonomy’, ‘accountability’, ‘competition’, ‘decentralisation’, ‘Academies’ and ‘Free Schools’ were employed as keywords to narrow down the searching scope. In addition, specific East Asian societies (namely Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai and China), ‘East’ (or Far East) and ‘Asia’ were used as another group of keywords. The data were sought on: (1) the UK Government website (<https://www.gov.uk/>) which stores all policy papers, announcements, publications, statistics and consultations; and (2) the websites of various mainstream mass media in England, such as the *BBC*, *Times Educational Supplement*, *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. From the official documents, their key sources of evidence were then identified and gathered. Examples are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Examples of the data for analysing the English representation

Nature of the documents	Documents
Policy papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>White Paper: Higher standards, better schools for all: More choice for parents and pupils</i> (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) - <i>White Paper – The Importance of Teaching</i> (DfE, 2010) - <i>National Curriculum</i> (DfE, 2013)

Announcements (speeches and press release)	<p>Speeches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Michael Gove’s speech to the Policy Exchange on free schools</i> (Gove, 2011a) - <i>Education Minister Elizabeth Truss speaks about delivering world-class schools</i> (Truss, 2014a) - <i>The fruits of autonomy</i> (Gibb, 2014) <p>Press release:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>More than one million children now taught in academies</i> (DfE, 2014, July 9) - <i>Hundreds of ‘coasting’ schools to be transformed</i> (DfE, 2015, June 30)
Government-commissioned reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Could Do Better: Using International Comparisons to Refine the National Curriculum in England</i> (Oates, 2010) - <i>The Framework for the National Curriculum. A report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review</i> (DfE, 2011)
Politicians’ statements published in and reported by mass media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Pisa slip should put a rocket under our world-class ambitions and drive us to win the education space race</i> (Gove, 2010, December 17) - <i>My revolution for culture in classroom</i> (Gove, 2010, December 28) - <i>British schools need a Chinese lesson</i> (Truss, 2014, March 4)
Key sources of evidence for official documents and politicians’ statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2007 McKinsey report: <i>How the World’s Best Performing School Systems Come Out On Top</i> (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) - OECD 2010 PISA report: <i>PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)</i> (OECD, 2010a) - Policy Exchange report: <i>A Rising Tide: The Competitive Benefits of Free Schools</i> (Porter & Simons, 2015)

‘Reality’ of school autonomy in East Asia perceived within domestic contexts

In addressing the second research question, the existing literature examining the historical and current development of school autonomy in East Asia was reviewed, through which part of the key policy papers were identified. The keywords, such as ‘autonomy’, ‘school-based management’ and ‘decentralisation’, were also employed to search policy papers on governments’ websites of selected East Asian societies. The analysis of these papers provides an understanding of the rationales and motives of decentralisation reforms, the operation of central regulation frameworks, and the power and responsibility of schools described at the policy level. Governments’ websites and examples of policy papers are respectively

shown in Table 3.4 and 3.5:

Table 3.4. Governments' websites of Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai (China)

Country/region	Websites
Hong Kong	Government Record Service http://www.grs.gov.hk/ws/english/home.htm
	Education Bureau http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html
Singapore	National Archives of Singapore: http://www.nas.gov.sg/
	Ministry of Education http://www.moe.gov.sg/
Shanghai (China)	Shanghai Municipal Education Commission http://www.shmec.gov.cn/
	People's Republic of China, Ministry of Education http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_2792/index.html

Table 3.5. Examples of the data for examining the 'reality' perceived in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai (China)

Country/region	Documents
Hong Kong	- <i>Codes of Aid for secondary schools</i> (Hong Kong Government, 1994)
	- <i>Report of the Bills Committee on Education (Amendment) Bill 2002</i> (Legislative Council, 2004)
Singapore	- <i>Singapore learning, creating and communicating: A curriculum review</i> (Singapore Ministry of Education, 1997)
	- <i>The school excellence model: A Guide</i> (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2000)
Shanghai (China)	- <i>Regulation on primary and secondary school teachers' continuing professional development</i> (Chinese Ministry of Education, 1999)
	- <i>Shanghai's Middle and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)</i> (Shanghai Municipal Education Commission, 2010)

In addition to policy papers which provide a portrayal of official intention, the data derived from interviews is also gathered to interrogate how policy was interpreted and operationalised within schools. There are 29 interviews conducted from November 2012 to May 2013; during this period, I was in Shanghai for two months, Hong Kong three months and Singapore six weeks. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The places for interview were chosen by interviewees, mainly in their office rooms; four of them were interviewed through emails and

telephone.

The choice of interviewees was expedient; all of them were approached through personal contacts – introduced by my supervisor, colleagues and friends. Nonetheless, in each society, I managed to make the sample cover the main types of schools and took diversity into consideration. Moreover, school leaders were selected because, apart from being responsible for school daily operation, they have also been active in various policy advisories and/or principal representative bodies that are part of the broader policy community; and other interviewees were selected as they are specialists in, and have commented publicly on aspects of, school governance.

More specifically, in Hong Kong, I interviewed four principals from aided schools and two principals from direct subsidy schools. Due to the accessibility problem in Singapore, I formally interviewed one principal¹² and informally ‘interviewed’ four principals; all of them were from government schools (two were principals of autonomous government schools). In Shanghai, six principals from government schools and one head of department from a private school were interviewed¹³. On top of these, I interviewed nine academics, one policy-maker and one senior education journalist. The descriptive summary of the composition of interviewees is provided in Appendix 3.

3.5. Data analysis

Hatch (2002) explains that “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148). The ultimate goal of qualitative data analysis is “to make sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 203) by “breaking data into meaningful parts” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 434) in a way that “allow[s] researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretation, mount critiques, or generate theories” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). This

¹² I was introduced to this principal outside of Singapore. He accepted my interview request after I informed him that I did not receive the official permission.

¹³ More details about the nature and proportion of these aforementioned types of schools are provided in the chapters examining respective East Asian societies.

section is to demonstrate the analysis methods used in this study, which are determined according to the nature of the data and the purposes of the research questions.

Qualitative document analysis

The adoption of qualitative document analysis is to address the first research question. Atkinson and Coffey (2011) define ‘documents’ as ‘social facts’. From a similar perspective, Silverman (2014) points out that constructionists who study documents focus on “the process through which texts depict ‘reality’” (p. 285). Throughout this study, concrete texts with regard to ‘school autonomy’ and particularly ‘school autonomy in East Asia’ were extracted from official documents and politicians’ statements. Then, five categories, serving as ‘inductive codes’, emerged from these texts, in terms of the ways that reforms of increasing school autonomy were legitimated. Table 3.6 presents the examples and frequency of the texts in the key policy paper – the 2010 Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010); and Table 3.7 shows the examples in politicians’ statements.

Table 3.6. Examples and frequency of the texts promoting school autonomy in the 2010 Schools White Paper

Category	Example (s)	Frequency
Citing East Asian societies	- “Finland and South Korea – the highest performing countries in PISA – have clearly defined and challenging universal standards, along with individual school autonomy.” (p. 4)	1
Making general statements (including generally citing ‘international evidence’)	- “Across the world, the case for the benefits of school autonomy has been established beyond doubt.” (p. 11) - “Analysis of the international evidence also demonstrates that, alongside school autonomy, accountability for student performance is critical to driving educational improvement.” (p. 12)	6
Citing societies other than East Asia (including citing national evidence)	- “In many of the highest performing jurisdictions, school autonomy is central. In high-performing US States, Charter Schools...” - “In Sweden, pupils who attend state-funded independent Free Schools outperform those in	5

	<p>other state schools.” (pp. 51)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “In this country, the record of independent state schools provides a striking testimony to the power of autonomy.” (p. 51) 	
Citing evidence from specific research sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The OECD has shown that countries which give the most autonomy to head teachers and teachers are the ones that do best.” (pp. 3-4) - “Analysis of PISA data shows that the features of the strongest education systems combine autonomy (e.g. over staffing powers at school level) with accountability (e.g. systematic and external pupil-level assessments).” (p. 51) 	3
Providing details of school autonomy enjoyed in high-performing systems ¹⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Across the world, the case for the benefits of school autonomy has been established beyond doubt. In a school system with good quality teachers, flexibility in the curriculum and clearly established accountability measures, it makes sense to devolve as much day-to-day decision-making as possible to the front line.” (p. 11) - “Analysis of PISA data shows that the features of the strongest education systems combine autonomy (e.g. over staffing powers at school level) with accountability (e.g. systematic and external pupil-level assessments).” (p. 51) 	2

Table 3.7. Examples of the texts promoting school autonomy in politicians’ statements

Category	Examples
Citing East Asian societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “In Singapore... Schools where principals are exercising a progressively greater degree of operational autonomy are soaring ahead.” (Gove, 2011a) - “The third reform imperative is greater autonomy for head teachers. There is a strong correlation in these league tables between freedom for heads – in systems like Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong – and improved results.” (Gove, 2013) - “The fifth pillar of reform is freedom for heads to recruit and reward the best. Shanghai, the world’s best-performing education system, has a rigorous system of performance-related pay.” (Gove, 2013)
Making general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Across the world, then, autonomy is proving a key driver of

¹⁴ Texts fell under this category provide comparatively more information about school autonomy in specific societies; however, as I shall demonstrate and argue in the following analysis chapters, the information is still vague and limited.

statements (including generally citing ‘international evidence’)	<p>success.” (Gove, 2011b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “... if we look at many of the high-performing and fast-improving education systems certain common features recur...there is a high level of autonomy from bureaucracy for headteachers.” (Gove, 2013)
Citing societies other than East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “And in America - where the Charter Schools system implemented by New York and Chicago is perhaps the quintessential model of school autonomy - the results are extraordinary.” (Gove, 2011a)
Citing evidence from other sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “As the OECD points out, two of the most successful countries in PISA – Hong Kong and Singapore – are among those with the highest levels of school competition.” (Gove, 2010, December 17) - “To quote from the OECD: “In countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed, students tend to perform better.” (Gibb, 2012)
Providing details of school autonomy enjoyed in high-performing systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “In Singapore... Schools where principals are exercising a progressively greater degree of operational autonomy are soaring ahead.” (Gove, 2011a) - “Shanghai, the world’s best-performing education system, has a rigorous system of performance-related pay.” (Gove, 2013)

By categorising the texts, large amounts of data were condensed into “a smaller number of analytic units”, which helped me to develop “a cognitive map” to understand “local incidents and interactions” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Within each category, I further investigated: (1) the descriptions of school autonomy in ‘reference societies’ provided by the UK Government and its key sources of evidence; and (2) the nature, degree and management areas of school autonomy promoted in England with reference to East Asia.

Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is adopted to answer the second research question, which is defined by Hsieh and Shannona (2005) as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). To be specific, it attempts to preserve the advantages of its quantitative origin – content

analysis – to make “replicable and valid inferences” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21). This is achieved by establishing a coding frame containing a set of categories (Patton, 2002; Schreier, 2012). Further, as Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) argue, unlike the quantitative version merely counting words of random sampling, it allows researchers to understand social reality through exploring the “meanings underlying physical messages... purposively selected... which can inform the research question” (p. 308). These characteristics of qualitative content analysis enable the present study to categorise and analyse the nature and degree of school autonomy in specific contexts according to the developed conceptual framework.

Mayring (2000) identifies two approaches of qualitative content analysis in terms of how a coding frame develops, namely, ‘inductive category development’ and ‘deductive category application’. The inductive approach requires the initial formulation of category definitions (criterion of selection), based on theoretical background and research questions, which determine “the aspects of the textual material taken into account”. Following these definitions, researchers immerse themselves in the data to tentatively draw inductive categories and constantly revise them until no additional new concepts can be found. The deductive approach differs from the inductive one as it “works with prior formulated, theoretical derived aspects of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text”. It requires “explicit definitions, examples, and coding rules for each deductive category” in order to identify “under what circumstance a text passage can be coded with a category”. These category definitions constitute the coding agenda employed to work through the data.

The analysis of school autonomy in East Asia was divided into two stages of coding; the two approaches of qualitative content analysis were both used at the second stage. More specifically, the first stage of coding was assembling chunks of the data under the same topic, categorising it into corresponding management areas identified and conducting ‘descriptive coding’ (Miles et al., 2014). Examples of this stage of coding are shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8. Examples of the first stage of coding

Area of school management	Original texts	Coding
Textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The textbooks / learning materials shown on this Recommended Textbook List have been vetted by the appropriate Reviewing Panels of the Bureau's Textbook Committee and are recommended for use in schools.” (Extracted from the website of Hong Kong Education Bureau [EDB]) - “We are required to choose textbooks from the recommended book list”; “Each subject department exercises their own professional judgment in choosing what textbook they would like to have.” (Principal Q from Hong Kong, extracted from the interview transcript) 	Schools choose textbooks from the recommended list
Appointment and dismissal of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “There are some requirements of academic qualification set by the Education Bureau. Every school in Hong Kong follows that...degree holders plus professional teachers’ training”; “It’s up to me to employ those teachers...” (Principal Q from Hong Kong, extracted from the interview transcript) - “Any person who wishes to teach in a school must be registered under the Education Ordinance as either a registered teacher or a permitted teacher. Registered teachers are persons who possess the approved teacher qualifications laid down in the Education Ordinance, whereas permitted teachers are in possession of academic qualifications only” (Extracted from the EDB website) 	<p>Education Bureau determines the number of teachers</p> <p>Schools make decisions on the appointment of teachers following the requirements set by the Education Bureau</p>

At the second stage, the deductive approach was applied primarily; the categories and coding rules were derived from the benchmarking scheme of the conceptual framework developed for this study. Table 3.9 and 3.10 respectively show the categories and coding rules in the areas of ‘textbooks’ and ‘appointment and dismissal of teachers’.

Table 3.9. Examples of the deductive categories and coding rules for analysing school autonomy with regard to the ‘textbooks’

Category (nature and degree of school autonomy)	Coding rule
No autonomy (0)	Determined by a higher authority
Operation – strong control (1)	Textbooks are determined by a higher authority; deviation needs to be approved
Operation – weak control (2)	A list of approved textbooks from which schools may choose
Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Textbooks are determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority
Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Textbooks are determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority
Full autonomy (5)	Freely determined by schools

Table 3.10. Examples of the deductive categories and coding rules for analysing school autonomy with regard to the ‘appointment and dismissal of teachers’

Category (nature and degree of school autonomy)	Coding rule
No autonomy (0)	Selected, appointed and dismissed by a higher authority
Operation – strong control (1)	Contract is signed with and terminated by a higher authority; schools may selected qualified candidates, approved by a higher authority
Operation – weak control (2)	Contract is signed with and terminated by a higher authority; schools may selected qualified candidates, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority
Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority
Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority
Full autonomy (5)	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools freely

Based on the first stage of coding, I graded school autonomy in each management areas according to the deductive categories and coding rules, which is, as Miles et al. (2014) term, ‘evaluation coding’. These grades combined with summative descriptions form the models of school autonomy in selected East Asian societies. It is noteworthy that the real situation sometimes covers two coding rules. For example, in Singapore, the majority of teachers are selected and assigned by the Ministry of Education, while schools can hire a small number of contact teachers.

Half point was given in this case; that is, the degree of school autonomy regarding teachers' appointment and dismissal in Singapore should be 0.5. Examples of the second stage of coding are provided in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11. Examples of the second stage of coding

Area of school management	First stage of coding	Second stage of coding
Textbooks	Schools choose textbooks from a recommended list	Operational – weak control (2)
Appointment and dismissal of teachers	Education Bureau determines the standards and number of teacher appointment	Operational – strong control (1)

Atkinson (1992) describes a given set of categories as “a powerful conceptual grid” which helps organise the data analysis, but may also results in the ignorance of uncategorised activities (p. 459). Although this ‘grid’ is difficult to “escape” (Silverman, 2014, p. 118), I tried to minimise this defect by being flexible and open to new information emerged from the data and accordingly revising the conceptual categories. A few inductive categories were integrated into the conceptual framework as new (sub-) areas of school management. For example, during the interviews, many principals mentioned that they have been restricted to promote teachers as the ratio of the professional entitlement is strictly set by the higher authority. Therefore, teachers’ promotion was added to the conceptual framework.

3.6. Reflection on researcher positionality

Kezar (2002) notes that “people have multiple overlapping identities... thus [they] make meaning from various aspects of their identity...” (p. 96). In this sense, my position as a researcher, both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in the three Asian societies, came into play to set up a ‘dialectic relationship’ (Freire, 2000) in a ‘shared space’ (England, 1994) with the researched. More specifically, these Asian societies are primarily considered as part of the Greater China region, profoundly influenced by Confucian heritage. Thus, the common ethnic and cultural background enabled me, as an ‘insider’, to quickly establish a kind of sense of familiarity with most of

interviewees and to better understand their underlying messages. Nevertheless, this may also lead to a tacit understanding between us. For example, some interviewees said that ‘as a Chinese, you know...’ and then stopped explaining. In this case, I was aware that I had to dig further about their perceptions rather than make assumptions as to what they meant.

I was introduced as an ‘academic researcher’ from one of the top UK universities to my interviewees through personal contacts. This seemed to facilitate the establishment of trust even before I formally met them. At the same time, my position also raised the suspicion of talking to an ‘outsider’ from a western university, especially in Singapore and Shanghai, which seemed to reflect the lack of autonomy in the school setting in these two East Asian societies. Although this issue prevented many potential interviewees from participating in this study, as a result, people who accepted the interview request were usually more critical and open-minded than their counterparts, and felt freer and more comfortable about providing details and explanations on their answers.

In addition, I worked as a voluntary teacher in a Chinese secondary school before I came to the UK. Thus I had experience of building good relationships with Chinese school principals. This is important in this study because principals in East Asia are at the top of the school internal hierarchy and enjoy social respect due to the Confucian heritage. As Robson (2002) argues, elites and professionals expect to express their particular views. During the interviews, I had a strong impression that principals would like to be heard. Therefore, I added some open-ended questions at the end of interviews. Thomas (1995) describes his feeling in interviewing ‘powerful people’: “...like a suppliant granted audience with a dignitary. I must admit to have felt ‘honoured’ to be granted time with a well-known executive...” (p. 7). Similarly, I found that a degree of flattery and appreciation of being granted an interview seemed to encourage their participation.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Obtaining informed consent is in many respects central to most ethical

guidelines (Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2013). In the present study, a detailed but non-technical (in a format that is easy to understand) information sheet, shown in Appendix 4, was provided when I first contacted potential interviewees. It illustrates the background of the researcher, the aims of the research and the way of conducting the interview, and provides examples of the interview questions. This was to make sure that potential interviewees were fully aware of the nature and implication of the research, and their roles within it at the outset (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Oliver, 2014). In the information sheet, I also explained the ways in which confidentiality and anonymity would be guaranteed and further promised that interviewees can skip any questions that they do not want to answer, terminate the whole interview at any point, or even withdraw the interview records if they change their minds afterwards (Ryen, 2007).

A consent form, shown in Appendix 5, was used to obtain interviewees' official agreement of their participation and confirm whether they would like to be informed about how their records are used in the research analysis and the outcomes of the research (Marzano, 2012). It serves as protection for both interviewees and interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, at the very beginning of every interview, I made sure that interviewees had read the information sheet and had no further questions about the interview as well as the whole research, and then asked them to sign the consent form. However, some interviewees do not mind being interviewed for this study, but prefer not to sign the form out of many considerations such as being identified by other people. I showed my understanding and followed their requests.

As I failed to gain official permission to collect data in Singapore, another ethical issue is what I should do when I got chance to 'talk' to Singaporean school leaders. Through personal contact, my requests for interview were accepted by four principals before I was informed about the permission application result. I decided to tell the truth and see whether they were willing to engage in this research in some other ways. They still informally met me and helped me to understand school governance and management in Singapore. As promised, I strictly followed their requests – no type records were made and no direct quotations were used in this

thesis. The only Singaporean principal formally interviewed and quoted in this thesis was fully informed the situation of the official permission before I invited him to participate in this study and the interview was taken outside of Singapore.

All personal information in transcription was removed and pseudonyms were used to eliminate the risk of identification of the interviewees. In the case of the interviews related to Hong Kong and Shanghai, the information about the school was also carefully obscured. The majority of schools in Hong Kong are operated by a range of school sponsoring bodies. Some massive sponsoring bodies own a great number of schools, while some of them only have one or two schools. In Shanghai, many schools have their distinctive specialities, such as arts, foreign languages and science. It would not be difficult to identify the school and then the principal through the hint of the names of the sponsoring bodies and the specialities. In considering confidentiality, I deliberately omitted this kind of detail when I was transcribing the interviews, although I acknowledge that this may erode the consistency of the interview data to some degree.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated the methodological considerations, approaches and methods adopted in this study. To be concrete, I have drawn on perspectives that the ‘reality’ and the knowledge representing the ‘reality’ are socially-constructed and intrinsically-interwoven with power. Therefore, this study has been designed as: (1) qualitative document analysis is used to investigate the English representation of school autonomy in East Asia (research question one); (2) the ‘reality’ of that perceived by insiders is approached by qualitative content analysis (research question two); and (3) these two examinations are then compared and discussed (research question three).

In order to guarantee the validity and reliability, I have collected data from a range of sources and various perspectives, including official documents, politicians’ statements, and their key sources of evidence; academic literature; and interview with school leaders, academics, policy-makers and educational journalists.

Furthermore, two school leaders from each society were invited to validate the analysis of the data. The accessibility of the potential interviewees was a major problem and the main ethical concern during the data collection. The lack of interviewees in Singapore led to the adjustments of research design – more interviewees were included. This change has broadened and deepened the interview and the whole study in that East Asian education systems have been approached from more perspectives.

The following chapters respectively answer the research questions, starting from examining the English representation.

Chapter 4. School autonomy in East Asia: the English representation

4.1. Introduction

In addressing the first research question presented in the introductory chapter, this chapter examines the evidential basis on which school autonomy has been promoted by the Coalition Government, particularly with regard to the high-performing education systems in East Asia. It begins by reviewing EPB in England from 1985 to 2010, which explores how foreign exemplars increasingly inspired or legitimated significant policy changes before the Coalition Government took office (section 4.2). Then, it traces the development of school autonomy in England from 2000 to 2010 before the Schools White Paper (SWP) was published; by doing so, the recent reforms and the nature of policy intent can be understood from a historical perspective (section 4.3).

Subsequent to these two historical reviews, this chapter specifically focuses on the English representation of school autonomy in East Asia (section 4.4), drawing from: (1) the SWP – the key policy paper that set the Government’s policy direction and principles; and (2) official statements, extracted from government-commissioned reports, politicians’ speeches and press release, which have reiterated and reinforced the Government’s claims in the SWP. It then investigates three of the key sources of evidence on which the English representation has been based – the OECD, Policy Exchange¹⁵ and McKinsey & Company (McKinsey), to probe how evidence has been selected to support the Government’s policy agendas (section 4.5). The policy initiatives legitimated by the English representation, particularly in relation to Academies and Free Schools, are also analysed (section 4.6). Lastly, this chapter explores the images of East Asian education represented in different western countries to examine a broader ‘East-to-West’ EPB in the prevailing discourse of global competition (section 4.7).

¹⁵ Policy Exchange is an influential British centre-right think tank, which aims to develop and promote policy ideas in the public, especially education, sector.

4.2. Education policy borrowing in England: 1985-2010

Before the 1980s, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) had represented a crucial source of 'professional advice' on education policy-making in England, primarily drawing on national inspection materials (Department of Education and Science, DES, 1982). According to Reynolds and Farrell (1996), little overseas evidence was referenced in England's education debates, except for occasional acknowledgements of the success of Scandinavian comprehensive schools and German vocational training.

As Smith and Exley (2006) note, regular overseas study visits of HMI began in the late 1980s and ended in 1992 when the HMI was replaced by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). These visits usually took two to three weeks; focused on specific aspects of a foreign education system, such as teacher training in the US (HMI, 1989, 1990), primary education in France (HMI, 1991a) and vocational education in Germany (HMI, 1991b); and resulted in a short report. During that time, there was a proliferation of HMI reports – four to five a year and many more were unreleased. Although the HMI was said to be "partially autonomous", a senior Inspector admitted that "we couldn't have gone overseas if the government wasn't interested in our findings" (quoted in Smith & Exley, 2006, p. 584). However, little evidence shows that the HMI visits led to any specific reform initiatives.

During this period, Germany became the most prominent European exemplar that England was interested in, mainly due to its soaring economy, which has been comprehensively reviewed by Phillips (2011). He argues that, as "a perennial factor", Germany was repeatedly referenced when evidence was of need for education changes. For example, from 1983 to 1985, the HMI team visited Germany five times. In 1986, a report concerned with its curriculum and examination was published (HMI, 1986). Later this year, the German education system generally and this report specifically were discussed in a Government internal seminar, preparing for the 1988 National Curriculum reform (Phillips, 2000). However, as Lawton (1994) argues, the descriptions of the German system

were often superficial and not accompanied by any detailed analysis. Phillips (2011) argues that few subsequent initiatives in the 1988 education reform bore resemblance to the German model, which was more likely to be admired rather than emulated.

In contrast, a number of education reforms in England since the mid-1980s were informed or inspired by the US experience, as similar policy initiatives would be announced in England a short time after HMI study trips and politicians' visits to the US (Finegold et al., 1993). For example, the introduction of City Technology Colleges was justified by 'Magnet Schools' in New York (Green, 1993); the then Education Secretary Kenneth Baker (1986-1989) and his colleagues visited the US three times to study its student loans system in the late 1980s, which was heavily referenced in the 1988 White Paper *Top-up Loans for Students* (DES, 1988); and the establishment of Training and Enterprise Councils in England was based on Michael Dukakis¹⁶'s experience working with the US private industry councils (Bailey, 1993).

To be accurate, there seemed to have a mutual attraction which resulted in a kind of 'policy convergence' between England and the US. A number of studies (e.g. Finegold et al., 1993; Halpin & Troyna, 1995) have suggested three factors driving the transatlantic policy 'borrowing'. Firstly, both countries confronted similar problems, such as high drop-out rate and low levels of attainment in reading, Mathematics and science, compared to their international competitors. Secondly, they shared common political and economic situations in addition to historical and cultural connections. Thirdly, similar understanding and interpretation of the role of the state played in the education sector – the neo-liberal faith – distinguished them from Continental Europe and Asia.

However, Levin (1998) argues that these two countries only appeared to adopt similar policies; in fact, variations existed and they seldom learned from each other's experience. Although Whitty and Edwards (1998) demonstrate the evidence of direct policy exchange across the Atlantic through shared policy networks, they

¹⁶ Michael Dukakis was an American politician who was seconded to the UK Employment Department in the late 1980s.

point out that “detailed ‘borrowing’ of specific policies and practices was much less in evidence... than policy makers working within similar ideological frames of reference producing parallel policy initiatives” (p. 221). Smith and Exley (2006) opine that these two countries were “in a form of dialogue”, but such dialogue seems to have been “confirmatory” rather than “transferring” (p. 588). Similarly, Whitty (2012) argues that policy-makers from both sides of the ocean have in fact ‘borrowed’ policies that had originally been legitimised with reference to policies in their own context.

The mid-1990s saw an emergence of using international achievement data. In fact, large-scale international surveys can be traced back to the 1960s. The pioneer was the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which has conducted more than 30 research studies of cross-national achievement in various subjects. However, as Alexander (2010) points out, these surveys were not taken seriously by English policy-makers until the 1990s. For example, two months before Major’s 1992 Election, Robin Alexander, Chris Woodhead and Jim Rose were commissioned to produce a report on curriculum and classroom practice in primary school, which became known as *The Three Wise Men* report. It looked through the available international survey reports (i.e. IEA and International Assessment of Educational Progress) for evidence on the “downward trends in important aspects of literacy and numeracy” (p. 17) and justified one of Major’s campaign statement – a return to streaming and more formal teaching methods in primary schools (Gillard, 2011).

Another important example is the Ofsted-commissioned report, *Worlds Apart? A Review of International Surveys of Educational Achievement Involving England* (Reynolds & Farrell, 1996). It signalled a high point of citing international comparative studies and making a generic and collective reference to a number of East Asian systems. In particular, Japan and Taiwan were highlighted due to their pupils’ high performance and the assumed causal relationship between education success and economic growth. Their key features were categorised as cultural, systemic, school and classroom factors for England’s consideration, such as Confucian heritage culture, longer time in schools, mixed ability classes and whole

class teaching.

Alexander (1996) immediately and scathingly accused the *World Apart* report of reducing the whole education system to a statistical calculation of inputs and outputs, condensing culture to one factor among many and basing arguments on measuring a few areas and reviewing limited comparative studies. However, Chris Woodhead, the then Chief Inspector of Schools in England and Wales (1994-2000), welcomed the ‘borrowing’ of whole class teaching promoted in the *Worlds Apart* report (Elliott, 2014) and continued to cite it to support specific reform initiatives (e.g. Woodhead, 2000). Even in a report commissioned by the Coalition Government, *Could do better* (Oates, 2010), it was still heavily referenced. In practice, these identified features of high-performing East Asian systems have rarely been transformed into any policy initiatives; only whole class teaching was adopted as a main pedagogical approach in the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy (Beard, 1999).

During the New Labour period, a group of ‘international...’ terms were superficially and vaguely used to promote perceived goals and initiatives of education. For example, the 1997 White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, stated that the Government would make efforts to “learn the lessons of international research projects that provide insight into best practice in other countries” (Department for Education and Employment, DfEE, 1997, p. 43). The 2001 White Paper, *Schools: achieving success*, asserted that the pilot of the Academy programme “will be developed in light of international experience”. However, no details about the international lessons and experience were provided. Since the 2000s, the term ‘world-class’ has become dominant in the discourse of policy-making (Alexander, 2010). For example, it was mentioned 34 times in the 2007 White Paper, *The Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Future* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2007). Similar to the ‘international...’ terms, Wolf (2002) argues that there was “little attempt” to define the meaning of this “political and marketing slogan”.

The pursuit of ‘world-class’ education service was significantly promoted by the launch and popularisation of OECD’s PISA survey. Since 2000, Andreas

Schleicher, the Director of the OECD and called by *The Guardian* the “PISA delivery man” (Wilby, 2013, November 26), has proselyted the value of PISA. In England, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair (1997-2007), certainly took the satisfactory performance of English pupils in PISA 2000 as New Labour’s achievement. He commented that “the country should be very proud of the OECD survey, which is a tribute to the hard work of pupils, heads, teachers, governors and parents across the country” (European Network, 2004, p. 13). Nonetheless, both Grek (2009) and Sellar and Lingard (2013a) argue that PISA did not occupy central position during the New Labour era, as ‘modernisation’ was already well used in producing legitimacy for new reforms and Labour was confident about the quality of national data and their worldwide leading role in making policy on the basis of national data.

After three rounds of survey, PISA had drawn considerable attention from all over the world and been accepted as the most important benchmark against which the success or failure of national education policy could be verified. In this scenario, the ‘dropping’ of England’s ranking in PISA league tables since 2003 was largely used by the then Opposition to question and criticise New Labour’s education policies, strategies and achievements. Media coverage at the time was dominated by doubts and criticism, and pressured politicians to respond (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004), especially in the election campaign. However, a fact was ignored by politicians that England had difficulty in reaching the required response rates in that survey; and the low reliability of results led to the exclusion of the English data from the trend comparisons by the OECD (OECD, 2013a).

The New Labour Government in its late period increasingly used international comparative evidence to prove the improvement of pupils’ performance and defend its leadership. For example, the 2009 White Paper, *Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future*, stated that “since 1997, school standards in England have gone from below to above average in comparison with advanced countries...” (DCSF, 2009, p. 17) Drawing on international comparisons, it identified that “a relatively low post-16 participation rate” remained a main problem of English education system, however, “we are making good progress” (p. 18). By citing the Trends in International

Mathematics and Science Survey 2007, the Government asserted that England is “the most consistently high-performing European country” (p, 17). Although it admitted that PISA revealed “one of the widest spreads of performance” between England’s highest and lowest achievers, the Government stressed that England “had one of the highest proportions of very high achieving 15 and 16 year-olds” (p. 17).

Ball and Exley (2010) identify the governance shift from the government to the government joined by multiple agencies and sites under the New Labour leadership. Slater (2005, July 22) similarly observes the influence from the Government’s consultants and states in the *Times Educational Supplement* that:

“If you want to influence Labour’s education policy, you could do worse than target a think-tank and a management consultancy. More than London University’s Institute of Education, the teaching unions or even the Labour party, the Institute for Public Policy Research and McKinsey have the ear of people in high places.”

As Alexander (2011) argues, the pursuit of ‘world-class’ education service may not be new; but the availability and application of international achievement data produced and advocated by the global policy network in achieving that has been unprecedented.

An array of foreign countries and cities was quoted in various official documents and statements at the time. Among them, Sweden and the US were most frequently used in the production of legitimacy for promoting school autonomy and parental choice which were central to New Labour’s reform agenda. As one of the well-acknowledged ‘world-class’ models, East Asia has received growing attention since the late 2000s. For example, the then Education Secretary Ed Balls (2005-2007) was impressed by an appreciation of Confucian culture in Hong Kong, which influenced the practices of teaching and learning, and family attitudes towards education. However, he did not think England could, or should, ‘borrow’ that (Forestier & Crossley, 2014). In contrast, the then Schools Minister Jim Knight (2007-2009) proposed to set up centres to teach Mandarin and Chinese culture in English state schools on his return from a visit to China in 2009 (Knight, 2009). But

this insight was not translated into any policy actions due to the impending general election (Morris, 2012).

A major policy concern in the late New Labour era was the National Curriculum. Three curriculum reviews involving wide international comparisons were produced or commissioned by the Government in this period (National Foundation for Educational Research, NFER, 2008; Rose, 2009; The Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2009). Drawing on relevant research, such as that undertaken by the OECD and NFER¹⁷, curricula in a range of high-performing countries, including Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Latvia, the Netherlands, Ontario, British Columbia, Italy and Sweden, were examined and compared with that in England. In summary, the key findings of these reviews commonly included: less prescription of curriculum content, less centrally-directed teaching instruction and more emphasis on essential subject knowledge. These reviews did not result in any specific policy actions immediately; rather, in the 2010 Election campaign the symbolic meaning of conducting reviews and proposing reforms seemed more significant than taking policy actions.

In summary, the selection of countries, features and sources of evidence and the levels of ‘borrowing’ have been consistent with the perceived domestic policy agendas, primarily in relation to the National Curriculum, pedagogy, school autonomy and parental choice. In contrast to the symbolic and rhetorical ‘admiration’ to Germany, the US has continuously had *de facto* ‘impact’ on England’s education reforms, mainly because of the shared neo-liberal ideology. Since the 2000s, two trends of EPB have emerged in England: (1) ‘world-class’ systems (e.g. East Asia) have replaced individual nations as a synonym for ‘reference societies’; and (2) the global policy network, instead of individual policy actors, has increasingly engaged in the production and circulation of international comparative evidence.

¹⁷ It is an independent charity working on education research and development in England and Wales.

4.3. School autonomy in England: 2000 to 2010

In the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the New Labour Government introduced City Academies to inner cities to break “the cycle of under-performance and low expectations” (Chitty, 2013, p. 93). This new type of secondary school was operated under a funding agreement; that is, the major proportion was provided directly by the Government, instead of transferring by local authorities, and a small contribution was required from sponsors. Modelled on City Technology Colleges¹⁸, the idea ‘borrowed’ from the US as mentioned above, City Academies had no formal connection with local authorities; but unlike City Technology Colleges focusing on technological and practical skills, they were able to determine their own curriculum emphasis drawing from a wider scope of subjects (Eurydice, 2007b; Glatter, 2012).

The 2001 Green Paper, *Schools: Building on Success*, set out strategies for improving secondary education and one of them was that every school should have “a distinct mission, ethos and character, and the autonomy to manage its own affairs provided it demonstrates success” (DfEE, 2001, p. 6). In so doing, the paper proposed to continue to accelerate the creation of City Academies and:

“significantly enhance the ‘earned autonomy’ of successful schools, by further increasing the delegation of budgets to them, restricting needless bureaucratic burdens (including those associated with the inspection process), and by allowing them the greater freedoms over the curriculum and teachers’ pay and conditions...” (p. 7)

The idea of ‘earned autonomy’ suggesting granting greater/extra autonomy for excellence was further articulated in the subsequent White Paper, *Schools Achieving Success*, published a few months later. However, it was never implemented in reality (Eurydice, 2007b). Instead, the Education Act 2002 renamed City Academies ‘Academies’ and expanded them to cover all ages and disadvantaged rural areas.

¹⁸ The programme of City Technology Colleges was not successful, which was hampered by the refusal of local authorities to provide suitable school sites. By 2000, only 15 colleges were established; three of them converted to Academies in later years.

The 2004 DfES report, *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, confirmed that giving “freedom and autonomy to the front line” would be the key theme in the next phase of reform (p. 19). As announced in the 2005 White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, 200 Academies would be established or in the pipeline by 2010. Meanwhile, by “mirroring the successful experience of Academies”, the Government introduced ‘Trust Schools’ – a new type of maintained schools, operated together by governing bodies and outside trusts and given the power to set their own admission policies and manage staff and assets independently¹⁹(DfES, 2005, p. 23). As Chitty (2013) points out, many of the freedoms granted to Trust Schools are those enjoyed by the new Academies promoted by the Coalition Government. As *The Guardian* (Smith, 2007, February 9) reported, the Government planned to have 100 Trust Schools by the spring of 2007 and about 70 schools were in the process of finding their trusts.

Notwithstanding these promoting initiatives, Academies were highly controversial. The Education and Skills Committee, appointed by the House of Commons conducted a detailed examination of Academies from 2002. The committee report released in 2005 criticised Academies on the grounds that they were merely added to “an already diverse system of secondary education”; and although the Government asserted that “this policy will lead to a rise in standards”, it “failed to produce the evidence to support the expansion of its diversity initiatives” (The Education and Skills Committee, 2005a, p. 3). Drawing on the 2005 annual report of PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) evaluation, the Government responded that Academies were located in “areas of real and historical underachievement” and were “popular with parents and pupils” (The Education and Skills Committee, 2005b, p. 5). Recognising the problems and challenges, the Government also averred that Academies were “beginning to make solid progress in raising educational standards”. However, in its 2008 government-commissioned report, PwC admitted that the evidence of Academies as a model for school improvement

¹⁹ Similar freedoms have also been enjoyed by the existing Foundation Schools. In this respect, Trust Schools can be classified as a type of Foundation Schools. The difference between them is that Foundation Schools are only run by their governing bodies. By introducing Trust Schools, more schools would be able to enjoy higher levels of autonomy. There are 699 Foundation Schools (including Trust Schools) operating in England by January 2015 (DfE, 2015).

was insufficient.

By 2007, the Government had established 83 Academies with 133 more expected to be open in 2008. The 2007 White Paper affirmed that “we are expecting every secondary school to have specialist, trust or academy status and every school to have a business or university partner, with 230 Academies by 2010 on the road to 400” (DCSF, 2007, p. 10). The 2009 White Paper further extend the power of strong school governing bodies to directly sponsor Academies and propose new schools. Before the 2010 Election, 203 Academies were in operation (DCSF, 2009). Compared to maintained schools, Academies were allowed to opt out of the National Curriculum, possess their own land and buildings, determine a subject specialism and whether to adopt a religious character or not, and take responsibility for admissions under the *Student Admission Code*.

The Academy Act was issued in July 2010, shortly after the Coalition Government took office. This Act made it possible for all schools, including primary and special schools, to become Academies, and legislatively brought a new type of school – Free Schools – into the Academy framework of England²⁰. In other words, Free Schools were set up as Academies; there was no essential difference between them. But parents and teachers were encouraged to open Free Schools if they were dissatisfied with maintained schools in a certain local area. The New Schools Network was established in 2009 by Rachel Wolf after visiting Charter Schools in New York. It was given £500,000 by the Government to promote Free Schools through providing information and advice (Murray, 2011, February 15) and Wolf later became an adviser to Michael Gove. According to Hatcher (2011), its trustees and advisers were advocates of the marketisation of education system; three of them were even engaged in the chain business of Academies. This organisation was thus suspected of and criticised for not being an independent or neutral body (Syal, 2010, October 28).

Three months after the introduction of the Academies Act, the first group of 25 Free Schools was given permission to proceed. The establishment of new Free Schools was not required to consult or inform those may be affected, including

²⁰ There is no provision of free schools in Scotland, Wales and North Ireland.

local authorities, residents and other neighbouring schools (Rustin, 2011, February 1). As Hatcher (2011) observes, the existence of applications for Free Schools were usually not made public until the approval was announced by the Secretary of the State. Whilst the overall schools capital budget was cut by 60%, the DfE allocated £50 million as the funding for running Free Schools. However, the expansion of Free Schools has raised considerable criticism and controversy. Firstly, they have been accused of having taken money away from maintained schools. Critics have argued that maintained schools, funded on a per capita basis, lose their pupils and accordingly funding; in other words, the funding for Free Schools actually comes from local authorities' budgets (Hatcher, 2011).

Secondly, they have been accused of being socially exclusive. The promotion of Free Schools was underpinned by the rationale of reducing social inequality in education. As the *Times Educational Supplement* reported (Vaughan, 2011, June 10), Gove stated that "all of the free school applications we have received are either in areas of deprivation, educational under-achievement or areas where pupil numbers are rising fast and there's a desperate need for places". Among the first 25 Free Schools, nine were in the 50% least deprived areas of the country, 15 in the 50% most deprived areas, but only two of them in the bottom 10%. Through selecting their catchment areas, the all-ability Free Schools are able to select pupils. According to Hatcher (2011), for example, the Bolingbroke Academy once excluded pupils from a struggling primary school serving a deprived council estate; and the West London Free Schools adopted a curriculum which is likely to be appropriate for children from professional middle-class families.

Nevertheless, a more significant expansion of Academies and Free Schools has been initiated since the publication of the SWP.

4.4. The English representation of school autonomy in East Asia

The SWP was published in November 2010 – six months after the new Coalition Government came into power. This was its first White Paper on education, which outlined a wholesale reform plan, particularly regarding school autonomy,

based on considerable international evidence including East Asia. Subsequent to the SWP, the policy initiatives aiming to increase school autonomy have been further legitimated in official speeches, announcements and press releases by frequently referencing East Asia. These documents and statements have constructed an image of highly autonomous schools in East Asia.

The SWP

In the first Foreword to the SWP (DfE, 2010), the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, clarified the nature of the educational ‘crisis’:

“...what really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country’s future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. In the most recent OECD PISA survey in 2006 we fell from 4th in the world in the 2000 survey to 14th in science, 7th to 17th in literacy, and 8th to mathematics.” (p. 3)

This ‘crisis’ was primarily identified according to the UK’s poor performance in PISA, although many academics (e.g. Goldstein, 2004; Micklewright & Schnepf, 2006) have specifically criticised its methodological deficiencies and generally questioned that the quality of education can be validly and reliably measured by large-scale surveys.

Subsequently, the solution was identified:

“The only way we can catch up, and have the world-class schools our children deserve, is by learning the lessons of other countries’ success.” (p. 3)

The then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, in the second Foreword, stated that the top performers of PISA “from Alberta to Singapore, Finland to Hong Kong, Harlem to South Korea” have been the “inspiration” for education reforms in England (p. 5). He emphasised that although “each of these exemplars has their own unique and individual approach to aspects of education, their successful

systems all share certain common features” (p. 7). Three “common features” were identified in the SWP:

“The most successful countries already combine a high status teaching profession; high levels of autonomy for schools; a comprehensive and effective accountability system and a strong sense of aspiration for all children, whatever their background.” (p. 5)

This suggested that East Asia, which includes many of “the most successful countries”, enjoys high levels of school autonomy and that has contributed to its educational ‘success’. In other words, being supported by East Asian exemplars, changes in school governance and management have been described as the key to improving the quality of education services. However, there was little direct reference to specific East Asian exemplars to substantiate the claims about school autonomy; only South Korea was mentioned once:

“Finland and South Korea – the highest performing countries in PISA – have clearly defined and challenging universal standards, along with individual school autonomy.” (p. 4)

Singapore and South Korea were however cited four times respectively to highlight the weakness of England’s education system, and to support the need to reform schooling and the need for high quality teachers. Furthermore, despite their low PISA rankings, Charter Schools in the US, Free Schools in Sweden, and City Technology Colleges and Academies in England were often cited to substantiate the assertion that “in many of the highest-performing jurisdictions, school autonomy is central” (p. 51). For example,

“In high-performing US States, Charter Schools – publicly funded independent schools set up by a legal ‘charter’ – have been engines of progress.” (p. 51)

“In Sweden, pupils who attend state-funded independent Free Schools outperform those in other state schools and a higher proportion (eight per cent more) goes on to higher education.” (p. 51)

“CTCs [City Technology Colleges] are now among the best schools in the country... Twenty-six per cent of Academies this year were judged to be outstanding by Ofsted, compared to 18 per cent of all maintained schools.” (pp. 51-52)

The last example implied that schools enjoying high levels of autonomy perform better than those state-controlled schools with less autonomy. However, as Whitty (2012) notes, a fact that have been forgotten is that grant maintained schools in England were the model and reference for charter schools in the US. Most statements were either made as self-evident ‘common knowledge’ or generally based on ‘international evidence’. For example,

“Across the world, the case for the benefits of school autonomy has been established beyond doubt.” (p. 11)

“Analysis of the international evidence also demonstrates that, alongside school autonomy, accountability for student performance is critical to driving educational improvement.” (p. 12)

Moreover, little attempt in the SWP was made to specify the precise nature, scope and form of school autonomy in any of the systems referenced. This left ample space for the Government to cite evidence relating to the generic concept. For example,

“Across the world, the case for the benefits of school autonomy has been established beyond doubt. In a school system with good quality teachers, flexibility in the curriculum and clearly established accountability measures, it makes sense to devolve as much day-to-day decision-making as possible to the front line.” (p. 11)

“Analysis of PISA data shows that the features of the strongest education systems combine autonomy (e.g. over staffing powers at school level) with accountability (e.g. systematic and external pupil-level assessments).” (p.51)

In spite of descriptions such as “flexibility in the curriculum”, “day-to-day decision-making” and “over staffing powers at the school level”, the SWP did not explain: (1) how flexible schools could be in terms of curriculum (e.g. freely

adopting curriculum for some subjects or creating new curriculum for all subjects); (2) in which areas of school management (e.g. personnel, finance and student admission) schools could make day-to-day decisions and what is the precise nature of decision-making (i.e. operational or policy-oriented); and (3) what do ‘staffing powers’ specifically designate (e.g. the power over staff appointment, appraisal or promotion).

Additionally, it was often highlighted in the SWP that more autonomy should be devolved to schools while high levels of accountability retain. For example,

“The best performing and fastest improving education systems in the world... combine high levels of autonomy for teachers and schools with high levels of accountability.” (p. 18)

However, similar to the promotion of school autonomy, no further explanations about school accountability in the ‘best’ systems were provided.

Official statements

Following the publication of the SWP, East Asia has been explicitly and increasingly cited in numerous official announcements, speeches and press releases (e.g. Gibb, 2012; Truss, 2013a; Gove, 2014a). In these statements, the attainment gap between English pupils and their counterparts in East Asia have been highlighted. For example, as Truss (2014b) stated:

“In Hong Kong, just under 9% of all pupils achieved the lowest levels in the PISA Mathematics assessment. In Singapore, it’s just above 8%. In Shanghai, it’s under 4%. In England, it’s 22% – almost a quarter.”

The educational ‘crisis’ revealed by international comparisons has been directly linked to the ‘disadvantages’ in global economic competition. For example, as Truss (2013b) stressed in another speech,

“This is an era of unprecedented competition... [and] an era where human capital is more important than physical capital, it means we need to improve

education. The evidence is quite clear here: countries with higher attainment have higher growth rates.”

On this basis, policy initiatives have been extensively legitimated by referencing the evidence from economically-soaring East Asia. For example, in commenting on PISA 2009, Gove (2010, December 17) wrote an article for the *Times Educational Supplement* on the need for more autonomous schools:

“Schools will enjoy new freedoms and will shed unnecessary bureaucratic burdens. Expanding the number of Academies together with new Free Schools, some promoted by groups of teachers, will further extend autonomy and choice... As the OECD points out, two of the most successful countries in PISA – Hong Kong and Singapore – are among those with the highest levels of school competition.”

In this statement, School competition was particularly intertwined with school autonomy, which has been frequently repeated in Gove’s other speeches (e.g. Gove, 2012a; Gove, 2012b). Three years later, England seemed not to have made progress and still lagged far behind its East Asian references in PISA 2012. In responding to UK’s “stagnancy”, Gove (2013) in one of his oral statements to the Parliament shifted the responsibility by declaring that the low performance was “a reflection on the education policies of the previous government” and then reaffirmed five lessons that England should draw from high-performing (i.e. Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea) and fast-improving (i.e. Taiwan, Vietnam, German and Poland) systems. Among them, two were directly related to school autonomy:

“The third reform imperative is greater autonomy for head teachers. There is a strong correlation in these league tables between freedom for heads – in systems like Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong – and improved results. That is why we have dramatically increased the number of Academies and Free Schools – and given heads more control over teacher training, continuous professional development and the improvement of underperforming schools.”
“The fifth pillar of reform is freedom for heads to recruit and reward the best. Shanghai, the world’s best-performing education system, has a rigorous system of performance-related pay. We’ve given head teachers the same freedoms here.”

The performance-related pay in Shanghai was specifically taken as an example of great autonomy enjoyed by East Asian school leaders. However, as I shall describe in the Shanghai chapter, it is far more complex than it appears and only bring about very limited extra autonomy. Another specific example with regard to Singapore was given by Gove (2011a), but the nature of the autonomy exercised by principals was narrowed:

“In Singapore, often cited as an exemplar of centralism, the Government has deliberately encouraged greater diversity in the school system – and dramatic leaps in attainment have been secured as a result. Schools where principals are exercising a progressively greater degree of *operational autonomy* are soaring ahead.” (Emphasis added)

As discussed earlier, ‘operational autonomy’ designates the power to decide how a policy is implemented. The following chapters demonstrate that the autonomy granted to Free Schools in the SWP goes beyond the ‘operational autonomy’ enjoyed by principals in Singapore as well as the other two East Asian societies.

The School Reform Minister Nick Gibb (2014) more recently claimed that the “academisation” (conversion to academy status) of schools in England since 2010 had significantly improved the performance of schools in the inspections by Ofsted and of pupils in the General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. He ascribed this achievement to the granting of “real” autonomy to schools to “vary their curriculum, extend the length of their school day and employ the best teachers – regardless of whether they have received formal qualified teacher status”.

Similar to the SWP, the necessity of school accountability in autonomous system has also been reinforced in official statements. For example, as Truss (2013a) emphasised:

“We are learning from the best in the world. And we will combine more autonomy for schools with better accountability.”

Instead of East Asia or any other ‘high performers’, with reference to the US,

Gibb (2015a) justified the Ofsted Schools Inspection framework which aims to improve accountability through “publicly grading state schools”. This is contradictory to the feature of school accountability systems in East Asian societies studied later.

In parallel to the reform of school autonomy has been the reform to create a more demanding but less prescribed National Curriculum (DfE, 2011), which has also relied heavily on evidence from East Asia. For example, Gove (2012a) stated that “our curriculum reforms were inspired by the high expectations for all children in Singapore and Hong Kong”. However, neither Academies nor Free Schools are required to follow the National Curriculum. A number of English politicians have made study visits to Singapore, Hong Kong and China, and identified various features of these high-performing systems such as the Confucian culture, long school days and rigorous curriculum (e.g. Gove, 2010, December 28; Truss, 2014, March 4). However, there seems to have been little attention paid to school governance and autonomy enjoyed by East Asian schools.

In short, England’s low rankings in international surveys have been taken as evidence to substantiate the criticism narrative of schools failing to deliver what was required and expected. East Asia has been identified as the source of lessons to deal with this educational crisis and further to prepare qualified workforce for global competition. Although little detailed evidence has been provided, in the SWP and official statements, East Asian societies have been represented as a model with high levels of school autonomy, accountability and competition which can improve pupils’ performance and eventually lead to a prosperous economy.

4.5. Key sources of evidence for the English representation

The Government’s efforts to justify the general approach to education reforms and specific initiatives with regard to school autonomy have largely relied on the work of the OECD and Policy Exchange. In contrast, the McKinsey reports that the Government cited extensively to reform teacher education were often ignored in the

promotion of school autonomy.

OECD

Over the last five decades, the OECD's education research and data have been highly acknowledged and widely used within academic circles, by politicians and in the media (McGaw, 2008), particularly with the rising influence of PISA since 2000. In the SWP, 'OECD' and 'PISA' were cited 11 times; and its references included three OECD documents, namely, the PISA 2006 report, 2009 Teaching and Learning International Survey report and 2010 *Education at a Glance*. As the Government stated:

“One of the most valuable ways we have of understanding the standards our children and young people are attaining in comparison with children in other countries is the regime of sample tests organised by the OECD and IEA.” (DfE, 2010, p. 46)

Gove also frequently cited the OECD analysis in his speeches. For example:

“In its most recent international survey of education, the OECD found that ‘in countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how pupils are assessed, pupils tend to perform better’.” (Gove, 2011a)

Andreas Schleicher, the OECD's Director of Education, was described by Gove (2012b) as “the most important man in the British education system” and “in world education”, and “the father of more revolutions than any German since Karl Marx”. When the results of PISA 2012 came out, Schleicher commented that it was too early to use this (disappointing) result to judge the Coalition Government's ongoing reforms (Coughlan, 2013, December 3).

However, the evidence from the OECD has sometimes been used selectively. For example, *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2010b) was cited as the source for the following assertion in the SWP:

“Analysis of PISA data shows that the features of the strongest education systems combine autonomy (e.g. over staffing powers at school level) with accountability (e.g. systematic and external pupil-level assessments).” (DfE, 2010, p. 51)

As Morris (2012) notes, although the OECD identified that a growing number of countries have established more autonomous schools, it did not make any claims about their impact on educational outcomes. The relationship between pupil performance and school autonomy seemed to be oversimplified by the Government. As the OECD argues in its report, *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do*:

“...some features of autonomy and accountability are associated with better performance. However, this is not a simple relationship under which any policy to increase autonomy, accountability or choice will improve student outcomes.” (OECD, 2010a, p. 105)

Moreover, the assertions made in the SWP have not always been in accord with the arguments of the OECD studies. For example, the OECD stated that:

“Countries that create a more competitive environment in which many schools compete for students do not systematically produce better results... there is no clear relationship between performance and the use of standardised tests or the public posting of results at the school level.” (OECD, 2010a, p. 14)

This contradicts what Gove (2010, December 17) contended in his speech, namely that Hong Kong and Singapore were characterised by the “highest levels of school competition”. Additionally, in its report, *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful*, the OECD (2013b) concluded that “school systems with high overall levels of performance tend to grant more autonomy to schools in designing curricula and assessments and seek feedback from pupils for quality-assurance and improvement” (p. 4). However, according to the school context questionnaire conducted along with PISA 2012, schools in England were reported to enjoy greater autonomy than their East Asian counterparts in almost all surveyed aspects, such as appointing and dismissing teachers, setting teachers’ salaries, choosing

textbooks, determining subjects and establishing assessment policies.

However, when it comes to the case of Sweden, a country that “has already gone very far in autonomy” (Schleicher, 2015) and been referenced by England in detail to promote Free Schools, the OECD seems to rectify its opinion on school autonomy. In the report presented in the Swedish Government press conference, Schleicher (2015) clarified that school autonomy can only work positively when there is great accountability. For school accountability, by taking Singapore as an example, he meant shared curriculum policies and a set of quality assurance mechanisms, including internal and external evaluation, written specification of pupil-performance standards and education goals, teacher mentoring and systematic recording of data.

All in all, although there has been a lack of consistence with regard to its statements about school autonomy, the OECD has become the most important source of evidence for legitimating the UK Government’s policy agendas.

Policy Exchange

Policy Exchange, established in 2002, is an influential British centre-right think tank which holds a deep faith in the role of free market to solve public policy problems. Although claiming to be independent, it has maintained manifold links with successive UK governments since its inception. For example, Michael Gove was its first chairman and its authors have included a number of former government policy advisors. After becoming education secretary, Gove often cited the work of Policy Exchange to justify Academies and Free Schools. For example, he (2014b) stated that:

“I’d like also to thank Policy Exchange for the intellectual leadership it’s given to education reform... The expansion of the academy programme has ensured that communities denied a choice of good schools have at last been given the schools they deserve. The introduction of Free Schools has set a new – and higher – bar for quality and innovation in state education. ... All of these reforms have been part of a long-term plan for our schools - shaped and supported by Policy Exchange’s work – and driven by a clear sense of moral purpose.”

David Cameron was re-elected as the Prime Minister in May 2015. As he (2015) pledged in one of his campaign speeches, the new Conservative Government would open 500 new Free Schools. Just one day before that speech, the Policy Exchange published a new report *A Rising Tide: The Competitive Benefits of Free Schools* (Porter & Simons, 2015) which gave Cameron the ‘evidence’ to press ahead with the reforms. As he stated:

“As Policy Exchange said this week, Free Schools don’t just raise the performance of their own pupils, they raised standards in surrounding schools in the area too.”

This report mainly argues that: (1) Free Schools “do not drag down results of neighbouring schools”; (2) they “do not only benefit the middle class”; (3) competition from them “does seem to be driving a response”; (4) they are “not taking money away from where schools are ‘needed’”; and (5) “there is no clear educational rationale for just limiting them to areas where there is a need for new schools” (pp. 6-7). It seems like a ‘mantra’ of the Government’s policy agenda on promoting Free School. Moreover, these arguments were often based on government reports. For example, as the report stated:

“The Department of Education’s recent research report on Free Schools reported that 72% of Free School Headteachers believe that they have an impact on the local schools, with a third thinking local standards are improving through competition, and a third believing they are improving through collaboration.” (p. 7)

It seems that the Government and Policy Exchange have formed a mutual-referential circle to support each other towards the same end.

McKinsey

McKinsey, a consulting company, has produced two high-profile reports on how to achieve ‘world-class’ education systems in recent years. The first, *How the*

world's best-performing school systems come out on top, was published in 2007. Although, as Morris (2012) argues, it “excluded an analysis of key variables, was selective in the evidence provided and was methodologically flawed” (p. 104), this report has been widely used by policy-makers across the world, including England. It was quoted seven times in the first 20 pages of the SWP relating to teacher education

In contrast, the 2007 McKinsey report was ignored in the promotion of school autonomy. This is understandable as it stated that, “few of the most widely supported reform strategies (for instance, giving schools more autonomy, or reducing class sizes) have produced the results promised for them” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 10). It also specifies that the reason for Singapore’s success is its “strong central control” (p. 13) and pointed out that the US experimented with decentralisation reforms and Charter Schools, however “the results were disappointing” (p. 11).

The subsequent 2010 McKinsey report, *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*, adopted a more favourable attitude towards school autonomy. This report confirmed the negative correlation between “a system’s performance level and the degree of tightness of central control over its school processes” (p. 24). Further, it divided the developmental process of education systems into five stages and argued that top performers such as Singapore and Hong Kong have exercised looser control when their education systems have become ‘great’ (Mourshed, Chijioko & Barber, 2010). Notwithstanding the incongruence between two McKinsey reports, in one of Gove’s (2012b) speeches, they were vaguely cited to legitimate greater autonomy:

“The PISA and McKinsey reports clearly show that the greater the amount of autonomy at school level, with headteachers and principals free to determine how pupils are taught and how budgets are spent, the greater the potential there has been for all-round improvement and the greater the opportunity too for the system to move from good to great.”

Michael Barber, who served as an academic, government advisor, partner and

head of the global education practice at McKinsey and now the Chief Education Advisor to Pearson, was centrally involved in both two reports. As Gove (2011b) admitted, “one of the most profound influences on me in doing this job has been Sir Michael Barber. And Sir Michael Barber’s work for McKinsey has reinforced in my mind what so many studies have also underlined”.

In sum, the assertions with regard to school autonomy in the OECD and McKinsey reports have sometimes been contradictory. Policy Exchange, closely tied with policy-makers, has consistently supported reforms of school autonomy. The Government has selected its preferred sources of evidence and the favourable evidence, in order to promote a highly autonomous and competitive education system. As Morris (2012) argues, this is “indicative of a highly expedient and opportunistic enterprise” (p. 104).

4.6. Policy initiatives legitimated by the English representation

Although the English representation of school autonomy in East Asia was highly selective and problematic as demonstrated above, a series of policy initiatives were claimed to be formulated on that basis in the SWP to increase school autonomy in England. These initiatives included: (1) removing unnecessary central prescription about curriculum and qualifications; (2) increasing autonomy for all schools; (3) dramatically extending the academy programme by getting existing schools to convert to Academy status; and (4) supporting teachers, parents, charities and enterprises to set up new Free Schools.

Following the SWP, the Education Act 2011 further provided legislation for Academies and Free Schools, and removed the requirement for Academies to have an emphasis on a particular subject area. The number of Academies increased from 203 to 2591 in March 2013 (Higham & Earley, 2013). By January 2014, 57% of public secondary schools achieved academy status, catering for 59% of all secondary pupils (DfE, 2014; DfE, 2014 July 9). In 2015, more than 240 Free Schools were operating (Wintour, 2015, March 6), and the new Conservative

Government launched its plan to create 270,000 extra places in Free Schools over the next five years (Coughlan, 2015, May 22).

According to the review of the SWP and official statements above, the policy initiatives of school autonomy promoted in England have involved changes to three main areas of school management, which can be further divided into six sub-areas, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Areas and sub-areas of school management in which policy initiatives have been promoted to increase school autonomy in England

Area	Sub-areas
Governance and management	School establishment (i.e. who can set up schools)
	School governance (i.e. who run schools)
Curriculum and school calendar	National Curriculum adoption (i.e. who can decide whether to follow the National Curriculum)
	School calendar (i.e. who can set the school terms and hours)
Teachers	Teachers' appointment (i.e. whether schools are able to hire untrained/unqualified teachers)
	Teachers' pay (i.e. who can set teachers' pay)

Table 4.2 summarises the autonomy that Academies and Free Schools enjoy in these six sub-areas and compares them with maintained schools.

Table 4.2. School autonomy in Academies, Free Schools and maintained schools

Area	Academies	Free Schools	Maintained schools
School establishment	Businesses, faith groups, charitable trusts and private schools	Teachers, parents, charitable trusts, universities and faith groups	Local education authorities
School governance	Trustees/Governing Body; free from the control of Local education authorities	Trustees/Governing Body; free from the control of Local education authorities	Local education authorities
National Curriculum adoption	Exempt from following the National Curriculum	Exempt from following the National Curriculum	Must follow the National Curriculum
School calendar	Determined by head teachers	Determined by head teachers	Depends on Local education authorities
Teachers' appointment	Allowed to hire untrained/unqualified teachers	Allowed to hire untrained/unqualified teachers	Qualified Teacher Status required

Teachers' pay	Determined by head teachers	Determined by head teachers	Following national pay
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From this table, it can be seen that, overall, Academies and Free Schools have been given greater autonomy than their maintained counterparts.

In parallel to the increase of school autonomy, a set of policy initiatives in terms of school accountability were also developed in the SWP: (1) providing more information about schools, particularly their performance, to parents, governors and the public; (2) setting performance tables for pupils and attainment and progress measures for schools; and (3) empowering Ofsted to categorise (rate) all schools. As the Conservative Government announced more recently, schools rated inadequate by Ofsted will be forced to turn into Academies under the Education and Adoption Bill 2015 (DfE, 2015, June 30). Moreover, by introducing the new category of 'coasting school' into the Ofsted Schools Inspection framework, hundreds of schools are targeted for improvement and those that fail can be required to convert to Academy status. In this way, it seems that, in England, the promotion of school accountability has largely supported the expansion of schools with greater autonomy.

4.7. The English representation of East Asian education and beyond

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the English interest in East Asian education is not limited to school autonomy; amongst western countries, England is not the sole 'admirer' of East Asia; and, rather than pure admiration, there seems to have emerged diverse and complex patterns of 'looking-East' in West. Although EPB from East Asia in England is the main focus in this study, a broader 'East/West' framework could provide deeper insights into examining this specific case as well as understanding the essence of EPB. This section begins with the English representation of East Asian education in general and then moves to other western countries' responses to East Asia's educational 'success', particularly compared with that to an European PISA star – Finland.

As demonstrated above, the outstanding performance of East Asian education systems in international surveys has caught the eye of English policy-makers with admiration. In addition to the portrayal of school autonomy in official documents and statements, politicians' study trips have provided more detailed descriptions of the whole education systems in that region. For example, after visiting three schools and a teacher training institution in Shanghai accompanied by a team of British Mathematics teachers and experts, Truss (2014, March 4) in her article for *The Telegraph* claimed that she got "a first-hand look" at how pupils there have achieved the best in the world at Mathematics:

"In every lesson I saw... teachers explained the concepts clearly; students then practised the questions for short, concentrated bursts and were given instant feedback... topics were dissected and discussed to a much greater extent. Examples got progressively harder throughout the lesson... children in China are in school all hours..."

Therefore, she contended that 'Britain's schools need a Chinese lesson'. Similarly, the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, compared classes in England and Hong Kong based on his 'field-study' experience:

"What I notice in all the school visits is the seriousness of the classes and the attitude of the students. If you come to the weaker state schools in England you will see the extreme outcome of an approach to pedagogy that is based on creating happy children, and the opposite is the case. All I see in such classrooms is amateurism, a lack of professionalism, a lack of seriousness." (Quoted in Forestier & Crossley, 2014, p. 12)

Because of the admiration of East Asian education systems, the first group of 29 Mathematics teachers were 'imported' from Shanghai to England in November 2014 and the second phase started several months later. These pioneering teachers are supposed to spend three weeks in a number of selected English primary schools and demonstrate their 'world-class' approaches to Mathematics teaching. In one of Gibb's (2015b) speeches, he spoke highly of Harris Primary Academy, a school adopting Singapore Mathematics textbooks and participating in this programme,

and described a lesson delivered by a Chinese teacher:

“... last week I was fortunate enough to observe a lesson at the Harris Primary Academy... led by Lin Lei. In a 35 minute lesson, with all pupils facing the teacher and engaged throughout, Lin taught all of the pupils to carry out complex types of long multiplication through clear explanation of calculation methods... I think that reflects something truly positive.”

He then articulated the ‘mastery’ learned from Asian models: a meticulous approach to arithmetic, whole class teaching and focused 35 minute lessons, immediate and tailored in-class questioning and scaffolding techniques, frequent practice and homework. In a most recent BBC documentary *Are our kids tough enough? Chinese school*, five Chinese teachers adopted Chinese-style in Mathematics, Science and Mandarin teaching for a month at a comprehensive school in Hampshire, which exactly reflected what Gibb described as ‘mastery’. According to the final test, English pupils from the ‘Chinese school’ performed better in all three subjects than their counterparts taught in ‘English ways’. This highly controversial documentary seems to support the UK Government’s representation of and admiration for East Asian models.

However, this is not the whole story; East Asia, a top performer in international league tables and, more importantly, an economic miracle in global markets, has also generated considerable insecurity and anxiety in England. Although as Grek (2008) notes, “most of the media focused on where the UK education system ranked internationally”, the dissatisfaction with the English education system has been heightened in stark contrast to the high performance of its East Asian counterparties. For example, as the *BBC News* headline on the day of the announcement of PISA 2012 states “Shanghai tops global school tests, UK ‘stagnates’” (Coughlan, 2013, December 3). Words, such as ‘beating’, ‘falling behind’ and ‘fighting’, have frequently appeared in official and media discourse. For example, the headlines in *The Telegraph* (Paton, 2014, February 17) read, “China’s poorest beat our best pupils”, and in *The Daily Mail* (Levy, 2014, February 17) read, “Middle-class British pupils are worse at Mathematics than

children of Shanghai cleaners”. Truss (2014, March 4) also commented on her visit to Shanghai in *The Telegraph*:

“...the ‘Shanghai method’ should be brought into to improve Britain’s schools and excuses should not be made for falling behind the levels of the ‘East’.”

In the context of the “widespread contemporary imagination of education as a global ‘race’ for economic competitiveness” (Sellar & Lingard, 2013b, p. 717), East Asia has been seen as a major competitor of, and even a threat to, England in the socio-economic arena. For example, as the *BBC* (Burns, 2013, April 19) reported, Gove stated that: “We are fighting or actually running in this global race in a way that ensures that we start with a significant handicap”. In commenting on this speech, a Whitehall source said: “we can either start working as hard as the Chinese, or we’ll all soon be working for the Chinese”. An article in *The Financial Times* warned that “UK universities [are] under increasing threat from Asian institutions” (Warrell, 2014, October 1). In addition to official and media discourse, the *BBC* (2006, February 6) reported that “in a study of public attitudes to global economic competition, 79% of 2,704 people identified fast-growing China as the largest threat to the UK”. In a sense, the purpose of learning from East Asia seems to ‘fight’ against East Asia.

In contrast, the Finnish success has never stirred the same kind of anxiety in England, although it has also been often described as a model worthwhile emulating. The following is a typical description of Finland taken from one of Gove’s (2012b) speeches: “We have learnt from Finland – a consistently strong performer in PISA studies”. Rather than highlighting the competition and any resulting consequences, the media reports have been more concerned with the lessons/facts about Finnish education, such as the titles ‘Why do Finland’s schools get the best results?’ (Burrige, 2010, April 7) and ‘How Finnish schools shine’ (Lopez, 2012, April 9). A comparatively ‘aggressive’ statement about Finland, given by John Cridland (2013, March 15), the Chief of the Confederation of British Industry, is that “UK needs to *match* Finland’s education system to drive the

economic growth” (emphasis added), instead of ‘beating’ or ‘fighting’ in the descriptions of East Asia. More recently, Finland’s performance in PISA has not been as outstanding as formerly. In one of Truss’ (2014a) speeches, England seemed to send Finland a kind of ‘reminding’: “Even some of the high-performing Scandinavian countries are seeing their absolute results dropping – and like everyone else, they have to be careful of complacency. Just look at Finland...”

A similar rhetoric of the global ascendancy of East Asian education systems and economic-political challenges from East Asia has also emerged in other Anglo-Saxon countries. In Australia, as Waldow et al. (2014) note, there has been an increasing media attention to Asian education since 2007. In particular, Shanghai’s success in PISA 2009 was taken as a “wake-up call” (Harrison, 2012, February 20), although Australia’s rankings were actually not bad in the PISA league tables; the nervous was from the imaginary competition with its Asian neighbours. As quoted in *The Australian* (2012, January 24), the Prime Minister Julia Gillard claimed that Australia needs to “win the education race” in which “four of the top five performing school systems in the world” are involved (quoted in Sellar & Lingard, 2013a). In parallel to the massive media reaction was the publication of the 2012 White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century*, which aimed to help Australia “navigate the Asian century”, seize the opportunities it provides and meet the challenges it poses (Australian Government, 2012, p. 8).

In the US, as Sellar and Lingard (2013a) observe, subsequent to the release of the PISA 2009 results, the media coverage on the outstanding performance of Shanghai pupils was extensive. They note a report in the *New York Times* (Dillon, 2010, December 7) titled “Top Test Scores from Shanghai Stun Educators”. This report quoted a comment from Chester E. Finn Jr, former Head of President Reagan’s Department of Education: “Wow, I’m kind of stunned, I’m thinking of Sputnik... I’ve seen how relentless the Chinese are at accomplishing goals, and if they can do this in Shanghai in 2009, they can do it in 10 cities in 2019 and 50 cities by 2029”. The term ‘Sputnik moment’, used to refer to the threat of the Soviet Union, was mentioned again in the US President Barack Obama’s address to describe challenges from Asia and legitimate education reforms to gain “the most

educated workers” who can “compete for the jobs and industries of our time” (Dillon, 2010, December 7).

Contrary to the ‘utopian’ representation of East Asian education systems in Anglo-Saxon countries, Germany seems to have held a stereotypical ‘dystopian’ interpretation. Waldow et al. (2014) examine a variety of German media materials and summarise that, firstly, schooling in East Asia has been commonly described as:

“Parents coach children like professional athletes to secure their success in examinations (school entrance, school leaving or university entrance examinations) that are decisive for their future career. In addition to ‘regular’ school, children cram in institutions of shadow education or with private tutors. A large part of what pupils learn for examinations consists of mindless rote learning. This merciless routine leaves children and youths very little time for play and leisure, or even sleep. Many pupils crack up under the pressure and take their own lives.” (p. 5)

Secondly, Germany has shown far less admiration of East Asian education systems as of Finland, although its PISA rankings have been similar. Thirdly, ‘Asia’ has been set against ‘Europe’ in terms of education traditions. For example,

“Two different educational traditions turn out to be equally successful in the international PISA-tests: on the one hand school cultures building on performance and industriousness or even drill, such as China and South Korea. On the other hand more liberal, progressively inspired school systems such as Finland.” (Schultz, 2010, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, quoted in Waldow et al. 2014, p. 7)

Fourthly, according to them, Shanghai’s PISA success seemed to strengthen Germany’s considerable insecurity about China which has been seen as its “main industrial competitor” (p. 6). Similar anxiety about East Asia and admiration for Finland, at least in England and Germany, can be reflected by the titles of two books both focusing on ‘world-class’ education systems and published in the same year: one was *Surpassing Shanghai: An Agenda for American Education Built on the World’s Leading Systems* (Tucker, 2011), whereas the other was *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn From Educational Change in Finland*

(Sahlberg, 2011).

All in all, East Asian education systems, either ‘utopia’ (should be borrowed) or ‘dystopia’ (should not be borrowed), have become an unavoidable topic in reform debates in western countries. Furthermore, these debates have been linked to and reinforced by the descriptions of East Asia as an imaginary competitor and threat, in striking contrast to the portrayals of and attitude towards Finland.

4.8. Conclusion

From 1985 to 2010, ‘what works elsewhere’ was used more or less / directly or indirectly / discursively or silently by English policy-makers depending on specific political needs. The promotion of school autonomy, primarily legitimated by Charter Schools in the US and Free Schools in Sweden, has long been on the policy agenda in England. Academies and Free Schools were introduced respectively in 2000 and 2010, have been largely expanded ever since and are expecting an even more prosperous future. A series of reforms have enabled all schools to convert to Academy status and raised the levels of autonomy in all schools, accompanied by the promotion of Ofsted-dominated school accountability and school competition. These policy initiatives have been largely formulated and advocated on the basis of the English representation which has identified high levels of school autonomy as the key feature explaining East Asia’s high performance. However, as demonstrated in this chapter, this representation has not been supported by sufficient details and primarily drawn from highly selective sources and evidence. Moving beyond school autonomy in England, East Asian education systems have triggered strong reactions among western countries, either admiration or disagreement, and a shared fear for Asia’s economic power and potential. In order to keep the traditional advantage in global markets, the necessity of learning from successful competitors is rationalised in England, Australia and the US.

The next three chapters investigate the ‘reality’ of the nature and degree of

school autonomy in three East Asian societies, namely, Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai, which are compared with the English representation in the last chapter.

Chapter 5. School autonomy in Hong Kong secondary education

5.1. Introduction

As one of the selected East Asian societies studied to answer the second research question, Hong Kong is among the richest and well-developed societies in the world. It was ruled by the British Colonial Government for a century and a half, and then reintegrated with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997 under the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems'. Correspondingly, it has been influenced by Chinese culture and British colonialism. These characteristics have been reflected in and refracted into its education development. This chapter examines the nature and degree of autonomy in Hong Kong secondary schools. Section 5.2 provides an overview of economic, socio-political and cultural development and how the education system has been shaped in this broader context over time. Section 5.3 investigates the historical evolution of school autonomy in Hong Kong. Subsequently, a model of school autonomy in the current system is created in section 5.4, drawing on policy documents, literature and interview data. Four features of school autonomy in Hong Kong are lastly identified and discussed in section 5.5.

5.2. Context

Geographically, Hong Kong is located at the tip of the Pearl River Delta and adjacent to the city Shenzhen in Southern China. It is one of the most densely populated cities in the world – over seven million people living in a land of 1,104 km² (Hong Kong Government, 2015). The vast majority of the population are ethnically Chinese. Only 5% are of other ethnic groups – either South-east Asian (e.g. Indian, Pakistani, and Filipino) mainly employed as domestic helpers; or Europeans, North Americans, Australians and Japanese often employed in the financial sector (OECD, 2011b). It was a colony of the UK from 1842 until its

return to the PRC in 1997 as a Special Administrative Region (SAR)²¹. Its pre-1997 education system was mainly a product of the colonial power. The handover was designed to promote a high degree of autonomy in most matters including education²² (Postiglione & Lee, 1997), although Holliday, Ngok and Yep (2002) argue that Hong Kong's 'autonomy' has since been largely contingent on the needs and preferences of the Central Government in Beijing.

Economic miracle

The dominant historiography outlines the economic development in Hong Kong as a legend that "a barren rock was turned into a capitalist paradise" (Ngo, 1999, p. 120). It represents one of the greatest success stories of the second half of the 20th century (Sweeting, 1995). Before the Second World War, Hong Kong flourished by serving initially as a settlement for the opium business and subsequently as a free trading and entrepôt centre. During the post-war period, its accessibility, stability and relative absence of government regulation in economic life attracted a massive influx from Mainland China escaping from the civil war and the turbulence in the early years of the PRC (Morris, 2009). Refugees, along with capital and technology, largely promoted economic explosion and the transformation to an industrial and export-oriented economy (Youngson, 1982).

However, there was no major structural development in the education sector responding to the demands for economic growth. Sweeting (1995) argues that in fact "the existence of a reasonably literate and numerate workforce, most of whom had basic schooling, contributed as a factor conducive to Hong Kong's 'economic miracle'" (p. 71). During the post-war period, the attention of policy-makers was mainly on the provision of primary education. Moreover, Morris and Adamson (2010) note that, teaching methods at that time encouraged pupils to be "quiet, respectful and hard-working", as workers were expected to be "diligent, dextrous, punctual and obedient" in addition to basic academic skills (p. 23). By 1978, Hong

²¹ Hong Kong was occupied by Japan from 1941 to 1945. After the Second World War, the UK resumed its colonial control.

²² Except for foreign relations and military defence.

Kong had achieved nine-year universal compulsory education – the first region in Asia to do so; and the 1980s witnessed that more people had access to mass education (Sweeting, 2004).

Since the late 1970s, when the PRC started to hasten its economic modernisation, Hong Kong has shifted to develop its service, financial and commercial sectors in order to deal with the loss of manufacturing to the Mainland (Sweeting, 1995). This shift was successful. By the early 1990s, Hong Kong's per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had surpassed that of the UK and it became one of the 'Tiger Economies' (World Bank, 1993). From the late 1990s onwards, it has been far more exposed to ever-increasing challenges especially from regional competitors such as Shenzhen, Shanghai and Singapore (Cullinane, Song, Ji & Wang, 2004). Goodstadt (2014) even argues that it has become "the main market for exploitation" since the 2000s, especially in the fields of property business, labour force and retail consumers (p. 66). Notwithstanding these changes, Hong Kong remains one of the world-leading finance, tourism and trade centres and the world's freest economy (Heritage Foundation, 2015).

Schooling in Hong Kong long focused on the academic disciplines, even when its economy relied heavily on manufacturing. Only a small proportion of junior secondary leavers would choose technical and vocational tracks (Hong Kong Government, 2002). Although the number of tertiary education places has increased from 2% to 18% of the age cohort since 1989, the levels of university admission have not expanded much (Law, 2007). A large number of pupils seeking limited university places have reinforced a highly competitive exam-oriented education system. With the advent of the knowledge economy, more workers are expected to be able to use another language and advanced information technology, communicate effectively and think creatively (Morris & Adamson, 2010). The Government thus published the report *Learning to Learn* in 2000 to help pupils "attain all-round development and life-long learning" (Curriculum Development Council, CDC, 2001).

Political stability and sensitivity

In contrast to its dramatic economic growth, one salient feature of Hong Kong's political system in the post-war period, as Sweeting (1995) argues, was "the lack of development" (p. 59). Unlike other former colonies, there was no large-scale decolonisation movement for independence after the reversion of Hong Kong's sovereignty to the UK in 1997. In addition, demands for democratisation obtained little public attention and support (Lau, 1982). As for the Colonial Government, instead of gaining political legitimacy from constitutional reforms or developing British identity, preventing the Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) infiltration and subversion was its political priority, particularly since the CCP took over the Mainland in 1949 (Morris, 2009; Ortmann, 2010).

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, as Morris (2009) argues, de-politicisation was adopted as a governance strategy which can be divided into two distinct phases in terms of different tactics used. From 1945 to 1966, the Government primarily enacted stringent legislation against political organisations, trade unions, and other associations which could challenge colonial rule (Sweeting, 1995; Scott, 2010). After the riots of 1966 and 1967, the direct actions stemming the Communist influence were reduced; more efforts were made to maintain social harmony and avoid conflicts by co-opting dissenting voices, promoting advisory bodies and using symbolic policies that relied on exhortation rather than compulsion (Ortmann, 2010).

With the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 which signalled that Hong Kong would return to Chinese sovereignty, the belated participatory and representative democracy reforms started to be placed on the agenda (Sweeting, 1995). The pressure for greater democracy was also intensified by a more affluent population with higher expectations and an increased pessimism spread after the events in Tiananmen Square on 4th June 1989 (Morris, 2009). Along with the memories of the Cultural Revolution, this political turmoil resulted in a crisis of legitimacy for the Central Government and further distanced Hong Kong people from their 'motherland'. Therefore, the urgent tasks for the Central Government

after the handover included safeguarding political stability, winning public support and forming a much stronger sense of patriotic national identity (Morris & Scott, 2003). However, merging Hong Kong into the Mainland has not proceeded smoothly. According to the latest People's Ethnic Identity Poll compiled by the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong, 63.7% of Hong Kong people consider themselves Hong Konger and/or Hong Konger in China, while only 35.2% consider themselves Chinese and/or Chinese in Hong Kong (Hong Kong University Pop Site, 2015, June 15-18).

Meanwhile, as Ghai (2000) argues, the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems' has actually protected Hong Kong's capitalist economic system and 'way of life' rather than sustaining its autonomy. The Central Government has dominated Hong Kong's political system. The introduction of Article 23 of the Basic Law²³ whipped up the public's long-term discontent over the ever-tightening central control and limited democracy and transparency of the political system. This triggered a gigantic protest on the 1st July 2003, which resulted in Article 23 being withdrawn. The tension between the Central Government and the mass of the populace has even since increased. For example, from September to December 2014, hundreds of thousands people protested to clamour for universal suffrage with public nominations.

The Hong Kong education system has both reflected the political environment and served as a political tool (Morris, 2009). Before 1997, the main concern of schooling shifted from de-politicisation and desensitisation to developing a distinct sense of Hong Kong identity (Luk, 1991; Morris & Chan, 1997). Accordingly, the content of the curriculum shifted from teaching about 'other cultures and distant time periods' to 'the culture and contemporary politics of Hong Kong' (Morris & Morris, 2002). After 1997, increased efforts have been made to foster patriotism, loyalty and national identity by using the strategy of emphasising a shared Chinese cultural and ethnic heritage but avoiding developing an allegiance to the CCP (Morris, 2009). However, this quest has still faced strong local resistance. For

²³ This Article was criticised that it empowers the SAR government to enact laws to prohibit any act against the central government (i.e. restriction).

example, Moral and National Education, perceived as ‘brainwashing’ by the public and promoting the victories of the CCP, was changed from a compulsory to optional subject in 2012 after meeting fierce public opposition (Morris & Vickers, 2015).

Centralised bureaucratic governance

According to Miners (1995), the concentration of power in the hands of the Governor and senior civil servants started at the very beginning of the colonial period and continued even after the introduction of direct elections in 1991. Ortman (2010) argues that both the Legislative Council and the Executive Council “resembled the Executive and Legislature in name only” (p. 45). This centralised governing system was also characterised by hierarchy, obedience and top-down approaches to policy-making (Scott, 2010). According to Morris and Scott (2003), the Colonial Government saw its educational responsibility as “the provision of resources, the formulation of programmes and the identification of key values” and schools were expected to open “following government instructions” (p. 73). To avoid conflicts with stakeholders and pressure groups, policies were made either symbolically and rhetorically; or in consultation with advisory bodies, especially the Curriculum Development Council and the Education Commission, although both bodies have been effectively controlled by the Government (Morris & Adamson, 2010).

Scott (2010) argues that the structure and functions of the government have not been essentially changed since the handover. Its major concern has remained as ensuring that “statutory bodies and public corporations are acting consistently with overall policy” (P. 3). Nevertheless, he also points out that the professional civil service has been weakened by political appointment after the 1997 retrocession. Meanwhile, compared to its predecessor, the SAR Government seems to be keener to bring about real changes (Morris, 2009). However, the political system characterised by disarticulation and polyarchy²⁴ have led to a lack of unity and

²⁴ As Morris and Scott (2003) demonstrate, after the handover, messages from “the Chief Executive, the various branches of the civil service, the Education Commission and other parts of the policy-making community” have been “contradictory, or at least inconsistent” in many areas of education policy (p. 80).

coherence between different components and weakened its capacity for policy formulation and implementation (Scott, 2000; Morris & Scott, 2003). Morris (2009) points out that the education policy-making system in the post-1997 period became relatively closed – interested parties which used to play advisory roles have lost their voices, as the Government has increasingly operated on the maxim “if you are not for us you are against us” (p. 88).

A hybrid of British colony and Chinese community

Hong Kong was formed primarily by immigrants from various parts of China. According to Lau (1982), throughout its colonial history, the society is an admixture that ingeniously combined “typical Chinese social features and features developed in the local setting” (P. 67). The social and behaviour patterns derived from traditional China, particularly the influence of the Confucian heritage in many aspects of education, emphasise diligence in studying to satisfy family expectations (Lee, 2014), parents’ heavy involvement (Lam, Ho & Wong, 2002), the respect to leaders and teachers from the community, parents, peers and pupils, and high power-distance culture in school management (Kwan, 2011).

Meanwhile, living in a ‘borrowed place and borrowed time’ where there has been minimal government intervention in the economic sector (Hughes, 1976; Lau, 1982), gaining quick material wealth through individual efforts has been seen as the basis of the pragmatic and realisable ‘Hong Kong Dream’ throughout the colonial era (Leung, 1996). Morris and Chan (1997) note that, as a “transient” society, social mobility in Hong Kong has been based on “achieved rather than ascribed criteria” (p. 250). Hongkongers firmly believe that the society has provided abundant opportunities for upward mobility and obtaining high educational qualifications has been seen as one of the viable and accepted approaches to that (Leung, 1996).

The Colonial Government encouraged the emergence of local economic elites and built a structural relationship with them to maintain its rule (Zhang, 2006). This pro-elite strategy has been strengthened by the SAR Government since 1997 (Holliday et al., 2002). Hongkongers have been described by Lau (1982) as

‘political aloofness’ who “keep themselves uninvolved” in political issues (p.102). A conservative brand of Confucianism has also been said to have promoted political quiescence and subservience to benevolent rulers and ‘collective harmony’. However, Morris and Vickers (2015) demonstrate that Hongkongers, especially the young generation, have increasingly engaged in political and civic movements in recent years (p. 313).

Overall, in Hong Kong, the increase of education provision has followed economic success, the socio-political shifts have impacted on schooling and the curriculum, the power of education policy-making has been centrally maintained by the Government, and the hybrid of British colonialism and Chinese culture has reinforced the instrumental nature of education and conformity to hierarchical relationships and order. The next section focuses on how school autonomy has historically developed in this broader context.

5.3. Historical development of school autonomy

In this section, I divide the historical development of school autonomy in Hong Kong into three periods. From 1842 to 1945, the embryo of the colonial education system was characterised by a small-scale elitist provision, increased cooperation with diversified private sponsoring groups and slow process of institutionalisation. The period from 1946 to 1981 saw the promotion of mass education and strong control over schools to depoliticise schooling and the curriculum. From 1982 to the present, a set of decentralisation initiatives has been implemented in the education sector, which has reconstructed governance framework of schools and diversified education provision.

The embryo of the colonial education system: 1842-1945

Initially, the Colonial Government minimised its role to promoting a small-scale elitist education, while leaving charities, churches and Chinese

traditional civil organisations to take major responsibility for local education (Adamson & Li, 2004). After the late 1840s, the Government started to develop its leadership and control over education, albeit in a very limited way. The Education Committee was established in 1847 and then merged with the Education Department in 1860 to supervise schools that received grants from the Government. The Textbook Committee was founded in 1873 to review and approve teaching materials (Law, 2007).

The 1873 Grant-in-Aid Scheme extended the scale and scope of land and financial subsidies to eligible private schools (Sweeting, 1990). Schools could decide whether to accept them or not. Aided schools in return were subject to government inspections (Yau, Leung & Chow, 1993). In consequence, control over private schools was gradually transferred from various school sponsoring bodies (SSBs) to the Government and a growing number of new aided schools were established with subsidies (Law, 2007). Since the late 19th century, more pupils have been enrolled in aided schools than in government schools (Sweeting, 1990).

The 1913 Education Ordinance was enacted in response to the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911. This was perceived to intensify Chinese nationalism and anti-British sentiments, especially in non-government schools, and consequently encouraged socio-political disturbance in Hong Kong (Adamson & Li, 2004). Therefore, non-government schools were required to register with the Director of Education in order to ensure that they act congruously with the Government's policies. In 1932, 25 education regulations were implemented to specify curriculum time, class size and pupils' discipline (Law, 2007). Meanwhile, the Kuomintang and CCP continued to compete for political support between the 1920s and the 1940s through schooling and curriculum (Bray & Tang, 2006). In brief, Hong Kong developed a diversified and autonomous colonial education system in this period.

Depoliticisation and centralisation: 1946-1981

After the UK resumed the control of Hong Kong in 1945, the Government

showed an increased interest in exercising its power to construct a local education system (Bray & Tang, 2006) and train a “local *compradore* class” through elite secondary schools (Morris & Vickers, 2015, p. 312). This was specifically interwoven with the attempts, including legislation and direct actions, to prevent the political influences of the Kuomintang and CCP as Civil War in the Mainland spilled over into Hong Kong (Sweeting, 1995; Adamson & Li, 2004). The 1948 Education (Amendment) Ordinance empowered the Director of Education to: (1) close any schools; (2) refuse to register any teachers and de-register any registered teachers, principals and supervisors; and (3) control “school subjects, textbooks, and all other teaching materials, and any activities (salutes, songs, dances, slogans, uniforms, flags, documents, symbols, etc.) which were political in nature”. A Special Bureau was established within the Education Department to monitor schools for the count- Communist purpose since 1949.

A new Education Ordinance was enacted in 1952 in response to the anti-British campaign heightened by the establishment of the PRC and promoted via schools run by the CCP. It re-clarified and reinforced the power of the Director of Education to ensure schools were not subject to any political indoctrination (Sweeting, 1990). In the same year, the Syllabuses and Textbooks Committee was set up to better supervise and adjudicate what was and should be taught to pupils (Morris & Vickers, 2015). Model timetables, syllabuses and textbooks were then produced, which largely unified schooling and the curriculum (Luk, 1991). Sensitive issues, such as Chinese history from 1911 to 1949, were removed from the curriculum. Civics Education was introduced as a compulsory subject to counter the anti-government propaganda through promoting the idea of ‘responsible citizenship’ and the constitutional relationship between Hong Kong and the UK (Morris & Chan, 1997).

As mentioned above, the riots of 1966 and 1967 saw political tactics shifting from relying on direct intervention to policy exhortation. Morris and Adamson (2010) argue that the Government’s key concern, due to its low level of political legitimacy, was to “minimise conflict and survive, rather than to create a view of the future society” (P. 36). Two “countervailing strategies” were thus employed in

the field of education: laudable and desirable policies were made centrally, but schools could decide to accept or ignore them (Morris, 2009). As a result, a number of symbolic policies were launched. A *prima facie* example was the Government's approach to the Medium of Instruction. Although since the late 1970s the Government declared that Chinese should be used in teaching, it was left to schools to choose and most of them maintained English as the Medium of Instruction (Morris & Sweeting, 1991).

From the mid-1960s, to increase the number of public school places and improve the quality of private schools, the Government initiated the Bought Places Scheme to buy school places from private schools. By 1980, the government-bought places accounted for 51.2% of total pupil admissions (Hong Kong Government Secretariat, 1981). Meanwhile, SSBs were encouraged to establish new secondary schools with public funding. Under a contractual agreement with the Government, SSBs were entrusted with the responsibility of "setting the school objectives, developing annual and long-term plans, the recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff, promotions and staff appraisal, teaching and learning activities, as well as the day-to-day administration" as long as their activities did not destabilise colonial rule (Leung, 2003, p. 24). The Government provided schools with land, buildings, most of the capital cost and almost the full recurrent cost. These financial incentives maintained its control on curriculum, pupil admission and teacher appointments (Sweeting, 2004; Morris, 2009).

Centralisation was also strengthened by a high-stakes public examination system. The Secondary Schools Entrance Examination was introduced in 1977 for primary graduates and was later replaced with an academic aptitude test (Choi, 1999). According to the result, pupils were classified into five academic capacity bands. Within a certain geographic area, the access to secondary schools depended on by pupils' banding (Morris & Chan, 1997). In general, Band One represented the top cohort of pupils and Band Five represented the bottom cohort. Correspondingly, schools with majority of Band One pupils were 'labelled' as Band One schools and those with majority of Band Five pupils became Band Five schools (Cheng, 2009). Pupils at Secondary Five and Seven (ages 16 and 18) sat for the Hong Kong

Certificate of Education Examination and Hong Kong Advanced Level of Education Examination organised by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA).

By the end of the 1970s, the majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong were included in a regulated government-SSB governance framework and provided with approved textbooks, prescribed syllabuses and centralised public examinations.

Diversification and decentralisation: 1982-present

Since the 1980s, Communist penetration of schools was no longer seen as such a threat to colonial governance and the pursuit of political legitimacy and efficient administration became the priority of the Government (Leung, 2003). Cheng (2009) identifies two waves of education reforms in Hong Kong during this period. The first took place in the 1980s and was formulated through six Education Commission Reports from 1984 to 1996, which adopted “a top-down approach with an emphasis on external intervention or increasing resources input” (p. 66). The second started from the 1990s²⁵. A series of policy initiatives relating to decentralisation and diversification have been designed and launched by the Government to satisfy stakeholders’ expectations by advocating marketisation, competition, accountability, school-based management (especially SBCD) and quality education. Below, relevant reports and initiatives are listed and analysed.

Llewellyn Report (1982)

An overseas Visiting Panel was invited to review education policies in 1982. The outcome was the *Llewellyn Report* (Llewellyn, Hancock, Kirst & Roeloffs, 1982) in which “school-based” and “teacher-oriented” approaches were recommended as a strategy of reforming curriculum and the “over-administrated

²⁵ As shown below, the rhetoric of school-based management and SBCD actually emerged in the 1980s, but the implementation and implication at that time were limited.

education system”:

“A genuine drive towards school–based curriculum selection and adaptation, together with school–based programme and pupil evaluation, could open up new horizons for teacher participation... Every effort must be made to encourage innovation at the school level which, after all, is where the real work is being done.” (p. 56)

The Government’s response to this report was limited – only recognised that teachers were the key people making decisions in their classrooms (Sweeting, 2004). Marsh et al. (2014) argue that although the report “did have long-term impact” on the subsequent SBCD in Hong Kong, “decentralisation... was not readily acceptable to the centre at this stage” (p. 37).

SBCD (1980s-present)

The decades after the publication of the *Llewellyn Report* have witnessed the promotion of SBCD. The School-based Curriculum Project Scheme (1988-1999) was designed to encourage teachers to develop their own curriculum. However, it was criticised for undermining teacher professionalism, as the Government specified the types of projects that they would like to support and required teachers to take these projects as extra work in addition to their normal duties (Morris, 1990). The School-based Curriculum Tailoring Scheme (1994-2005) was initiated to provide remediation for junior secondary pupils who had difficulties to keep up with the central curriculum. In fact, teachers were only permitted to develop teaching materials following the same curriculum. Therefore, as Marsh et al. (2014) argue, it “was... merely a transfer of problems and tasks, but not authority, to schools” (p. 38).

The setting up of School-based Curriculum Support Teams in 1998 marked the SAR Government’s intention to further promote SBCD. However, school-based activities had to be in compliance with the requirements of the central curriculum in terms of learning time, learning targets, and essential content (CDC, 2001). The ‘Seed’ Projects initiated in 2001 attempted to support collaboration among teachers,

officials and experts. Nevertheless, those projects were selected because they complemented the central curriculum. Since 2004, an Education Development Fund of \$550 million was set up to stimulate teachers and schools to participate in school-based professional programmes. Similar to other SBCD programmes, Marsh et al. (2014) argue that it does not involve *de facto* devolution of power; the Government exercises its control through resource allocation and performance evaluation.

Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) (1991-present)

The DSS was introduced in 1991, aiming to encourage the development of private education. This idea originated from the concept of market that parents and pupils (customers) buy educational services from schools and schools supply services according to customers' needs and through market price signals (Tsang, 2002). At that time, the egalitarian subsidy policy of schools was perceived to weaken the motivation for school improvement and limit parental choices for quality education (Law, 2007). The Government was also dissatisfied that, under the Bought Places Scheme, the role of private schools was restricted to providing cheap school places to be purchased by the Government for pupils who failed public schools entrance examinations. Besides, a number of leftist schools had long been marginalised and disbarred from obtaining government funding; the Government felt politically obligated to reintegrate them to the mainstream in anticipation of 1997 (Chan & Tan, 2008).

In these circumstances, private schools, aided schools and brand-new schools which achieved sufficient education standards could voluntarily join the DSS (Education Department, 1991). However, the initial reaction was lukewarm – by 1997, only 13 schools joined the scheme and most of them were ex-CCP schools. Law (2007) argues that this was mainly due to the fear of change and unforeseen consequences of converting to the DSS schools from teachers, principals and SSBs. In 1999, the Government launched a revised scheme which enabled DSS schools to determine their own tuition fees, receive government subsidies and obtain social

donations for their Endowment Funds (Chan & Tan, 2008). They were also given more autonomy to determine their curriculum, Medium of Instruction and admission requirements without restrictions from the central allocation system (Lo, 2010).

Consequently, more aided schools have been attracted to convert to DSS status, especially elite schools. By 2013, there were 62 DSS secondary schools; nonetheless, they only accounted for a small proportion out of 514 public-funded secondary schools (Census and Statistics Department, 2014). Chan and Tan (2008) point out that although the Government attempted to develop the private sector as “an alternative source in running education”, it had not yet become strong enough to be “a major education provider or operator in the marketplace” (p. 478). Furthermore, DSS schools were not totally free from the central control. They had to sign a service contract which could be revised or ceased by the Government according to official performance evaluations (EDB, 2015a). The scheme also aimed to increase school competition and the diversity of provision. However, it was criticised on the ground that the high tuition fees charged by a few famous DSS schools privileged pupils from affluent families (Law, 2007).

School Management Initiative (SMI) (1991-1997)

In 1991, the SMI, as a specific type of school-based management framework, was introduced by the Government to the aided sector (Leung, 2003). Particularly, the SMI report: (1) emphasised that the role of the Education Department should shift from “detailed control to support and advice”; (2) empowered the School Management Committees (SMC) to prepare a formal constitution “setting out the aims and objectives of the school and the procedures and practices by which it will be managed”; and (3) permitted schools to have discretion in spending their block grant, savings gained from freezing up to 5% unfilled vacancies for staff and non-staff purpose, and a small amount of fees (*Tong Fai*) collected from pupils for

school-related activities (EMB²⁶ and Education Department, 1991). However, Leung (2003) notes that the financial flexibility under the SMI was in fact very limited, as the block grant, which did not include teacher salaries, only accounted for less than 15% of school funding.

The implementation of the SMI, as Leung (2003) argues, mainly relied on “persuasion, lobbying and the goodwill of school administrators to join the scheme voluntarily” (p. 28). However, schools did not show much enthusiasm, even when the Government suggested that it would be eventually made compulsory for all aided schools. Wong (1995) explains that this was primarily due to strategic misplay – there was little public consultation beforehand, principals were asked to make decisions without being given sufficient information and they were unkindly criticised in the SMI report. Moreover, the lack of *de facto* autonomy in financial management as discussed above also restricted the spread of the SMI. Thus, from Leung’s (2003) point of view, the SMI was a “re-regulation exercise” rather than “decentralisation of authority” (p. 28). As a result, six years after the announcement, only 30% of schools had joined the SMI (Leung, 2003).

School-based Management (SBM) Scheme (1997-present)

In 1997, the Education Commission in its Report No. 7 recommended that the SBM in the spirit of the SMI should be implemented in all aided schools by 2000. More specifically, it (1) suggested maintaining the formal procedure for formulating school annual reports and profiles, the composition of the SMC and the flexibility of funding under the SMI; and (2) introduced self-evaluation, external inspection and a framework of performance indicators to measure and supervise educational outcomes (Education Commission, 1997). In contrast to the voluntary basis of its predecessor, the SBM was made compulsory, which was not welcomed by the major SSBs (Ng & Chan, 2008).

The Education Department set up the Quality Assurance Inspection section in the same year to develop a quality assurance system. The initial composition of the

²⁶ It was merged with the Education Department in 2003 and renamed the Education Bureau in 2007.

assessment was 20% school self-evaluation and 80% on-site full external inspection. The external school review team replaced the Quality Assurance Inspection in 2004, which was redefined as a validation of the school self-evaluation and reduced its contribution to 20% (Law, 2007). Additionally, in 2000, the Education Department abandoned the academic aptitude test for pupils and decreased the academic capacity bands from five to three. Cheng (2009) argues that under this new banding system, the individual differences of pupils within each band and within each secondary school were greatly increased. Schools were thus expected to be more responsive to more diverse needs and this further justified the promotion of the SBM.

Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) (2005-present)

As part of the school-based management reform, the Education (Amendment) Bill passed in 2004 required every aided school to establish an IMC, replacing the SMC, on or before 1st July 2009, whereas this was not a compulsory requirement for DSS schools²⁷. This 2004 Bill stipulated the composition of the new management committee – managers selected by the SSB (up to 60% total membership), the principal, alumni manager(s), independent manager(s), elected teacher manager(s) and parent manager(s). It also clarified the functions and power of the SSB and IMC under this new framework (Legislative Council, 2004). Various stakeholders were thus given power to take part in school decision-making. Proponents contented that the introduction of the IMC, which was characterised by transparency and accountability, was a significant move towards the democratisation of school management (Ng & Chan, 2008).

However, resistance came from the major SSBs, especially the Catholic Church (which runs over 320 schools), the Anglican Church (about 90 schools), and the Methodist Church (18 schools). These SSBs objected to the requirement that all aided schools must establish the same management committee structure. They doubted whether their missions and vision could be realised if every school's

²⁷ DSS schools which do not establish IMCs are still managed by SMCs.

constitution required government approval (Law, 2007). They were also concerned that SSBs would lose their control of schools, as part of their power would be redistributed to individual schools' IMCs which would be directly accountable to the Government and not the SSB (Pang, 2008).

The tension between the Government and those SSBs who objected continued after the passage of the 2004 Bill, which resulted in a delay in setting up IMCs in a great number of schools. In 2005, the Church applied for a judicial review of the constitutionality of the 2004 Education Bill and stated that it would undermine religious freedom. In 2010, the Court of Final Appeal overruled Church's claim. By 2015, the majority of secondary schools had established their IMCs.

After three decades, a number of SBCD programmes, the SBM scheme and the DSS have continued to serve the purpose of diversification and decentralisation in the education system. Nevertheless, these decentralisation reforms have essentially involved a redefinition of roles and a shift of power to tighten the Government's control in the public education sector (Leung, 2003; Pang, 2011). Moreover, there has long been a tension between the maintenance of central governance and the use of school-based management for achieving this (Lam & Yeung, 2010; Marsh et al., 2014).

Since the mid-19th Century, the Hong Kong education system has evolved from a small elitist and autonomous system, to a highly centralised system, and then to a relatively decentralised system under a strong framework of central governance. The next section is concerned with the nature and degree of autonomy in secondary schools currently.

5.4. Current model of school autonomy

The current education system in Hong Kong provides 12 years free education. The New Academic Structure, introduced in 2009, consists of three-year junior secondary education and three-year senior secondary education, followed by four-year undergraduate education. Since 2012, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary

Education has become the sole public examination for secondary pupils. Currently, public-funded secondary schools include: government schools, aided schools, DSS schools²⁸ and caput schools. Table 5.1 shows the numbers and percentages of these types of schools and their enrolled pupils in 2013.

Table 5.1. Number and percentage of different types of Hong Kong public-funded secondary schools and their enrolled pupils in 2013

Type of school	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of pupils	Percentage of pupils
Government	32	7.0%	24,937	6.7%
Aided	362	79.0%	297,177	79.7%
DSS	62	13.5%	49,103	13.2%
Caput	2	0.5%	1,577	0.4%
Total	458	100%	372,794	100%

(EDB, 2014a)

This section examines the nature and degree of autonomy in Hong Kong public-funded secondary schools, focusing on aided schools – the major type of schools, and also paying attention to DSS schools – the type of schools enjoying greater autonomy. Drawing on the analysis of policy documents, literature and interview data with regard to aided schools, I give each sub-area of school management a grade according to the framework developed in the literature review chapter, and create a model of school autonomy in Hong Kong to be compared with those of Singapore and Shanghai.

Organisation and governance

The EDB is responsible for the formulation and implementation of education policies. A number of large SSBs, such as Catholic Church, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and Po Leung Kuk, play a crucial role in education provision and school management. As Principal C explained, “X [the name of the SSB] is my boss. We obey the education regulations from the Government... because all our salaries are paid by the Government, but the management is by X. I can be fired by X, because

²⁸ DSS schools are examined as ‘quasi-public’ schools in this study as they partly receive public funding.

they [the Government] ask X to manage their schools” (*sic*). According to Principal P, Scholar F and Scholar R, the organisational structure of schools is decided by SSBs following the EDB’s guidelines. In other words, schools operated by the same SSB usually have the same structure (Leung, 2003), usually including school management committee, supervisor²⁹, principal, vice-principals and heads of departments. As mentioned earlier, all aided schools have since 2005 been required to establish IMCs. The Education Ordinance defines the functions and powers of SSBs and IMCs in this new governance framework, as shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Functions and powers of SSBs and IMCs in Hong Kong secondary schools

	Functions and powers
SSBs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. setting the vision and mission for the school; 2. drafting the constitution of the IMC; 3. giving general directions to the IMC in the formulation of education policies of the school; 4. overseeing the performance of the IMC; 5. deciding the mode of receiving government aid; 6. issuing guidelines for raising funds and entering into contracts involving funds other than funds received from the Government; 7. deploying principals and teachers among the sponsored schools under certain circumstances
IMCs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. managing schools; 2. formulating education policies of the school in accordance with the vision and mission set by the sponsoring body; 3. accounting to the Permanent Secretary and the sponsoring body for the performance of the school; 4. ensuring that the mission of the school is carried out; 5. planning and managing financial and human resources of the school; 6. ensuring that the education of the pupils is promoted in a proper manner; 7. school planning and self-improvement of the school; 8. employing such teaching staff and non-teaching staff as it thinks fit and determine their terms and conditions of service

In short, SSBs provide guidelines for IMCs and supervise their performance; IMCs take charge of the daily operation of schools. Nevertheless, as Principal B experienced, in practice, IMCs intend to “give the free hand to principals, unless on

²⁹ According to the EDB, supervisor is appointed by the SSB or elected by the managers of the school in accordance with the constitution of the IMC and mainly responsible for reporting personnel changes and tenancy of schools. (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/sbm/corner-ipc-sch/delegation-function-sv.html>)

some important issues, like the Medium of Instruction”. Schools can apply to join the DSS once they meet the EDB criteria. According to Principal P, “most DSS schools are from Band One... so [they are] famous schools... the Government has cut the number that can be DSS schools, the plan is not to have all schools DSS schools” (*sic*). Table 5.3 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.3. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools

Area	Description	Degree
Organisation structure and functions	Mainly determined by the EDB and SSBs (e.g. the introduction of IMCs)	1
Governance mechanism	The EDB executes central control; SSBs provide guidelines for IMCs and supervise their performance; IMCs take charge of the daily operation of schools	2
Types of schools	Schools can voluntarily join the DSS if they meet the EDB criteria; but the number is controlled by the EDB	2

Similar to aided schools, DSS schools are primarily operated by their principals and management committees. But as mentioned above, IMCs are not compulsory for them; in other words, under the DSS, SSBs have greater power in determine the composition of school management committees and then the management of schools.

Finance

The Government remains the major source of funding for the majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong. More specifically, government and aided schools are fully funded according to heads of pupils and provided with land, standard school buildings and facilities by the Government (Yung, 2006). Aided schools are financially managed under the Code of Aid which specifies the number of classes that schools can operate per year group and the number of teachers that they can

hire based on pupil intake. In addition, as Principal Z and Principal Q stated, aided schools are allowed to collect fees (*Tong Fai*)³⁰ and receive donations that are approved by SMCs/IMCs. According to Principal C, Principal H and Journalist K, SSBs may offer some extra funding for specific purposes, such as hiring temporary teachers and organising school events.

With regard to financial management, as Principal Q explained, there is a “general domain where [aided] schools can use with considerable freedom following specifications” and a “special domain where every part has got a specified usage”. As stated in the Code of Aid, the subsidy consists of Recurrent Grants, Non-recurrent and Capital Grants, and Non-recurrent Grants for Curriculum Development. Recurrent Grants can be further divided into Salaries Grant, Operating Expenses Block Grant, Composite Furniture and Equipment Grant, Rent and Rates Grant, and Passages Grant³¹. From the names of these grants, as Principal P explained, it is clear that the EDB “has already created a number of pockets for [aided] schools” and principals “cannot move money from one pocket to another”. This was echoed by Scholar A and Scholar R. Principal Z and Principal B mentioned that schools are requested to provide annual budgets for the EDB audit and make them known to the public via schools’ websites. The Government has the power to reduce, withdraw, refund and expand subsidies (Hong Kong Government, 1994). Table 5.4 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.4. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Hong Kong aided secondary schools

Area	Description	Degree
Source(s) of finance	Fully funded by the Government; donations and fees approved by SMCs/IMCs and additional grants from SSBs	2
Expenditure	Domains and quota are stipulated in the Code of Aid; schools manage their expenditure according to that	2
Land, buildings	Provided by the Government and maintained by schools	1

³⁰ EDB allows aided secondary schools to collect *Tong Fai* at a rate of not exceeding \$290 per annum from their senior secondary pupils (EDB, 2008a).

³¹ Passages Grant is for schools which require passages for teachers of English on overseas terms and their families if applicable (Hong Kong Government, 1994).

and facilities		
Financial report and its availability	Audit by the EDB and uploaded to school websites	1

As mentioned above, DSS schools have been given the authority to set their own tuition fees on top of annual per capita government subsidies. The current three- income-banding funding scheme for DSS schools was introduced in 2000. Table 5.5 shows the permitted ratio between the government subsidies and school tuition fees.

Table 5.5. Three-income-banding funding scheme for Hong Kong DSS schools

Band	Fees	Subsidy
I	0 to $\frac{1}{3}X$	X
II	$\frac{1}{3}X$ to $2\frac{1}{3}X$	X, but schools are required to set aside 50% for scholarships / financial assistance schemes
III	$2\frac{1}{3}X$ or more	None

(EMB, 2000)

Basically, as long as tuition fees are below two and a third ($2\frac{1}{3}$) of the average unit cost of subsidising an aided school place (X), DSS schools can continue to receive full recurrent subsidies (Lai, 2002). According to Principal P, “the amount of fees ranges from hundreds to thousands HKD... a few DSS schools that transformed from elite schools charge very expensive fees”. Meanwhile, the Government provides DSS schools with land, standard buildings, non-recurrent capital grants for major repairs and a one-off grant for upgrading facilities to the standard of newly constructed aided schools. Anything over and above the standard is only available are at their own expense (Tsang, 2002).

Comparing to aided schools, DSS schools enjoy more freedom in the use of their grants for educational purposes as long as that is in compliance with the Education Ordinance, agreements signed between the school (SSB and SMC/IMC) and the Government, and other relevant regulations (EDB, 2012). According to Principal P, DSS schools are also subject to the EDB audit. School reports including

a financial summary are required to upload onto schools' websites for public monitoring (EDB, 2012).

Curriculum, teaching and examinations

Aided schools are required to prepare their pupils for the public examinations (Chan & Tan, 2008). They adopt the central curriculum prescribed by the Curriculum Development Institution of the EDB, which is developed in consultation with advisory bodies such as the CDC and Education Commission. As Morris and Adamson (2010) note, the Government tightly mandates these bodies through determining their agendas and selecting their members. The central curriculum includes eight Key Learning Areas with a range of compulsory subjects and a list of optional subjects from which schools can choose. For each area, there is a curriculum guide for aims, content, time allocation, learning and teaching strategies, assessments and resources, and practice exemplars (CDC, 2002). According to Scholar R, "usually, teachers... take reference to the guide and develop their lesson plan".

Based on the curriculum guide, various commercial textbook publishers decide the depth of coverage and the way that topics are explained and presented (Morris & Adamson, 2010). In other words, as Scholar R explained, "the publisher will edit textbooks in accordance with the curriculum published by the EDB". Then, the EDB provides a recommended list of textbooks "vetted by the appropriate Reviewing Panels of the Bureau's Textbook Committee" and states that choosing textbooks from that list is not "a compulsory requirement" (EDB, 2015b). However, as Principal B stated, "you will have a lot of difficulties if you do not follow... you have to explain to the EDB... and you have to submit the books you want to use for approval". Principal H considered that "'not approved' carries a meaning of not up to standard, and not legitimate".

Although schools are encouraged to design their own calendar flexibly to meet their local needs, the guide offers very detailed suggestions about curriculum time allocation for each area. Taking English Language as an example, schools may

allocate seven to eight periods per week and 17%-21% periods in total for each key age stage. The length of a lesson is freely decided by schools. The EMB (2005a) only stipulates that there should be no less than 190 school days and 90-93 holidays a year and the proposed list of school holidays should be submitted for approval. In addition, a model of learning time (including school time, time before and after school, weekends and holidays) and activities arrangement is provided for their reference (CDC, 2002).

Scholar A argued that “[principals] are not legally required to follow the [central] curriculum. But they will be foolish if they don’t”, as it is highly consistent with the syllabus produced by the sole public examination body – the HKEAA. As Principal Z described, day-to-day teaching actually “follows the textbook and the textbook follows the curriculum and assessment syllabus”. He also admitted that “past exam papers are the key references for teaching” and the approaches of the public examination are mirrored by internal assessments in order to make their pupils more proficient. Although teachers are said to have been given greater power to determine teaching methods, Scholar F argued that “if they have found the traditional dictated way works, they will be very reluctant to change it, even if they want to”.

School-based Assessment (SBA) is applied to three core subjects, namely, Chinese Language, English Language and Liberal Studies, and a number of optional subjects, such as Chemistry and Visual Arts. All pupils from Secondary Four to Six are supposed to be assessed by their own teachers in those subjects under the HKEAA guidelines. However, as Scholar A observed, SBA has “not proved popular at all”, as “parents would challenge subjective assessment by teachers” and this “has put teachers in a position they are not comfortable with”, so “there is a move now among the teaching associations to actually ask SBA to be removed”. According to the latest HKEAA (2015a) announcement, since 2018, the marks awarded in SBA will account for 15-20% in most subjects’ results in the public examination³²; and SBA will no longer be implemented in two subjects and become optional trail in four subjects.

³² The weighting of SBA will range from 30% to 50% in three optional subjects relating to arts and technology.

As mentioned earlier, SBCD has been promoted in Hong Kong since the 1980s. Rather than providing an alternative curriculum, Marsh et al. (2014) argue that SBCD “has been, and remains, a means to reify the central curriculum reform initiatives by making them more relevant to and therefore more feasible in the local (school) context” (p. 36). Principal B commented that “unless it is designed for the public examination... it dies”. Besides, very little time is actually allocated for SBCD by schools. Principal Z elaborated that: “say for example, out of 50 periods, it would just account two or three [periods]... most of them are used by schools as a kind of propaganda... telling parents that we have so many school-based curricula, but if you really take into consideration the hours, the time spend on it, then you will find that just... very minimum proposal” (*sic*).

Table 5.6 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘curriculum, teaching and examinations’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.6. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘curriculum, teaching and examinations’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Textbooks	Most schools choose textbooks from an EDB-approved list; deviation need to get permission from the EDB	2
Subjects	Prescribed compulsory and optional subjects; the choices of optional subjects depend on individual schools	1.5
Content of subjects and curriculum delivery	Following prescribed curriculum syllabuses; Flexible in theory; influenced by the sole public examination in reality	2
School-based curriculum development	Supplementary to central curriculum and preparation for the public examination	2
Curriculum time allocation	The percentage of curriculum time for each subject is provided by the EDB; the arrangement is determined by schools	2.5
School calendar	Decided by schools following the EDB guidelines; the list of school holidays is required to submit for approval	3.5
Entrance exams	Prescribed syllabuses for the public examination (about 80-85%); the SBA is applied to selected subjects	1.5

In contrast, DSS schools have greater flexibility in curriculum design than aided schools. For example, as Journalist K mentioned, 11 out of 62 DSS secondary schools in 2013 were allowed to offer up to 50% of their pupils alternatives to the central curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma and General Certificate Education A-levels, mainly catering for the international market. Nevertheless, the EDB (2015a) emphasises that “DSS schools are still required to offer principally a curriculum targeted at local students and prepare them for the local examinations”. This was also mentioned by Principal P: for the majority of schools, “no matter aided or DSS, you have to teach Hong Kong curriculum, which means you have to prepare kids to sit for public examinations conducted by the HKEAA” (*sic*). As Chan and Tan (2008) argue, most DSS schools have only been free to develop non-examination subjects; this has limited their autonomy in providing alternative curriculum to a certain extent. Scholar X also noticed that “even some performance very good schools are very conservative, they are more reluctant to make change” (*sic*).

Teachers

According to the Education Ordinance and Code of Aid, teachers in aided schools are required to register as either ‘registered teachers’ or ‘permitted teachers’. The former have to possess a recognised teaching certificate (e.g. a local Teacher’s Certificate or Post-graduate Diploma/Certificate in Education) in addition to a degree qualification. They are given permanent posts and allowed to teach all subjects. The latter do not need to have a teaching certificate, but can only sign a temporary contract and teach few designated subjects (e.g. music, arts and sports) when registered teachers are in shortage (EDB, 2008b). In general, permitted teachers get less pay than registered teachers and as stipulated in the Code of Aid there is no increments for permitted teachers after reaching certain salary bars. They may obtain the ‘registered’ status through the completion of

recognised on-the-job training programmes.

Lai’s (2002) study demonstrates that sub-degree-level and untrained teachers served as a “convenient buffer” in Hong Kong to meet the rapidly growing demand for teachers from the 1950s to the early 2000s. A great number of teachers gained their teaching certificates through in-service teacher training during that time (Lai & Grossman, 2008). But standards for entering the teaching profession have become more rigorous in recent years; the Government’s long term policy was “to require all new teachers to be professionally trained and degree holders” (EMB, 2005b). According to Principal Z, schools “are allowed to recruit teachers without teachers’ training, but that’s not that normal”. Principal H confirmed that trained teachers are preferred in most schools. By 2013, the vast majority of secondary school teachers are professionally trained university graduates, as shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7. Academic qualification and training status of Hong Kong secondary school teachers

Academic qualification	Training status	Number	Percentage
University graduate or equivalent	Trained	27968	93.3%
	Untrained	1456	4.9%
Non-university graduate	Trained	488	1.6%
	Untrained	69	0.2%
Total		29981	100%

(EDB, 2014a)

There are five universities primarily providing initial teacher education. Those who enter teaching later in their careers can receive the recognised professional qualification through the Non-Graduate Teacher Qualification Assessment. Schools are responsible for checking the eligibility of job applicants. As Principal C explained, two interviews are usually held with applicants: “one with principal, the second is in the headquarter’s office” in SSB and if “we want to employ contract [permitted] teachers, before that, we have to ask the permission from them [SSB]” (*sic*). As soon as the appointment is confirmed by SMCs/IMCs, applications for teacher registration are submitted to the EDB. Only the employment of principals, temporary Native-speaking English Teachers and teachers directly appointed to

promotion ranks is required to be firstly approved by the EDB. Dismissal is handled by the same authorities (EDB, 2007).

The number of teachers that a school can recruit depends on the permitted number of classes and the permitted teacher-to-class ratios. For example, as Principal Z explained: his school was allowed to operate four classes in Secondary One and five classes in Secondary Four; the permitted teacher-to-class ratios in the 2012/13 school year were: 1.7 teachers per junior secondary class and 2.0 teachers per senior secondary class, which means he may hire 6.8 teachers for Secondary One and 10 teachers for Secondary Four. This is the main indicator for calculating the Salary Grant. Another is the status of teachers – all teachers are categorised as either Graduate (GMs) or Certificated (CMs) Masters/Mistresses. GMs must hold a university degree and are paid more than CMs. Schools are only permitted to use 85% of their Salary Grant for GMs. Principal C complained that “nowadays, almost all teachers are degree holders, but they [EDB] still keep this kind of ratio”. Consequently, many graduates are employed as CMs.

With regard to continuing professional development, the minimum requirement is 150 hours spread over three years. As Principal Z argued, this is a “loose indication” because the EDB does not specify “what should be included and not included”, so “it’s up to the teacher to decide” the form and content. Nevertheless, as Principal H mentioned, schools have to report the hours of continuing professional development completed by their teachers in the annual school report. The EDB (2015c) also lists a set of recognised training courses on its website, including those stated in the Code of Aid and other equivalent ones acceptable to IMCs or Permanent Secretary for Education. Teachers are required to undertake these courses if they wish to be eligible for promotion (EDB, 2015c).

The current teacher appraisal framework was introduced in 2001. Following the *Teacher Performance Management* (EMB, 2003), schools can define the objectives, set the criteria and methods, and determine the procedures of their own appraisal models. Although under this framework, schools are given the authority to conduct appraisal and approve promotion, according to Principal P, there is “a ratio between senior and junior teachers... if all your senior teacher positions are

filled... there is no chance” of promotion. Teachers are not civil servants, but follow similar salary scales including annual increments as civil servants, which are stipulated in the Code of Aid. Table 5.8 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teachers’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.8. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teachers’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Qualification and training	The vast majority of teachers are required to be trained degree holders	1.5
Appointment and dismissal	Hired and fired by schools (SMCs/IMCs); registered in the EDB	3
Continuing professional development	150 hours spread over three years, the form and content are decided by teachers and schools; recognised training courses are listed on the EDB website and formed as promotion condition	2
Appraisal	School-based teacher appraisal in compliance with the EDB guidance	2
Promotion	Proposed by schools following the stipulated ratio	2
Pay (salary and bonuses)	Following stipulated salary scheme stipulated in the Code of Aid	0
Legal status	Not civil servants, but following similar salary scheme	2

Compared to aided schools, DSS schools enjoy more flexibility in the management of teachers. As Principal P explained, “the DSS school system, it’s a little different, because all teachers are kind of in contracts... but I would have to exam the qualifications of the applicants in the same that the EDB exams applicants of the aided schools” (*sic*). In particular, DSS schools are not required to conform to the proportion of GMs and CMs. This enables them to hire more junior CMs staff with comparatively lower salary costs and more supporting staff (e.g. teaching assistants and administrators), whereas the number of such staff is stipulated for aided schools (Chan & Tan, 2008).

Accountability

The school development and accountability framework was introduced in 2003 and its latest phase starts from September 2015. This framework requires all aided schools to prepare a school development plan, conduct annual school self-evaluation and seek validation from an external review team sent by the EDB once every four years (Walker & Ko, 2011; EDB, 2015d). Both school development plan and school self-evaluation make reference to 23 performance indicators in four major domains prescribed by the EDB, namely, management and organisation, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos, and student performance (EDB, 2015e). In addition, the EDB provides a series of standard school self-evaluation tools which are recommended for schools to assess their performance, such as Key Performance Measures, Stakeholder Surveys and School Value-added Information System (EDB, 2015f). Schools' self-evaluation annual reports should be endorsed by their SMCs/ IMCs and made available on their websites before the end of each academic year (Cheng, 2009).

According to the EDB (2015g), an external review team is comprised of four members: three EDB officers and a front-line school personnel. The main purpose of the review is to complement school self-evaluation and “give schools the benefit of feedback and suggestions for improvement from different perspectives” (p. 3). As Principal B, Principal H and Principal Q described, external review teams usually visit schools for four days; with reference to the prescriptive performance indicators, reviewers check school development plans and self-evaluation reports for the latest two years, observe lessons and meet stakeholders (i.e. parents, pupils, teachers and school managers). As the EDB (2015g) states, external review reports focus on the contexts of the schools and their key strengths and areas for further improvement. Principal B said that schools would be expected to “demonstrate that they are taking steps to improve” drawing on EDB’s suggestions. External review reports are required to be released to schools’ stakeholders but only encouraged to be uploaded to their websites for the public information (EDB, 2015g).

On top of this, aided schools are required to participate in the Territory-wide

System Assessment conducted by the HKEAA. It aims to provide schools with objective data on pupils’ performances in Chinese language, English language and Mathematics at the end of key age stages one to three against specific Basic Competencies (HKEAA, 2015b). According to Journalist K, the collected data is also used by the Government to review and inform policies. The EDB does not officially rank schools. The banding system, revised in 2000, is used to group pupils based on their academic abilities, although, as illustrated earlier, it in effect labels schools. Schools’ academic performance and other statistics are still published in mass media, which puts great pressure on schools. Table 5.9 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘accountability’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.9. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘accountability’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools

Area	Description	Degree
Goals and standards	School development plan is made according to a set of prescriptive performance indicators	1
Evaluation and inspection	School self-evaluation and external review by the EDB are conducted with reference to performance indicators	1
Annual report	Checked by the external review team	1
Availability of information	School development plan and self-evaluation have to be uploaded to schools’ websites; external school review reports are required to release to schools’ stakeholders	1

As EDB (2015h) stipulates, DSS schools, which have service agreement with the Government, are subject to external review on their performance and the Territory-wide System Assessment. This is one of the criteria for the renewal of service agreement. While the timing is set out in service agreement, the procedures and requirements are the same as those for aided schools. The arrangements of external review for DSS schools without service agreement are those applied to aided schools. Principal P felt that DSS schools actually “face more serious and stricter scrutiny from the EDB than aided schools”, because “the more freedom a school has, the closer the EDB looks at it”.

Pupil admission and external relations

Pupil admission in aided schools is determined through the Secondary School Places Allocation system designed and managed by the EDB. It is divided into two stages: discretionary places and central allocation. The application for discretionary places depends on schools; those participating are allowed to reserve up to 30% places for their preferred pupils and not subject to restriction on districts (EDB, 2014b). According to Principal Z, “all secondary schools in Hong Kong... try their best to attract more applicants for the discretionary places”. In the central allocation stage, 10% are for unrestricted school choices and the remaining 90% are for restricted school choices; pupils are centrally allocated to secondary schools according to their bands, parental choice and computerised random number (EDB, 2014b). Contrary to the former allocation system merely depending on academic performance, as Chan and Tan (2008) argue, the current system actually reduced schools’ control over “the quality and demographic attributes of their student intakes” (p. 475).

According to Principal C, the competition among schools has increased in recent years, as the birth rate in Hong Kong has decreased and the Government has started to “kill schools”. Principal Z complained that, in this situation, he has to spend a great deal of time and money on marketing activities and teachers are also distracted from teaching by the work to attract more pupils. While collecting data in Hong Kong, I saw prominent advertisements for schools in local newspapers and massive banners on the streets.

The EDB has developed a series of schemes and programmes to encourage and help schools to build active partnerships with businesses (EDB, 2015i). Schools are fairly free to have ‘sister schools’ in Mainland China or overseas. Parents who would like to engage in school activities can either join the Parent-Teacher Association following the EDB guideline, or be elected as the IMC parent representative to have their voice heard in the matter of school management. Principals and teachers are very used to freely expressing their views on and complaints about education and schools through the media. This is evident in my

data collection, particularly comparing to the other two East Asian societies. Table 5.10 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools.

Table 5.10. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Hong Kong secondary aided schools

Area	Description	Degree
pupil admission	A centralised allocation system; schools can reserve up to 30% places	2
Relationship with other schools and businesses	The EDB provides schemes to encourage and facilitate that	4
Level of parents’ involvement	Parents can join the Parent-Teacher Association and/or be elected as representatives of IMCs; the power and function are stipulated by the EDB	3
Relationship with mass media (or interview requests in general)	People can freely express their opinions	5

For schools under the DSS, whether or not join the allocation system is their own choices. For those participating, they can still freely set their own admission requirements; those not can recruit pupils go beyond geographic boundaries (EDB, 2014b). As Law (2007) argues, given nine-year compulsory education is free in aided schools, tuition fees can be a “barrier” for pupils from poor families to choose fee- charging DSS schools, although not all of them charge high fees (p. 111). Moreover, Journalist K pointed out that the freedom of pupil admission enjoyed by elite DSS schools has led to a concern on the potential detrimental impact of admitting pupils on their academic merit which mainly means pupils’ “English language ability and the types of private tutoring and extra-curricular activities that parents could arrange for their kids to build their impressive portfolios for admissions”. For “some not very famous” DSS schools, as Principal P mentioned, they “have to try very hard to attract students”.

This section has examined the nature and degree of school autonomy in the current Hong Kong education system, particularly, with regard to aided and DSS secondary schools. Drawing on the historical and current development, this is

further analysed and discussed from four perspectives in the next section.

5.5. Features of school autonomy

Education in Hong Kong was modelled on a British-style system and influenced by Chinese tradition during its colonial history. The post-handover period has seen a number of whole-system changes such as the introduction of a sole public examination and the New Academic Structure. Through decades of efforts, Hong Kong has achieved 12-year free education; developed a sophisticated partnership with various non-governmental SSBs; and shifted from relying on private funding and resources to receiving public subsidies. Subsequent to the expansion of mass education, since the early 1980s, policy-makers started to stress quality assurance, effective school governance, parental choice, market forces and competition through a series of school-based management initiatives including the SMI/SBM schemes, SBCD programmes and the DSS. In this context, school autonomy in Hong Kong has been characterised by four features, elaborated below.

Firstly, major reforms promoting school autonomy have been centrally designed and initiated, but implemented voluntarily at first and made compulsory after 1997. A good example is the introduction of the SMI and SBM scheme. As described above, the former was firstly promoted through lobbying strategies but not warmly welcomed by most aided schools, whereas the revised SBM scheme was mandatory for all aided schools since 1997. This change has been in accordance with the shifting of governance and policy-making in the political system before and after the handover (Morris & Scott, 2003). The establishment of IMCs, the promotion of Chinese as Medium of Instruction and the regulation of class sizes are examples of the centrally initiated and implemented policies in the post-1997 period. The SAR Government, compared with its colonial predecessor, seems to have relied less on the use of symbolic policies and increasingly tightened its control over policy implementation at the school level (Morris & Adamson, 2010).

Secondly, the establishment of IMCs has transferred autonomy from SSBs,

rather than from the Government, to individual schools. By including 40% external representatives, the power previously exclusively enjoyed by SSBs has been divided among various stakeholders. The roles and functions of SSBs and SMCs/IMCs, and the relationship between them, have been clearly redefined, while the central control of the Government has not been significantly changed. In other words, the Government still holds the power of determining goals and criteria of education through the prescribed curriculum and the public examination, and designing the governance and accountability framework. Furthermore, as Pang (2008) argues, the Government “is likely to assume increasing control of school education”, because: the Board of Education was dissolved in 2003; the Education Commission no longer prepares policy documents from 1997; and the role of SSBs as “intermediate control structure” has been weakened since the 2000s (p. 30). In this sense, central control of education seems to have been reinforced.

Thirdly, the autonomy that has been devolved to schools is limited and further balanced by a set of central control mechanisms. For example, aided schools have only been empowered by the SBM scheme to manage 15% of their budget; and they are free to admit up to 30% pupils based on their own discretion. Although the DSS enables schools to be more autonomous than their aided counterparts in many aspects, schools with DSS status are still subject to government inspection and the contract can be terminated by the EDB if they cannot meet the stipulated standards. Besides, there are only a small proportion of secondary schools (13.5%) granted DSS status, which has limited their impact. Despite that the Government has developed a school-based evaluation framework, it has to be validated by the EDB review and conducted according to prescriptive performance indicators. Even in some areas that schools are in theory granted great autonomy (e.g. teaching methods and SBCD), in reality, they adopt approaches which guarantee high performance in the sole public examination.

Fourthly, the DSS has been promoted as a key means to achieve marketisation/privatisation of education (Chan & Tan, 2008), which has correspondingly brought about the increase of the level of school autonomy. It was formulated and initiated in an attempt to expand the private provision of education and strengthen the role of

private schools as a good alternative to public schools (Tse, 2005). Moreover, market mechanisms are central to the management of DSS schools. For example, they are allowed to determine tuition fees according to market price signals, and parents and pupils can 'buy' education service based on their needs and preferences without central restrictions. Thus, a few elite DSS schools are able to set higher bars to select rich and/or academically capable pupils. Nevertheless, Law (2007) argues that the extent of marketisation/privatisation should not be exaggerated; "the DSS school is not a genuine case of privatisation; rather, it subsidises private education" (p. 109).

5.6. Conclusion

The Hong Kong education system has mainly reflected and changed in response to broader socio-political shifts. In terms of school autonomy, three distinct periods have been identified in this thesis. The strategies adopted by the government in the education sector have shifted from 'laissez-faire' to centralised control and then to decentralisation and diversification. However, the reforms promoting school-based management since the 1980s have not necessarily led to higher levels of school autonomy in all types of schools and in all management areas. Furthermore, the Government has recentralised the education system through weakening advisory bodies and SSBs; the accountability framework and quality assurance mechanisms have also been used to retain central control. Meanwhile, the central curriculum and the sole public examination have determined daily teaching and learning to a large extent, although SBCD has been rhetorically encouraged. The DSS, as a specific approach to marketisation/privatisation, has only brought about more autonomy in a small number of schools. Therefore, it would be problematic to make the general claim that secondary schools in Hong Kong enjoy high levels of autonomy.

Chapter 6. School autonomy in Singapore secondary education

6.1. Introduction

In addition to Hong Kong examined in the previous chapter, Singapore is another society selected to answer the second research question. It is a commonplace to declare that Singapore is unique – a tiny island, a young state, a strong government, a prosperous economy and a multicultural society. Its education system, well-acknowledged as high-performing (Stewart, 2011), has been developed in this context and been used as a vital means to achieve economic growth, political stability and national cohesion. The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate the nature and the degree of autonomy in Singapore secondary schools. Firstly, it is concerned with how the education system has been painted in a broad canvas of economy, politics, society and culture. Secondly, a specific focus is given to the evolution of school autonomy over time. Thirdly, a model of autonomy enjoyed by secondary schools currently is created, according to the analysis of policy documents, literature and interview data. Lastly, five features of school autonomy in Singapore are identified and enunciated, based on the analysis of historical transitions and current developments.

6.2. Context

The Republic of Singapore (Singapore) is a sovereign city-state, sitting at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. It is a small island (about 700 km²) with a population of 5.4 million, ethnically made up of 74% Chinese, 13% Malay, 9% Indian and 4% others (Department of Statistic, 2015). Singapore was ‘found’ in 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and officially subject to British colonial rule from 1867. It was occupied by Japanese during the Second World War, granted limited self-governance by the UK in 1959, incorporated into the Malaysian Federation in 1963, and reluctantly and traumatically obtained full independence in

1965 (Turnbull, 2009). The paucity of natural resources has stimulated the People's Action Party (PAP) – the sole party that has ruled Singapore since independence – to prioritise education and manpower training as the centre of its economic and political nation-building strategies (Gopinathan, 2012). These instrumental goals have profoundly shaped the development of the Singapore education system.

Economic growth

Singapore had a long history of free entrepôt trade since Raffles landed. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 resulted in a dramatic increase in trade between Europe and Asia, which made Singapore the capital of the British Straits Settlements during the colonial period because of its strategic location (Turnbull, 2009). Nonetheless, the first generation of the PAP leadership staunchly believed that Singapore could only survive by being united with Malaya, generally because it was “a Chinese majority in a Malay-dominant area” (Gopinathan, 2012, p.66) and specifically, in terms of economy, because its lop-sided trading economy was heavily intertwined with Malaysia (Gopinathan, 1974). Therefore, the independence came as a “rude shock” (Tong & Lian, 2002, p. 2) and forced this new-born country to confront a stark and urgent situation. Considerable efforts were made in these circumstances to orient education to the pre-eminent goal of economic survival by providing a basic-skilled and disciplined labour force (Gopinathan, 1995).

Singapore ushered its economic turning point in the late 1960s, when the outspread of the fever of China's Cultural Revolution frightened western companies and factories out of investing in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and turned to Singapore. The following two decades saw great economic strides based on the export-oriented and labour-intensive manufacturing industries. Since the 1980s, Singapore sought to attract high value-added goods and services (Turnbull, 2009). Correspondingly, as Ashton and Sung (1997) observe, its education system moved from providing compulsory primary education and upgrading basic literacy, Mathematics and science in the 1960s, to promoting technical and vocational training in the 1970s,

and then to developing skills required for “effective participation in an advanced industrial society” (p. 212) and expanding the provision of higher education in the 1980s. It is noteworthy that Singapore achieved universal primary education in 1965 and lower secondary education in the early 1970s without making them compulsory (Stewart, 2011).

By the 1980s, a rich and progressive Singapore had become a major global economic player, well-known as one of the ‘Tiger Economies’ which provided a stable and friendly investment environment with low taxes and pro-employer Labour Law; and a successful ‘developmental state’ which has had extensive state intervention, regulation and planning in its economic and social developments (World Bank, 1993; Johnson, 1995). The mid-1980 recession urged the Government to recognise the challenge of knowledge-based economy in the globalisation era (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002). Singapore has since concentrated on enhancing “creativity and productivity in its labour force to compete better in the global auction for talent” (Gopinathan & Mardiana, 2013, p. 16). A major restructuring of the education system has been launched since the late 1990s and continues to be underway (Gopinathan, 2007). Two of the key initiatives were the 1997 “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” and 2004 “Teach Less, Learn More”, which have put a high premium on flexibility, decentralisation, diversity, innovation, entrepreneurship, information technology and lifelong learning in education (Pang, 2011).

Politics and governance: a centralised and paternalistic ‘administrative state’

The halo of British invincibility was inevitably shattered due to its surrender during the Second World War. Meanwhile, there was little racial integration and social cohesion in Singapore as an immigrant society; the main ethnic groups considered themselves as Chinese, Malays and Indians, rather than as Singaporeans (Gopinathan, 1995). During the 1960s, independence movements triggered intensive ethnic and religious disturbances and tensions (Turnbull, 2009). Therefore, it was urgent for the newly-elected PAP Government to build a united nation

accommodating ethnic and linguistic pluralism to ensure the continued survival of the country (Hill & Lian, 1995). This goal was deemed to be achieved by creating and inculcating a sense of national identity and a kind of value that would enable Singaporeans to live in harmony (Han, 2009). Education has since served as part of this broader strategy to promote national integration and produce loyal and committed citizenry, and for this purpose, bilingualism and different versions of national education have become the key components of the education system (Gopinathan, 2007).

Since its birth, Singapore has experienced a long socio-political stability guaranteed by a powerful government. As Gopinathan and Mardiana (2013) describe, its governance system has been maintained by “an astute and development-focused political and administrative elite” (p. 22), eschewed “ideology in favour of pragmatism and rational policy making” (p. 17), efficient resource distribution and detailed policy implementation. Moreover, high salaries have been provided for ministers and civil servants to attract and retain elitists and eliminate corruption (Hill & Lian, 1995). The highly efficient and clean Government has received worldwide reputation and admiration.

However, Singapore has been often criticised as “one of the most outstandingly stubborn cases of authoritarianism” (Sim, 2006, p. 143), ‘soft authoritarianism’ (Hwee, 2002), or ‘stable semi-democracy’ at best (Case, 2002). Mauzy and Milne (2002) opine that it has a “dominant party system” rather than a “one-party system”, because “other parties exist” (p. 38). In spite of the ‘multi-party’ form of the political system, the PAP is in fact the sole party that has ever been in power with few parliamentary seats held by the fragmented opposition and no local elected institutions (Jones, 2013). Lee Kuan Yew, who went on to lead the country for 31 years as Prime Minister since 1959, once even declared, “I make no apologies that the PAP is the Government and the Government is the PAP” (Petir, 1982, quoted in Mauzy & Milne, 2002, pp. 25-26). With this unchallengeable power, Gopinathan (2007) points out that the Government has been able to develop its own forms of human rights and state control and interventions.

Lee Kuan Yew and other political leaders have firmly supported hierarchy within the Government. This, as Mauzy and Milne (2002) argue, means “the Minister, not the top civil servant, is in charge” (p. 6). Many academics have identified Singapore as an ‘administrative state’. For example, as Chan (1976) elaborates, its governance system has been characterised by “depoliticisation”, which means political decisions have been “given” by, and “the bureaucracy is a close handmaiden of”, the PAP (p. 232). In addition, Khong (1995) points out that “the alliance, based on a convergence of interests between an increasingly technocratic civil service and the political leadership, has played a vital role in conferring legitimacy on the government” (p. 117). In this way, the political power concentrated in the hands of cabinet ministers has been diffused into the administrative arena.

Lee Kuan Yew was highly skeptical of ‘western democracy’. Instead, ‘Asian Values’ and ‘Neo-Confucianism’ were notably developed by him and have been cherished by the Government. This ideological system has rationalised the Asian-style authoritarianism and stressed the rule of law and order, collectivism, communitarianism and social harmony in sacrifice of certain freedoms (DeBary, 1998; Hill, 2000). As to its people, the Government has adopted a ‘Father knows best’ approach in both public and private sectors (Choy, 1987) on the ground that ordinary people are ‘immature’ (Haas, 1999). Examples include a series of government- initiated campaigns, such as: against spitting in public and selling chewing gum; and advocating flushing public toilets and behaving courteously. Caning, introduced in the colonial period, has been retained as punishment for convicted criminals and expanded to daily misbehaving. The mass media is state-owned and responsible for informing people the Government’s decisions and propagating its ideologies (Lee, 2010). Unions have been turned into a key institution of implementing policies and maintaining order (Rodan, 2006).

These political characteristics have been accordingly reflected in Singapore’s small, compact, centralised and regulation-making education system. On the behalf of the Government, Singapore’s Ministry of Education (SMOE) exercises strict control over various types of educational institutions and different levels of

schooling in almost all management areas (Tan, 2006). As Dimmock and Tan (2012) argue, the “high degree of tight coupling and alignment in policy and leadership” have guaranteed “the implementation, sustainability and scalability of policy reforms” across the whole country (p. 326). Particularly with regard to curriculum, following Lee Kuan Yew’s idea of education – ‘producing a good man and a useful citizen’, pupils have been imbued with the values and beliefs promoted by the Government in “all subjects where appropriate”, especially Civics and Moral Education, Social Studies and Mother Tongue Language (Han, 2009, p. 106).

This highly centralised and hierarchical one-party Government has tried to seek a ‘kinder and gentler’ face since the mid-1980s under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (1990-2004) and his successor, Lee Kuan Yew’s son, Lee Hsien Loong (2004-present), in order to hold Singapore’s attraction to global investors and cope with a more complex socio-political setting (Lyons & Gomez, 2005). The Government has shown its desire for a ‘civic society’, although this has been more concerned with the contribution from, rather than the criticism made by, elites (Hill & Lian, 1995; Lee, 2002). The reflection of this political emphasis in the education arena was the introduction of National Education and Character and Citizenship Education as compulsory curriculum since the late 1990s, with the purpose of retaining young Singaporean’s loyalty and attachment (Gopinathan, 2007). However, the degree of ‘openness’ and ‘liberalisation’ seems not high enough to appease the growing discontentment with the existing social-political restrictions. The PAP experienced its lowest popular support and won a narrow victory over the opposition in the 2011 Election.

A pragmatic and meritocratic society

For centuries, people from various countries have flooded into Singapore drawn by the chance to make their fortunes; the tide continues to this day. Most of the migrants were Chinese and Indian. The lack of natural resources and the tension with potentially hostile neighbours in Malaysia and Indonesia have generated a strong sense of urgency and unsafety within Singapore. As Reid (2010) argues, the

awareness of crisis has equipped Singaporean with “a pragmatic determination to adopt policies that are good for the country rather than reiterating ancient beliefs or shibboleths” (p. 15), which has especially worked well for the Chinese. Moreover, Tong and Lian (2002) point out that the instrumental, utilitarian, technically-oriented and consumption-conscious culture has increasingly dominated the society. This may partly explain why education in Singapore has long been regarded and utilised as an instrument to an end, more than an end in itself; and why practical subjects (such as Mathematics, science and English) and examinations have been attached such importance (Gopinathan, 1995; Tan & Ng, 2007).

The belief in talent has deeply rooted in every facet of Singapore as a state and a society. Meritocracy integrated with elitism is included as a component of the Government’s ideology (Mauzy & Milne, 2002), and established as a crucial value and principle in people’s daily life (Ho, 2003). Originating from Confucianism, it is accepted that individuals are born with different capabilities (Kim, 2009); their social and occupational positions should be and can be objectively and scientifically determined by merit (achievement), rather than political and economic background, race, religion, class or parentage. A conspicuous example is the short-lived Graduate Mother Scheme announced in 1984, which provided financial benefits for university graduate mothers and school enrolment privileges for their children (Mauzy & Milne, 2002). The education system is similarly premised on an idea that, while everyone has access to education, which equips them with skills and knowledge to earn a better living, the best and brightest are identified and ensured the best resources to develop to their fullest potential (Gopinathan, 2007).

Through half a century, Singapore has transformed ‘from third world to first’ in the words of Lee Kuan Yew. As Sharpe and Gopinathan (2002) argue, the PAP Government has formulated its development strategy in a firm faith in human capital. Its education policies and practices have been driven and restructured in tune with economic changes and political needs. A set of socio-political features, such as centralism, hierarchy, pragmatism and meritocracy, have also shaped the governance and management of the education system. The next section specifically examines the evolution of school autonomy in Singapore against this broad

backdrop.

6.3. Historical development of school autonomy

In this section, I identify four historical segments specifically in terms of school autonomy. From 1819 to 1958, education was rarely the Colonial Government's priority; only the post-war period saw the preparatory efforts to establish a national education system. From 1959 to 1978, as part of the nation-building strategy, a unified and centralised national education system was formed to cater for all pupils from different ethnic groups. The period from 1979 to 1996 witnessed the beginning of education decentralisation and diversification, which resulted in high-performing schools granted with more autonomy. Since 1997, further decentralisation and diversification were launched in parallel with the introduction of various quality assurance mechanisms as a means of retaining accountability and central control.

Preparation for a national education system: 1819 – 1958

As Wilson (1978) argues, the Singapore education system during the colonial period was predominated by a *laissez-faire* philosophy that left the major provision of schooling to enterprising individuals, missionary bodies and private organisations. For a long time, schools were operated in one of four languages: English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil, and differentiated in terms of curriculum, management and overall goals. Only Malay and English schools were occasionally funded by the Colonial Government from 1854; in return, they were subject to official inspection (Wong & Gwee, 1980). It was not until the 1920s that the Colonial Government began to exert more control over community-run Chinese schools due to their subversive political activities (Doraisamy, 1969). A significant move was the Registration of Schools Ordinance that required schools, teachers and managers to register, regulated the operation of schools and shut down schools that “promoted ideas deemed to conflict with the interests of the Government” (Tan,

2006, p. 59). Since 1923, the Grants-in-Aid scheme and official inspection were extended to Chinese schools.

The *Ten Years Programme* for education development was published in 1947, which was described by Gopinathan (1974) as the “first effort in Singapore history” to design education policy and define overall goals (p. 7). It called for a universal education system to prepare for self-governance, which would be able to provide a free primary education and a common curriculum for all ethnic groups of pupils (Yip, Eng & Yap, 1990). In 1955, an All-Party Committee was commissioned to scrutinise Chinese schools which became increasingly politicalised and radicalised, influenced by the huge socio-political movements and turbulence in China. The 1956 White Paper accepted many of the Committee’s recommendations, including a common curriculum, a settlement on English as the medium of instruction and the principle of ‘equality of treatment’ for all language streams schools (Tan, 2006; Gopinathan, 2012).

The 1957 Education Ordinance and subsequent regulations reaffirmed the requirement of school registration, clarified the duty and responsibility of school management committees and stipulated that government schools and aided schools would be treated equally in respect to finances, teachers’ qualifications and salaries, physical facilities, and pupils’ attainment, behaviour and discipline (Colony of Singapore, 1957a, 1957b). In addition, the Director of Education was given the power to control staff appointment and dismissal in all types of schools (Tan, 2006). All these policy initiatives marked the preparation for the construction of a united national education system.

Centralisation and integration: 1959-1978

Since 1959, education policies towards centralisation and integration started to be intensively implemented to ensure economic survival by association with socio-political stability. Two or more language streams schools were accommodated into one building and operated under a common principal (State of Singapore, 1959). Universal primary education was available for all pupils from 1966, which means

pupils from different ethnic groups could receive the same number of years of formal schooling. In terms of curriculum, common syllabuses and attainment goals were provided for all schools (State of Singapore, 1962), bilingualism became compulsory at the primary level in 1960 and the secondary level in 1966 (Gopinathan, 1980) and the Education Publication Bureau was set up in 1967 to produce standard and affordable textbooks. The national examination system was introduced to primary and secondary education in 1961 and 1966 respectively (Doraisamy, 1969). The Institute of Education was established in 1973 to centrally prepare graduates and non-graduates in different approaches for the teaching profession (Wong, 1974).

Moreover, values, norms and attitudes that would lead to a strong sense of national identity and civic loyalty, and appreciation of a well-governed society were emphasised in schooling. Rituals and ceremonies involving national symbols, such as flag-raising and anthem singing, were introduced in 1966 – a year after the full independence (Yip et al., 1997). During this period, education provision through the public sector was largely expanded and became the majority. For example, the percentage of government secondary schools increased from 22.2% in 1955 to 71.5% in 1980 (SMOE, 1995).

With regard to education governance and management, Goh and Gopinathan (2006) argue that “the strictly top-down approach in planning, disseminating and enforcing educational changes was a clear reflection of the Singapore’s Government paternalistic style of rule”, which eventually resulted in a “‘yes-man’ syndrome”, a “spoon-feeding culture” and the lack of autonomy within the education system. Hargreaves, Shirley and Ng (2012) provide a vivid description of this kind of governance and management culture: “if you gave a speech that contained an idea that a senior education official liked, the joke was that within 72 hours, it would be fully implemented with complete fidelity across the entire country” (p. 80).

By the end of the 1970s, a fragmented colonial education system inherited from the UK was transformed into a centralised and integrated system characterised by a standardised structure, common curriculum, unified examinations,

institutionalised values and top-down managerial approach.

Early decentralisation and diversification: 1979-1996

The rapid post-war economic growth supported the expansion of the education system. Over the first two decades of the independence, Singapore achieved a basic standard of national education. The late 1970s and early 1980s were seen as the watershed that the Government's policy focus shifted from quantity to quality (Ng, 2008). In 1979, a government-commissioned committee headed by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee reported on the issues of high attrition and semi-literate school leavers and attributed the cause to ability differentials. Following this report, a new education system was implemented aimed to allow pupils to progress at a pace more suited to their abilities. This new system created a two-tier curriculum and a three tracks system at the primary school level: the normal bilingual, the extended bilingual and the monolingual. Similarly, according to their results of the Primary School Leaving Examination, secondary pupils would be grouped into one of three courses: special, express and normal. In 1994, the normal course was further divided into academic and technical courses³³ (Deng, Gopinathan & Lee, 2013).

In fact, the top layer of the pupil cohort received much more attention and support compared to their counterparts in this new system, which entrenched the meritocratic ethos long adopted by the PAP (Tan, 1998). For example, in 1980, the Special Assistance Plan was introduced to nine leading Chinese-medium schools in which pupils were offered with both Chinese and English at the first language level and a series of programmes to help them develop a strong understanding of Chinese values and culture (Gopinathan, 1995). In addition, a small number of well-established schools, at both primary and secondary levels, were selected and funded to develop their distinct enrichment programmes, including Niche Programme, Languages Elective Programmes, Art Elective Programm, Music Elective

³³ Taking the Secondary One enrolment in 2000 for example, there were 50.8% pupils in express course, 22.2% in normal (academic) course, 17.5% in normal (technical) course and 9.4% in special course (SMOE, 2014).

Programme and Gifted Education Programme, in order to cater for the diverse needs of top and specialist pupils (Tan, 2007).

Another two significant decentralisation initiatives targeting the most promising and able pupils were the establishment of independent and autonomous schools. As the then First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated in 1985, the centralised control had largely restricted prestigious schools from developing their individuality and special characters; more autonomy to principals and teachers would stimulate education innovation and enhance the quality of education (Tan, 2006). He thus argued for freeing those top schools by giving principals the power to manage staff, design curriculum and choose textbooks. Goh's statement was echoed by the then Education Minister Tony Tan. At the end of 1986, Tan, accompanied by 12 school principals, went on a field trip to study the management of 25 'acknowledged successful schools' in the US and the UK. A year later, the *Towards Excellence in Education* report introduced independent schools to ease the overly rigid education system.

Between 1988 and 1993, eight schools deemed to be academically excellent and possess "capable principals, experienced teachers, strong alumni network and responsible governing boards" were selected to be given independent status (Tan, 2007, p. 307). These independent schools have since enjoyed greater autonomy in hiring and dismissing teachers, managing finances, developing curriculum and enrolling pupils, but have been still required to conform to some education policies, such as bilingualism and national education. While continuing to receive a great deal of financial aid from the SMOE, they have been allowed to charge high tuition fees. Therefore, Tan (1998) argues that "independent schools are by no means financially independent of the government" (p. 52).

However, independent schools were widely criticised due to their elitist nature and expensive fees (Tan, 2006). Meanwhile, the 1991 Election saw the PAP's victory again but with a reduced number of parliamentary seats. It was believed by the Party leaders that the increasing cost of public services resulted in the loss of votes (Tan, 1993). The then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong thus announced in 1992 that the number of independent schools would be maintained at eight for the

time being. Instead, 18 academically outstanding government and aided schools were selectively converted to ‘autonomous schools’ between 1994 and 1997. These autonomous schools could enjoy greater autonomy in terms of curriculum design and pupil admission, and charge a certain amount of tuition fees – higher than ordinary schools but lower than independent schools (Tan, 1998). Independent and autonomous schools have been expected to serve as ‘role models’ of high quality of schooling and to diversify the highly centralised education system, although the number of them was limited (Tan, 2006).

In parallel with these decentralised initiatives, the Government also tightened its control over schools through creating and implementing a series of regulative and accountability frameworks and mechanisms. For example, in 1979, national guidelines and standardised formats were provided by the SMOE for principals to make the School Rolling Plan, which was aimed to facilitate the conduct of central monitoring and reviewing (Ng, 2008). In 1981, the SMOE published the principal handbook, to which they were required to reference when making daily operational policies and undertaking administrative procedures (Wee & Chong, 1990). In the same year, the Curriculum Development Institute was set up within the SMOE in order to design and produce standard curriculum and teaching materials used across the country (Ng, 2008).

The annual ranking system was introduced in 1992. The purpose as claimed by the Government was to provide sufficient information for parents and pupils, encourage diverse choices and enhance inner-school competition through which the overall standard of education would be raised (Goh, 1992). All schools were ranked according to their pupils’ academic performance. League tables were published in local newspapers, which drew massive public attention and correspondingly caused huge pressure on schools. This ranking system received critiques from both within and outside the Government; the main concern was that it is problematic to judge a school’s excellence solely on the basis of examination results (Tan, 2006). Moreover, as Ng (2008) notes, negative opinions were also derived from the anxiety that the increased stress on individual schools might bring about over-conformity. In this scenario, the ranking system was scrutinised in 1997.

However, it was retained after several feverous parliamentary debates.

Further decentralisation and diversification: 1997-present

In the mid-1990s, the SMOE continued to recognise over-centralisation and bureaucracy as the major obstacles to the effectiveness of education system, which, as Tan and Ng (2007) describe, resulted in “schools waiting for edicts to be issued from the headquarters” (p. 158). Schools were encouraged to be more creative, flexible and responsive to various local needs and pupils’ diverse talents (Teo, 2000), while headquarters were supposed to provide general guidance and ensure overall quality (Ng, 2008).

In parallel, the accelerating pace of globalisation and a sharp economic recession in Asia highlighted the inadequacy of the Singapore education system which was “dominated by teachers and syllabuses” (Gopinathan, 2007, p. 60). A significant response was the 1997 ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ initiative, which emphasised adopting more flexible pedagogical strategies, developing pupils’ critical and creative thinking abilities and encouraging them to actively learn more than the formal curriculum.

This initiative was accompanied and balanced by the Desired Outcomes of Education published in the same year, which defined the common values, attitudes and capacities that ideal Singaporean pupils should attain at each key stage of their education (SMOE, 1997). As Tan (2014) points out, it has functioned as concrete guidelines not only for policies and school programmes, but also for the evaluation of these policies and school programmes.

Still in 1997, the school cluster system was introduced in attempt to decentralise educational administration, promote greater collaboration among schools and ensure effective resource allocation (Teo, 1997). All government and aided primary schools, secondary schools and junior colleges were placed into 28 clusters and later in 2000 into four zones; independent schools were permitted to choose whether they would like to join or not (Tan, 2006). Each cluster consisted of around 13 different types and levels of schools, facilitated by a superintendent who

was given the authority and resources to deal with local needs and problems (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002).

The School Excellence Model introduced in 2000 required all schools to carry out self-appraisal (SMOE, 2000), which devoted more emphasis to value-addedness, leadership, staff management and strategic planning in addition to academic results (Tan & Ng, 2007). An external validation led by the School Appraisal Branch within the SMOE was undertaken every five years in order to maintain quality assurance. Furthermore, this model was associated with various official rewards to individual schools, such as Achievement Awards, Outstanding Development Awards and Development Awards, which set the national standards for schools and impacted on their daily practice (Ng & Chan, 2008). The annual ranking system was modified by the SMOE in 2004. Instead of making league tables, schools with similar academic performances were banded together and their exact ranking positions was kept confidential (Ng, 2008).

A broader and more flexible curriculum for junior colleges and upper secondary schools was endorsed by the SMOE in 2002. Subsequently, 11 prominent secondary schools and junior colleges were permitted to provide 'Integrated Programmes' from 2004 which would let up to 10% top-scoring pupils skip the national General Certificate of Education 'Ordinary' (GCE 'O') level examination and consequently a small group of the most talented pupils would be able to enjoy more flexible and innovative curriculum and co-curriculum activities (Gopinathan & Deng, 2006). Particularly, an independent school, the Anglo-Chinese School, was approved to offer an alternative qualification – the International Baccalaureate diploma – from 2005 after several tries (Tan, 2007). It was the first public-funded school allowed to do so.

Curriculum reform was further initiated after the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech on the 2004 National Day Rally in which he put forward that "we have got to teach less to our students so that they will learn more". In response, the SMOE launched the 'Teach Less, Learn More' initiative a year later, seeking to further lessen the dependence on rote learning, repetitive tests and inflexible instruction, and encourage innovative, differentiated and effective teaching, and

active and independent learning (Ng, 2008). In this spirit, 10-20% of curriculum time was freed up as ‘white space’ to give teachers the autonomy to “customise lessons, using a variety of teaching and assessment methods to better meet the needs of their students” (SMOE, 2005). As Leong, Sim and Chua (2011) argue, this policy initiative demonstrated the Government’s attempts to shift away from “a grades-centric and ‘one-size-fits-all’ paradigm of education” to a “top-down support for bottom-up or school-based curriculum initiatives” (p. 52). Nevertheless, the high-stake national examination system was not accordingly changed.

From 2004 to 2008, four specialised independent schools were established, including Singapore Sports School in 2004, NUS High School of Math and Science in 2005, and in 2008, the School of the Arts and the School of Science and Technology. They have been operated with greater autonomy, especially in putting more weight on their specialised subjects, whilst retaining membership of the existing school clusters and achieving aims set in the Desired Outcomes of Education.

Northlight School and Assumption Pathway School, targeting pupils from the bottom layer of academic performance, were set up in 2007 and 2009 respectively. Crest Secondary School began to admit for pupils undertaking the normal (technical) course in 2013. These three specialised schools have adopted a whole-school approach to provide tailored curriculum and learning environment to fit their pupils’ academic abilities and possible career paths.

Three private-funded secondary schools were opened in 2005 to further the diversity of the education system. Notwithstanding the private nature, they have to strictly follow the SMOE’s guidelines on bilingualism, national education, daily flag-raising and national anthem rituals and enrol at least 50% of local pupils (Gopinathan, 2007).

Since independence, the Singapore education system experienced a long period of high centralisation and standardisation; the SMOE directly and tightly controlled and supervised almost all aspects of education and schooling. Since the early 1980s, an array of decentralisation and diversification initiatives, such as the

establishment of independent and autonomous schools, and the introduction of the School Excellent Model and school cluster system, have been introduced to cater for specific needs of pupils and particularly to ensure the brightest receive the best and customised educational service. As a result, more autonomy has been granted to those high-performing schools with the most able pupils. On this basis, the next section explores how school autonomy is developed in the current education system.

6.4. Current model of school autonomy

According to the Primary School Leaving Examination results, pupils (without special needs) in Singapore are admitted to a four-year express (60%), five-year normal academic (25%), or four-year normal technical (15%) course in secondary schools (Stewart, 2011). The normal academic course prepares pupils for the GCE 'N' (Normal)-level examination in the year of Secondary Four, while pupils from the normal technical course take the same examination in the year of Secondary Five. In their final year, pupils of the normal academic course may join those in the express course sitting for the GCE O-level examination. Only a small proportion of top pupils undertaking Integrated Programme can skip those examinations. Pupils passing the entry mark can continue their postsecondary education at junior colleges, polytechnics, or Institution of Technical Education, and study for the GCE 'A' (Advanced)-level examination to go to universities.

The vast majority of secondary schools in Singapore are public-funded, which can be categorised into 'government' and 'aided'. A small number of them have been designated as 'autonomous'. In addition, there are independent schools, specialised independent schools and specialised schools financially supported by the Government. Table 6.1 shows the number and percentage of different types of public-funded secondary schools and their enrolled pupils in 2013.

Table 6.1. Number and percentage of different types of public-funded secondary schools and their enrolled pupils in 2013

Type of school	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of students	Percentage of students
Government / Government (autonomous)	108/15	72.8%	139,542	70.8%
Aided / Aided (autonomous)	18/13	18.3%	40,456	20.5%
Independent	8	4.7%	12,759	6.5%
Specialised independent	4	2.4%	2,693	1.4%
Specialised	3	1.8%	1,715	0.8%
Total	169	100%	197,165	100%

(SMOE, 2014)

This section examines the nature and degree of autonomy in Singapore public-funded secondary schools, focusing on non-autonomous government schools – the main type of secondary schools, as well as autonomous and independent schools – the types of schools with greater autonomy. According to the framework developed in the literature review chapter, I give a grade to each sub-area of school management with regard to non-autonomous government schools, drawing on the analysis of policy documents, literature and interview data. The model of school autonomy in Singapore is developed to be compared with those of Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Organisation and governance

In Singapore, all public-funded schools are subject to the policy and framework of the SMOE. There are four zonal branches including 28 clusters that operate as an intermediate level of governance between the SMOE and schools. This cluster system was initially designed in the geographic sense. However, as Scholar J argued, it “becomes very strange, because they [SMOE] want diversity within a cluster... they want to try and make sure that every cluster has primary schools, secondary schools, prestigious, non-prestigious... so now the ‘geography’ has gone... you have schools not next to each other being grouped together” (*sic*). In other words, which cluster a school belongs to is mandated by the SMOE.

As stated by the SMOE (2015a), cluster superintendents are empowered to

“develop, guide and supervise the school leadership teams to ensure that schools are effectively run”. They are given an annual budget to promote collaboration amongst schools, identify teachers’ career development needs and those with potential, and offer financial support for the worthwhile school projects. As Scholar J and Policy-maker W mentioned, they also supervise and evaluate the performance of school leaders. In this way, part of the operational power as to finance, personnel and appraisal has been devolved from the central level to the cluster level.

According to Policy-maker W and Principal L, the SMOE provides general guidelines for school organisational structure. Within a school, there are principal, vice-principals and heads of departments. Different forms of school management bodies are required to be set up in according types of schools: school advisory committees in government schools, school management committees in aided schools and a board of governors in independent schools. Scholar G explained that principals can suggest the person they believe would contribute to the development of schools to become members of the management body; but the candidate list has to be approved by the SMOE. In respect to day-to-day school operation, as Scholar J observed, “across all the schools, the principal pretty much has very free hands to run the school... nearly in every school in Singapore the board lets the principal be the professional educator”.

Principal L recalled that “all schools started as government schools”; autonomous and independent schools have been selected by the SMOE based on their academic merit. In theory, schools can reject to be converted. However, as Scholar M and Scholar S argued, the autonomous and independent statuses are usually linked with good reputation, more resources and greater autonomy, which generate great attractiveness to schools. They further explained that the prerequisite of obtaining the special status is meeting the pre-set criteria and the final say is held by the SMOE. The rationale, as Principal L understood, is “since you are proving yourself to be up to a certain standard, I will give you more autonomy in your running”. Moreover, high-flying schools are selectively permitted to offer various enrichment programmes catering for the talented and most able pupils. Specialised independent schools and specialised schools have been set up by the SMOE to

provide customised courses.

Table 6.2 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

Table 6.2. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Organisation structure and functions	Mainly determined by the SMOE (e.g. the introduction of cluster system)	1
Governance mechanism	The SMOE executes central control; the cluster system works as an intermediate administrative level; principals are responsible for daily operation	2
Types of schools	Schools can apply for special status if they meet the SMOE criteria and reject to be converted by the SMOE; the SMOE has the final say	2

Membership of a cluster is not compulsory for independent schools. Scholar J explained that whether or not independent schools join the cluster “depends on how willing a principal is to have the school involved”. As Principal L observed, with regard to organisation structure and school management, “independent schools [have] a bit more flexibility” comparing to government schools. Nevertheless, Scholar J emphasised that this does not mean that the SMOE gives up its control over independent schools. He provided an example of the SMOE’s ‘powerfulness’: “in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education intervened in an independent school when its governing board members were having a big fight with each other, like a power struggle... the Ministry of Education stepped in and dissolved the board” (*sic.*).

Finance

All government schools are fully funded by the Government. Autonomous schools are able to charge a small amount of fees and apply for extra funding from the SMOE for their enrichment programmes. On the top of that, all public-funded

schools are members of the Education Fund³⁴, which enables them to receive donations and issue tax deductible receipts, conforming to the SMOE’s internal guidelines (SMOE, 2015b). Various branches of the Finance and Development Division within the SMOE are responsible for managing school funds; formulating financial and procure policies, budget allocation framework and reporting standards; and setting contract requirements and daily budget operations (SMOE, 2015c). As Principal L and Policy-maker W stated, the SMOE provides all public-funded schools with the land, infrastructure and facilities, while schools are responsible for daily maintenance.

Detailed guidelines with regard to school expenditure are made by the SMOE. As Principal L experienced, “how we use our money, it’s very tightly controlled... for example, there is a quota that you can use for furniture, you may decide to buy how many chairs or desks, but you cannot spend it on school activities”.

Furthermore, Policy-maker W pointed out that government schools only receive money “virtually”, as bills are paid directly by the SMOE. Schools’ annual financial reports are required to be submitted for the SMOE audit and uploaded to the websites of schools and the SMOE for public information. Table 6.3 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

Table 6.3. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Source(s) of finance	Fully funded by the Government; receiving donations subject to the SMOE’s guidelines	1
Expenditure	Strictly following the SMOE’s guidelines; bills are paid directly by the SMOE	1
Land, buildings and facilities	Provided by the Government and maintained by schools	1
Financial report and its availability	Audited by the SMOE and uploaded to the websites of schools and the SMOE	2

Aided schools can receive the identical per head amount from the Government,

³⁴ The Education Fund is an exempt charity which receives donations from public and funds projects to advance education in Singapore. Members of the Board are appointed by their designations within the SMOE.

which can be up to 90% of their total revenue. Independent schools are given an annual per capita grant equivalent to the recurrent cost in government and aided schools. Independent schools are given an annual per capita grant equivalent to the recurrent cost in government and aided schools. The Government also subsidises up to 80% and 90% of the building fund for independent schools and aided schools respectively (Chan & Tan, 2008). According to Policy-maker W, the remaining is usually raised by schools through “appealing to parents, old boys, old girls, alumni members and the community”. Scholarships, both from the SMOE and independent schools, are available to pupils who have done well. In terms of expenditure, independent schools have greater financial autonomy than their government counterparts, mainly because they can be in charge of their own bills.

Curriculum, teaching and examinations

In Singapore, the Curriculum Planning and Development Division within the SMOE is responsible for designing syllabuses, assessment modes and special curriculum programmes, monitoring their implementation, and promoting pedagogical approaches that support learning outcomes and achieve national education goals. It also provides school personnel training in order to facilitate the understanding and implementation of the national syllabuses and programmes (SMOE, 2015d). The syllabus for each subject prescribes the curriculum aim, content, time allocation and desirable outcomes, and provides a guideline for teaching, learning and assessment.

The vast majority of secondary schools adopt the national curriculum, which is subject-centric and composed of three circles. The inner circle seeks to equip pupils with sound values and inculcate responsible citizenry, which includes Co-Curricular Activities, Character and Citizenship Education, National Education, Physical Education and Values in Action. The middle circle, Project Work, centres on pupils’ thinking, process and communication abilities. The outermost circle consists of a set of compulsory and optional content-based subjects which can be divided into Languages, Humanities and the Arts, and Mathematics and Sciences. As prescribed

by the SMOE, pupils from different course streams are offered different subjects or different levels of complexity in subject coverage (Tan, 2014). National Education, English and Mother Tongue Language, Science and Mathematics are compulsory for all course streams (SMOE, 2015e, 2015f).

The SMOE reviews private-published textbooks and displays those approved on the 'Approved Textbooks List' website. As Policy-maker W explained, the SMOE provides guidelines for publishers in terms of textbooks; and "when they ready to publish books, they do send to us, and then we look through, and if we think that they follow our guidelines, we will allow them to put something like '[S]MOE approved textbooks'". According to Principal L, the SMOE also invites experts to write textbooks for subjects such as History and Civics and Moral Education. Both SMOE produced and approved textbooks, in the view of Principal L and Policy-maker W, are "prescribed" and "standard", as they are all based on the national syllabuses and reflect the national examinations.

As the SMOE (2015g) stated, schools are "encouraged" to select the textbooks from the 'Approved Textbooks List' according to their pupils' specific needs. According to Policy-maker W, in reality, "schools prefer to choose approved books, because of 'security' and 'safety' ... there are some schools choose textbooks out of that list because their students need more challenging textbooks" (*sic*). Scholar S added that "if they [schools] wish to deviate, they will seek [S]MOE approval first".

The SMOE schedules school terms and holidays. With regard to curriculum time, it stipulates 40 periods of 35-40 minutes per week for secondary schools, which equals six hours a day including recess time (Straughan, 2011). Both Principal L and Policy-maker W emphasised that the SMOE stipulates the minimum curriculum time for each subject, which is specified in the syllabuses. Taking Secondary Three normal academic courses for example, there are 20 periods per week for core examination subjects, six periods for compulsory non-examination subjects and three to eight periods for optional subjects. More specifically, for instance, eight periods are allocated to English per week, six periods to Maths and two periods to Civics and Moral Education (International

Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive, 2010). According to Principal L, these are “recommended hours... it is up to the school’s discretion on how many periods they want to devote to [different subjects]... probably can go up to more, but not less” (*sic*). In this case, although the SMOE encourages schools to determine their own operational hours, the room left is limited.

Although SBCD has been promoted in Singapore since the 1980s, from Gopinathan and Deng’s (2006) point of view, this does not mean that schools have been changed to “places responsible for creating their own curriculum materials” (p.106). Rather, according to Deng et al. (2013), SBCD in Singapore has referred to the adaption, modification and translation of the national curriculum in specific school contexts. This is understandable given that, as Lam, Alviar-Martin, Adler & Sim (2013) note, getting good exam results remains the key priority in Singapore. These arguments are echoed by the interview data collected in this study. For example, Scholar S argued that SBCD “is not independent of national curriculum”, but rather “essentially an effort to tweak the curriculum to fit the particular needs of the school’s cohort of students”. In respect to the time allocated to SBCD, Principal L explained that, “national curriculum should be fulfilled first... then it is up to the schools to design and implement their school-based curriculum... the reality is whether you still have time to do that, after fulfilling the national curriculum”.

Perhaps what schools can decide, as mentioned by many interviewees, is how to deliver curriculum and what teaching resources can be used. Nonetheless, the national curriculum is singly assessed by the Singapore Examination and Assessment Board within the SMOE, which has become the *de facto* guideline on day-to-day teaching and learning. Academics argue that traditional classroom pedagogies and especially factual classroom talk have remained overwhelmingly in Singapore schools (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen & Silver, 2012; Hogan et al., 2013). Similarly, Scholar S points out that although the SMOE “encourages a diversified pedagogy... the examinations are high-stakes selection examinations, so much cramming takes place”. This is also echoed by Gopinathan and Mardiana (2013); according to them, the use of the results of national examinations “as a sorting

mechanism continues to result in a strong focus on grades and content acquisition rather than learning and holistic development” (p. 25).

Table 6.4 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘curriculum, teaching and examinations’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

Table 6.4. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘curriculum, teaching and examinations’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Textbooks	A list of the SMOE produced and approved textbooks, written according to the prescribed syllabuses; most schools choose from that list; those do not, need the permission from the SMOE	2
Subjects	Prescribed compulsory and optional subjects stipulated for different course streams; top pupils may go beyond the national curriculum	1
Content of subjects and curriculum delivery	The content primarily follows prescribed syllabuses; teaching methods are flexible in theory, but influenced by national examinations in practice	2
School-based curriculum development	Complementary to the national curriculum and after finishing the national curriculum	2
Curriculum time allocation	The number of periods is prescribed by the SMOE; the arrangement depends on schools	1
School calendar	Terms – scheduled by the SMOE; days – little room is left for schools to make decisions	2
Entrance exams	Prescribed syllabuses; national examinations	0

In theory, autonomous and independent schools are given greater autonomy in terms of curriculum design; but they have to conform to two specific national education policies, namely, bilingualism and the teaching of civics/moral education. Moreover, both literature (e.g. Tan, 1998; Chan & Tan, 2008) and interview data demonstrate that only a few of them actually stray from the national curriculum. As Scholar B and Principal L elaborated, staying in the mainstream can ensure that pupils will not be disadvantaged in the national examination (only one independent

school can provide alternative certificate). Policy-maker W emphasised that “there is also an understanding that schools should mollify the curriculum to suit their own local needs... customise it... students from the top 10% are given special programmes”. In other words, the ‘customisation’ of the curriculum is not to create a new curriculum; rather, opportunities and support are provided for the brightest to go beyond the national curriculum. Scholar J argued that “it’s [SMOE] still adopting a very cautious attitude towards allowing schools to really diverse, for example, an independent school’s application to switch to IB [International Baccalaureat] was rejected by the [S]MOE... Because I think the Ministry of Education still feels... that schools are very important institutions for socialising young people, so they don’t want to just let everything be totally non-government run” (*sic*). Similarly, as Scholar D maintained, “Singapore are still stuck in the common curriculum... principals have a margin of control over the non-mainstream curriculum but none over the mainstream curriculum”.

Teachers

In Singapore, the majority of teachers are ‘appointed teachers’; as Scholar G explained, “they are centrally selected, employed, trained, assigned and dismissed by the SMOE”. More specifically, to qualify for the interview to become teacher trainees, applicants are expected to be from the top 30% of their cohort and have relevant higher education degrees and/or certificates. Qualified applicants are interviewed by the SMOE and required to pass the Entrance Proficiency Test (SMOE, 2015h). All the selected candidates sign contracts with the SMOE and then become civil servants. Those without teaching qualification have to be trained at the National Institute of Education which was formed in 1991 and has since become the sole provider of teacher education and training programmes in Singapore, working “in close unison” with the SMOE (Dimmock & Tan, 2012, p. 328).

According to Policy-maker W, as soon as the selected candidates are admitted to the teacher training programmes, they are “employed on the government salary

scales” and the SMOE “pays for all the tuition fees”. As Scholar M explained, once teacher trainees finish their programmes and meet the criteria to become teachers, the SMOE would appoint them to different schools based on central needs and teachers’ preferences. In other words, as Scholar J stated, “principals can only hire teachers from the pool of teachers that they have”. Although teachers can request a different posting after two years, the request needs to be approved by the SMOE.

Another type of teacher is the ‘contract teacher’ – they are not necessarily trained, mainly employed short-term to fill temporary gaps and sign/cease the contract with individual schools. As Policy-maker W stressed, in reality, the SMOE “would not allow schools to have too many such vacancies”; in other words, the number of contract teachers is very limited.

With regard to continuing professional development, according to Principal L and Policy-maker W, the SMOE: (1) organises a set of training programmes and associates them with promotion; and (2) stipulates 100 minimum hours per year and provides a range of scholarships for teachers, while the time, form and content of training courses can be decided by teachers and schools. The ‘Education Service Professional Development and Career Plan’ was designed in 2006 by the SMOE. It comprises three career paths – teaching, leadership and specialist, an evaluation system – the Enhanced Performance Management System and recognition through monetary rewards. Through the process of the plan, teachers are encouraged to select a career path, develop their goals for teaching based on self-evaluation, and discuss goals and performance benchmarks with their reporting officers (usually the heads of the departments or vice-principals) to ensure that they are aligned with the goals set by schools and the SMOE (SMOE, 2005; Lee & Tan, 2010).

Reporting offices are supposed to supervise teachers throughout the year and mark their performance at the end of the year. As Policy-maker W experienced, in fact, “anybody, any senior person, who works with a junior teacher, is in the position to supervise the teacher... teachers always feel that they are being observed... they are being watched all the time”. This sophisticated and ubiquitous monitoring mechanism can produce detailed career profiles of every teacher and guarantee the ‘right’ selection and promotion. According to Principal L, “teacher

promotion is civil service promotion, so it's by the [S]MOE, principle do recommend, but not on the running”.

With regard to teachers' salary, Scholar G explained that it is “from the government funding and it's regulated by the Ministry of Education according to how many years they have been working and also teachers' positions in the ‘career paths of teachers’”. In other words, as Principal L stated, it “sticks to the standard salary scales”. On the top of that, principals can decide teachers' annual performance bonuses according to their performance grades, which can amount to one to three months' salary for average to outstanding performers (Sclafani & Lim, 2008). Policy-maker W emphasised that both salary and annual performance bonus are “directly transferred to teachers' accounts by the [S]MOE”.

The then Minister of Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam (2006) claimed that school leadership has been the key to school governance and management in Singapore. As Scholar G enunciated, the rationale is to “select and train principals carefully and then let them do their jobs”. For the majority of public-funded schools, according to Scholar J, school leaders are from “the same group”, “only three local private schools that really appoint their own people”, and others are carefully selected, employed and trained by the SMOE. As Policy-maker W elaborated, “we [SMOE] choose the right principals [to guarantee the quality of education]... we actually look at principal candidates very carefully before we sort of put them to head a school... and we prepare them, we actually put them to courses” provided by the SMOE. By referencing to teachers' profiles, those who are identified to have leadership potential would be strongly encouraged to take the leadership track of the career paths. Although teachers' willingness would be taken into account, in Dimmock and Tan's view (2012), the leadership track “is a system, rather than individual-initiated process of selection” (p. 327).

According to Scholar D, school leaders are usually rotated between schools and re-assigned by the SMOE every five to seven years. Furthermore, they may be rotated to the SMOE headquarters serving as cluster superintendents or assistant/deputy directors in specific branches, or to the National Institute of Education to share the insights from the frontline with teacher trainees (SMOE, 2011). As

Dimmock and Tan (2012) argue, “rotation is thus seen as a means of securing a tightly coupled leadership both vertically and laterally, as well as professionally and inter-institutionally” (p.329). In brief, it seems that who can become teachers, who should be promoted to be school leaders, where they should go and how long they can work there, are under the tight control of the Government. Table 6.5 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teachers’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

Table 6.5. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teachers’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Qualification and training	The requirements are stipulated by the SMOE; the majority of teachers are centrally selected, employed, trained and appointed by the SMOE	0.5
Appointment and dismissal	Determined by the SMOE; schools and teachers’ preferences are taken into consideration	0.5
Continuing professional development	100 hours minimum per year and forms and content are decided by teachers and schools; the SMOE provides some courses as the requirements for promotion	1.5
Appraisal	Centrally designed framework; conducted by schools	2
Promotion	Teachers choose the career paths; promotion is proposed by schools; the SMOE has the final say	1
Pay (salary and bonuses)	Stipulated salary scales; schools can determine bonuses according to teachers’ performance grades	2
Legal status	The majority of teachers are civil servants	0.5

The qualification requirements for ‘appointed’ and ‘contact’ teachers are also applied to those working in independent schools. Comparatively, independent schools have more freedom in determining the number of teachers that they would like to hire and setting salary scales at their own budgets. As Scholar J stated, the principle is “you want more teachers; you use your own money”. With regard to teachers’ salary, as Policy-maker W explained, “in the independent schools, they don’t have to follow this system [the government salary scales]... for convenience, the independent schools by and large follow us [SMOE]... but they might give the teachers a little bit more or less... it’s easier for them” (*sic*). Notwithstanding, there

are some regulative restrictions for ‘appointed teachers’ working in independent schools. For example, according to Scholar J and Scholar S, after teaching for six years, they have to make a choice – either return to government schools, or give up their government employment and sign a contract with an independent school.

Scholar D also argued that although in theory “independent schools have the most autonomy to nominate somebody”, in almost all the cases, it is the SMOE that has the final say; however “the principals of the top independent schools... are appointed with heavy government influence and approval”.

Accountability

The current school accountability framework comprises the School Excellence Model and Recognition System, under the management and supervision of the School Appraisal Branch within the SMOE. Since 2000, all public-funded schools are required to conduct annual self-evaluation which is validated by an external review team dispatched by the SMOE once every five years (Ng, 2003). The framework is composed of two categories: (1) ‘Enables’ – how results are achieved; and (2) ‘Results’ – what the schools has achieved. There are nine prescriptive quality criteria against which schools are assessed internally and externally, namely, leadership, strategic planning, resources, staff management student-focused processes, administrative and operational results, staff results, partnership and society results, and key performance results (Ng & Chan, 2008).

Principal L described his experience of the evaluation and review procedure: “the criteria are given by headquarters... [for each of the criteria] you consider how you describe your work... and you score yourself... after that, the external team comes and checks whether you target it or not, they provide suggestions for improvement” (*sic*). As the SMOE (2000) emphasises, schools have to provide explicit evidence to justify self-scoring. The school self-evaluation and external review reports are confidential to the SMOE (Ng, 2010). The School Appraisal Branch is to “provide information for continuous school improvement and enable schools to be well organised and managed to provide quality education” (SMOE,

2015a).

According to the SMOE (2000), the School Excellence Model is meant to help schools appraise their own performance in various aspects of school processes and pupils' outcomes. Mok (2002) argues that this model provides "a common language and frame of reference within the school sector" which enables schools to benchmark them against other similar schools (p. 357). Similarly, Ng (2008) opines that it attempts to empower schools to determine development plans, identify and measure strengths and weaknesses, recognise progress and achievements. In addition, as the SMOE (2000) stated, the model is a "systematic framework for helping schools become excellence organisations as they drive towards the achievement of the Desired Outcomes of Education". In other words, although individual schools are allowed to determine their own targets and approaches via the School Excellence Model, they are expected to conform to the overall goals and standards defined by the SMOE.

The Recognition System was introduced in 2014 in order to bring about a more holistic awarding system. Additionally, the number of other school awards has been reduced and the secondary school banding system based on academic results was removed (SMOE, 2012). Instead, emphasis is placed on recognising best practices of schools in five key aspects: teaching and learning, student all-round development, staff development and well-being, character and citizenship education, and partnership.

Notwithstanding the efforts to promote the school-based appraisal model and develop the holistic recognition system, the accountability framework facilitates the maintenance of the Government's central control. As Ng (2008) argues, even a top school that "had the 'strength' to break away from the mainstream system" may find itself "'pulled' back into the system", as the winners of school awards are published, which provides a kind of tangible evidence of schools' merit (p. 121). Further, since all teachers and school leaders are employed as civil servants, according to Scholar D, S and Principal L, they are not report to school boards or management committees, but directly to the Government through the SMOE. Ng (2010) thus argues that, in a political and administrative sense, "the government is

the most important stakeholder of the school” (p. 283).

The competition for attracting the most able pupils exists among all types of schools. According to Scholar D, “schools are encouraged to be distinctive, to create niches for themselves and to compete to attract good students”. As Scholar S mentioned, achievements and profiles are highlighted in schools’ websites; principals have to get engaged in marketing activities, such as branding and publicising to “compete for good students”. Principal L pointed out that “the ranking model has changed over time and now is banded”; however, “parents want league tables, so newspapers all try to do their own league tables”. Table 6.6 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘accountability’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

Table 6.6. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘accountability’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Goals and standards	Set by individual schools via the School Excellence Model in line with the Desired Outcomes of Education stipulated by the SMOE	2
Evaluation	Annual self-evaluation and external review by the SMOE once every five years	1
Annual report	Submitted to the SMOE	1
Availability of information	Confidential to the SMOE	0

Autonomous and independent schools are also subject to this accountability framework, which is not essentially different from non-autonomous government schools. The central accountability framework is employed as a tool to concretise the Government’s requirements and expectation.

Pupil admission and external relations

Admission to secondary schools is currently through a central allocation system, based on the Primary School Leaving Examination results. According to Principal C, Scholar D and Policy-maker W, there is little leeway for the majority of government and aided schools. Only those with specialisations have some

discretion over admission. More specifically, as Gopinathan and Mardiana (2013) explain, principals in schools running Niche Programmes have up to 5% control of admission to talented pupils through the Direct School Admission scheme³⁵ and there will be 85 such secondary schools, accounting for 50%, in 2016 (SMOE, 2015i).

According to Scholar S, “schools are encouraged to be part of their communities and to establish links with appropriate institutions... as with most things, broad guidelines exist, schools seldom seek to deviate from these guidelines and established practices”. Moreover, the SMOE approval is needed for setting up partnerships with other schools and businesses. In fact, principals are well self-censored as to what they should not do. As Policy-maker W illustrated, “they [principals] know that we [the SMOE] do not encourage very sensitive effects towards religious and racial elements”. This also demonstrates the rationale that, as argued by Scholar G, autonomy can be given to the ‘right’ person to do the ‘right’ job.

Parents are welcome to make contribution to school activities and events, but they rarely participate in school management or decision-making process. As Scholar S stressed, “the need for school-level autonomy however... is not for stakeholders who may wish to invest in schools or parent groups wanting to start schools”. As civil servants, principals and teachers are supposed to cautiously deal with the relations with the media, or generally, interview requests; who they can talk to and what kind of topics they can talk about are required to be scrutinised and approved by the SMOE. My data collection experience for this study is a good example, which has been elaborated in the methodology chapter. Table 6.7 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools.

³⁵ Pupils can choose to participate in Direct School Admission scheme which allows them to take school-based tests and be admitted by their preferred schools before the Primary School Leaving Examination and central allocation.

Table 6.7. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Singapore non-autonomous government secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Pupil admission	Primarily through the centralised school allocation system according to the Primary School Leaving Examination results	2
Relationship with other schools and business	Encouraged but need to be approved	4
Level of parents’ involvement	Parents are welcomed to support school activities and events	2
Relationship with mass media (or interview request in general)	Strictly scrutinised and approved by the SMOE	1

With regard to pupil admission, autonomous schools and independent schools enjoy a relatively greater freedom: those with Niche Programmes are allowed to determine their own admission figures and exercise discretion on the whole annual enrolment; those without Niche Programmes may reserve up to 20% direct enrolment; and those providing the Integration Programme can entirely determine their intake (Gopinathan & Mardiana, 2013). There are no essential differences between government schools, autonomous schools and independent schools in respect to external relations with other schools, businesses, parents and media.

This section provides a detailed description of school autonomy in the current Singapore education system and accordingly develops a model. Five features in this respect are identified drawing on the understanding of the historical and current development of school autonomy in Singapore, which are discussed in the following section.

6.5. Features of school autonomy

As Ng (2008) notes, the Singapore education system “moved through the short history of nationhood of just over four decades from one which was rudimentary” to one whose excellent international surveys results “have showcased its ‘maturity’” (p. 113). What has been intertwined with the provisional expansion and quality

improvement are the reforms of decentralisation and the maintenance of central control. The education system was highly centralised in the 1960s and 1970s. The reforms enhancing decentralisation and diversity began in the early 1980s, which have granted more autonomy to schools throughout the following three decades. Tan and Ng (2007) thus argue that the education system has transformed from “a direct interventionist control model” to “a more remote supervisory steering model” (p. 158). Nevertheless, the Government has never ceased its control in the education sector. Five features of school autonomy in Singapore are identified and elaborated below.

Firstly, almost all decentralisation reforms in Singapore have been centrally initiated, directed, mandated and funded, rather than having a “grassroots base” (Karlsen, 2000, p. 530). The ‘top-down’ approach adopted in education reforms suggests considerable influence from the centre. In other words, issues as to how much autonomy, in which school management areas, to which level of authorities (i.e. cluster or school) and for what types of schools (e.g. autonomous schools, independent schools, non-autonomous government schools, or schools with enrichment programmes), are primarily decided by the SMOE. This is also a reflection of the paternalistic, hierarchical and authoritarian managerial style in the political system adopted by the PAP Government (Dimmock & Tan, 2012). Central control and intervention have rarely encountered local resistance in practice (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). In Tan and Ng’s (2007) opinion, this is not surprising “in a country which promotes ‘responsible, rule-following citizenship’ with an accent on obligations” (p. 161).

Secondly, education decentralisation in Singapore has been balanced by central control through accountability system and quality assurance measures. All schools are required to conform to some key national policies, such as national education and bilingualism. For example, notwithstanding the introduction of the School Excellent Model and Recognition System, the powerful but invisible control over schooling has always been the high-stake national examination which is still the sole choice for the vast majority of pupils. Schools that are not able to provide alternative certificates cannot take the risk of “being genuinely distinctive from one

another” (Tan, 2005, p. 69). Besides, Ng (2008) argues that the quality assurance is more like a “paradoxical journey”: although central supervision and external review have been increasingly shifted to local accountability and internal appraisal, the Government has still held its rein over education through centrally-designed and compulsorily-introduced accountability mechanisms, such as the Desired Outcomes of Education and the reporting officer system.

Thirdly, Singapore has established a sophisticated personnel management system in the education sector which is characterised by a hybrid of centralised control and decentralised measures. By recognising the importance of teachers and school leadership, the SMOE has carefully selected teacher trainees, centrally trained them in the National Institute of Education, recruited and managed qualified teachers as civil servants, tightly monitored and appraised them via the Education Service Professional Development and Career Plan, promote the ‘right’ person to the leadership path, and kept them working closely with the SMOE. Moreover, from Tan’s (2006) point of view, the purpose of granting greater autonomy to school leaders is to “better achieve government-dictated macro-policy objects and goals” (p. 68). Similarly, as Ng (2008) argues, school leaders are expected to understand centralised strategies and aims, and determine what tactics would be the best to achieve these aims for their pupils as well as the society.

Fourthly, autonomy in the Singapore education system has been specifically given to different levels of authorities and different types of schools in different areas of school management. For example, some operational power with regard to finance, personnel and evaluation has been decentralised to clusters and superintendents, rather than schools and principals. A small number of independent schools and autonomous schools, as the ‘products’ of decentralisation reforms, have been selectively given much more autonomy by the SMOE than other ordinary schools to enrol top and/or specialist pupils and enable them to go beyond the national curriculum. Furthermore, even within these two types of schools, autonomy has been granted to different areas of school management and in different degrees. For example, independent schools can use their budgets to hire contract teachers, while autonomous schools run by the Government can only find

their teachers from the ‘pool’ provided by the SMOE.

Lastly, autonomy in Singapore has only been granted to, either ‘high-flying’ schools that are good enough to manage themselves or top pupils who have the academic ability to pursue a deeper and broader curriculum. As mentioned earlier, the existing independent schools and autonomous schools are academically selected. Moreover, enrichment programmes, in particular, the Integration Programme and Niche Programme, have only been allowed to be operated in high-performing schools and provided to talented pupils. Therefore, school autonomy in Singapore, like the whole education and governance system, is highly meritocratic and pragmatically serves the purpose of securing economic competitiveness and social cohesion. In a word, once schools and their pupils are qualified, they can have more autonomy by receiving the approval from the SMOE.

6.6. Conclusion

The national education system in Singapore, rooted in a multi-ethnic and small-size society and characterised by instrumentalism and meritocracy, has served to build political legitimacy, foster economic growth, and strengthen social cohesion and allegiance of identities since its inception. Intensive central control was long used as a strategy to bring about standard and efficiency to the management of schools at the early national-building stage. Since the 1980s, education reforms, aiming to increase decentralisation and diversity, have been initiated and promoted by the Government. Superintendents have replaced the SMOE to take charge of some operational duties within their clusters. A small number of academically strong schools have been selected to become ‘independent’ or ‘autonomous’ and ‘awarded’ more autonomy in some specific management areas. Nevertheless, the vast majority of schools are still required to conform to national curriculum and central guidelines, fully or mainly funded by the Government, and mainly appraised by their performance in the national examinations. Therefore, it is not wholly accurate to claim that the current Singapore education system has overall enjoyed a high level of school autonomy.

Chapter 7. School autonomy in Shanghai secondary education

7.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters have investigated school autonomy in Hong Kong and Singapore. Shanghai is the third East Asian society studied to address the second research question. As a distinct region of China, over the last century and a half, Shanghai has undergone an intensive form of forced internationalisation (1840s-1940s), decades of socialist transformation (1950s-1980s) and re-globalisation from the early 1990s (Wasserstrom, 2007). These historical transitions have brought about significant changes in the education arena. This chapter examines the nature and degree of autonomy in Shanghai secondary schools. It begins by reviewing the economic, social-political and cultural context in order to understand the transformation of the education system (section 7.2). Then, the historical development of school autonomy is examined (section 7.3). Following these two reviews, a model of school autonomy in the current system is created, based on the analysis of policies and practices adopted and perceived by policymakers, scholars and school leaders within Shanghai (section 7.4). On this basis, five features of school autonomy in Shanghai are identified and discussed (section 7.5).

7.2. Context

Shanghai sits at the mouth of the Yangtze River in East China. It is one of the largest cities by population in China, as well as in the world (Chan, 2007). For centuries a major and prosperous local trading port, Shanghai started to draw external attention in the 19th century owing to its advantageous location and economic potential. It was one of the first five ports opened to international trade after the first Opium War (1839-1842). By the 1930s, the city was flourishing as a commercial and financial hub of the Asia Pacific (Wasserstrom, 2007). Since the

establishment of the PRC in 1949, Shanghai has been selected as one of the four provincial level municipalities under the direct leadership of the Central Government, with a relatively high degree of autonomy in policy formulation and implementation within its 17 county-level³⁶ and 210 town-level divisions.

Economic centre

As Cheng (2011) puts it, “if Beijing is China’s political centre, Shanghai is all business” (p. 25). In 1952, the newly-established PRC adopted a Stalinist model of economic development blended with Mao Zedong’s own socialist egalitarianism ideals, which was primarily characterised by highly centralised control, five-year plans, top-down directives and absence of capital and labour markets (Leung, 1995). Under this new regime, although Shanghai remained as a key economic centre, it was forced to abandon its traditional advantages in commerce and finance, and concentrate on heavy industry, as with other major cities in China (Arkaraprasertkul, 2010). Its coastal location became a problem during the Cold War period. As Pan (1991) notes, there were 156 Soviet-supporting programmes in the 1950s, but none of them was allocated to Shanghai due to the fear of war. Nevertheless, Shanghai remained one of the main sources of fiscal revenue for the centre.

The ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1966-1976) brought the economy of the whole country to “the edge of collapse” (Leung, 1995, p. 207). The post-1978 China, led by Deng Xiaoping, initiated ‘Reform and Opening’ (*gaige kaifang*) which signalled the transformation from ‘planned economy’ to ‘socialist market economy’ and assigned certain cities and provinces flagship status to achieve rejuvenation and progress. Nonetheless, Shanghai’s economic renaissance is said only to have begun from 1992, after Deng’s comments that “in the areas of talented personnel, technology and administration, Shanghai has obvious superiority” (Jacobs, 1997, p. 170). A set of preferential policies have enabled Shanghai to set up China’s largest free-trade zone in Pudong District, make decisions regarding foreign investment,

³⁶ There are currently 16 districts and one county in Shanghai. For the rest of the thesis, I shall use the term ‘district’ to include both ‘district’ and ‘county’, unless otherwise stated.

trading and stocks approvals, and lower tax rates for enterprises (Arkaraprasertkul, 2010). Shanghai has become one of the world's fastest developing cities in the past three decades. By 2013, Shanghai's GDP per capita grew to US \$ 14,574 more than twice that of China as a whole (Shanghai Statistics Bureau, 2014a).

Despite its constant economic growth since the early 1980s, China's educational investment has remained relatively low by world standards. Leung (1995) demonstrated that the spread of basic literacy and numeracy in China with a large illiterate population was achieved with investment ranging between 2.2-3.1% of GDP. The goal of 4% of GDP by 2000 was delayed to 2012 (Zhong, 2013). In this circumstance, education has still been expected to provide a sufficiently qualified labour force to support economic development. Reflecting its economic strength, Shanghai became the first city in China that achieved nine-year compulsory education in 1993, and 4% of GDP for education investment in 2002. The current enrolment rate for compulsory education in Shanghai stands over 99%; and about 84% of Shanghai secondary school graduates go to college, in contrast to 24% nationally (Shanghai Statistics Bureau, 2014b).

Political quiescence

The insecure Cold War environment for the new-born Communist PRC reinforced the CCP resolve to consolidate its political control. As Leung (1995) notes, in this highly centralised and one-party dominated system, Mao, the 'Great Leader and Teacher', launched a series of mass political campaigns, such as anti-Rightist struggle and the 'Great Leap Forward', to eliminate the enemy of the proletariat, promote ideological indoctrination and eventually build a socialist society. The pre-1949 Shanghai was seen as 'the birthplace' of the CCP but also a 'sink of iniquity' (Jacobs, 1997). Its western-influenced modern culture and capitalist heritage did not fit well with Mao's socialism and 'pro-ruralism' (Kirkby, 1985). The post-1949 Shanghai was thus particularly heavily supervised and controlled by the centre. For example, Jacobs (1997) argues that the centrally-organised out-migration from Shanghai in the Maoist era was used to fragment

potential political opposition as well as to contribute to industrial development in other regions.

The turning point of China's politics was the end of the Cultural Revolution. Since then, 'politics in command' has given way to economic construction to safeguard the PRC and CCP's existence (Xing, 2003). However, serious social problems appeared alongside market-oriented reforms, such as the infiltration of western bourgeois liberalism leading to a collapse of public faith in socialism, and a popular resentment at corruption and the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor. Combined with growing unemployment and inflation, these resulted in massive anti-government demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Zhao, 2004). As Vickers (2009) notes, the CCP subsequently "deployed patriotism rather than socialism as the key plank of the Party's new ideological platform" and rested Party legitimacy on economic success (p. 61).

Staggering economic progress has not brought about a similar scale of improvement in political democratisation. Yang (2006) argues that in recent years "the foremost concern for China's leaders has been the maintenance of political order and the promotion of effective governance" (p. 144). The 'Harmonious Society' and 'China Dream' have been espoused respectively by the former President Hu Jintao (2003-2013) and the present President Xi Jinping, advocating the overriding need for socio-political stability to guarantee individuals and the nation's economic success. According to Jacobs (1997), Shanghai was relatively quiescent during unrest in the 1980s. Although it has benefitted from preferential economic policies since the early 1990s and regained the nation's economic leadership, it has not competed politically with Beijing. Shanghainese are known in China for "lacking enthusiasm for politics" (Yu, 1992, p. 143).

During the early decades of the PRC, education served as an ideological and political instrument (Law, 2009). The superiority of a socialist society and Party-state was central to the Government's curriculum and schooling agenda, especially in History, Chinese Language and moral and political subjects (e.g. Thought and Values, and Thought and Politics) from primary to tertiary education (Jones, 2002). Besides this, Vickers (2009) argues that the promotion of Mandarin

(*Putonghua*) as the national language and the adoption of a simplified version of the traditional script were the key strategies for breaking from “the old order” and constructing a new China (p. 56). The structure and practices of the education system also represented political needs. For example, Party secretaries rather than principals had the power over school management; and the Young Pioneer (*shaoxiandui*) and Young League (*gongqingtuan*) were established to bring up young generation in the spirit of Communism.

After the Tiananmen demonstrations, the CCP intensified efforts to indoctrinate youth. Thus, ‘patriotic education’ (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu*), in combination with ‘national situation education’ (*guoqing jiaoyu*), was initiated in the early 1990s, and continues to this day across all levels of schooling (Vickers, 2009). It promotes moral and ideological values, such as a sense of pride in one’s Chinese identity, commitment to society and loyalty to the Party and nation, through emphasising the country’s so-called ‘One Hundred Years of Humiliation’ and in particular the “Against Japanese Aggression” (*kangri zhanzheng*) (Mitter, 2007). Moreover, as Vickers (2009) argues, the promotion of ‘quality education’ (*suzhi jiaoyu*) since the late 1990s has complemented patriotic education in seeking to cultivate capable individuals who are willing to make a commitment to building and defending a strong, modern and united China. Education in Shanghai has also been affected by these changes.

A central-provincial governing system

According to Dong (2007), the division of power between the centre and the provincial has followed a principle of ‘unified leadership and level by level management’ since 1954. In maintaining its leadership, the CCP has established numerous committees and branches at all levels of governance and across all public sectors. Moreover, all governing institutions have been structured in a dual Party-government system in which the Party secretary outranks the governor (Lawrence & Martin, 2013). Only since the mid-1980s, has central control become more indirect, and the provincial level has hence been granted greater autonomy

(Goodman, 1997). Nevertheless, as Yang (2006) notes, the Central Government has retained the power to appoint top provincial officials and reconfigure central-provincial fiscal relations. Shanghai has since become responsible for its own governance in almost all areas, including education, as long as it conforms to national policies and guidance.

In fact, the functions and responsibilities of the central and provincial authorities have never been clearly demarcated. As Vickers and Yang (2013) note, even when a license for education decision-making has been transferred to a province, “the precise extent of that license has remained vague and uncertain” (p. 29). Dong (2007) compares the central- provincial relationship to a ‘barrel’– they are all similar in terms of scope and scale but only different in that the centre maintains the final say. Moreover, the centre and the province are both characterised by bureaucracy and a system of ‘polyarchy’. The education system is centrally administered and governed by the Ministry of Education (CMOE) and education departments of other national ministries. Similarly, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SMEC) and district education bureaus (DEBs) cooperate with other provincial/district authorities (e.g. human resources, finance, organisation and planning) in relevant areas. Any decision thus has to be approved multiple times.

The cultural heritage and pride of local identity

Although there have been a variety of dogmas and philosophies in China’s long history, Confucianism has undoubtedly dominated almost all facets of the life of individuals and of society³⁷. Kim (2009) argues that East Asia, including China, has kept a “strong Confucian *pedagogic* culture” (p. 857) characterised by a number of *unchanging* patterns, particularly exam-driven schooling and patriarchal authority and hierarchy. Cheng (2011) argues that, in this cultural context, education has been reduced to “examination preparation” and is seen as the major “path for upward social mobility” (pp. 23-24). Although Shanghai has reached a

³⁷ Confucianism was attacked in China during the Cultural Revolution and has been recently promoted by the Chinese Government to develop China’s ‘soft power’. The establishment of Confucius Institutes is an example (Kim, 2009).

relatively high enrolment rate in tertiary education, the pressure of examinations has not been reduced. The high spending on private tutoring is a conspicuous example³⁸ (Loveless, 2013, October 9). Law (2009) studies the influence of ‘Confucian authority’ on the culture of school management in China and argues that, for principals:

“It is important to cultivate and keep good relationships with government officers, to faithfully implement the government’s education policy, and to listen carefully to and carry out what government officials specifically instruct the school to do.” (p. 316)

Shanghai proudly see themselves, and are seen by the rest of China, as ‘Domestic Overseas Chinese’. As Jacobs (1997) argues, Shanghai’s immigrant culture, relative wealth, concern with the economy rather than politics, and enthusiastic engagement with the outside world, have validated this metaphor. Shanghai’s pride in its own distinctiveness has been reflected in its attempts to reaffirm its local identity, particularly as the most important ‘gateway’ to Chinese modernity (Bergère, 2009). For example, although pre-1949 Shanghai was ambiguous in the CCP’s official discourse, the cultural and economic vigour of the cosmopolitan ‘Old Shanghai’ has been unabashedly recalled and celebrated in museums and commercial areas (Vickers & Yang, 2013). With regard to education developments, since the 1980s, the Shanghai Municipal Government has pioneered on almost all fronts, and projected Shanghai as a ‘first-class city with first-class education’ within China and internationally (Ngok & Chan, 2003).

After three decades of a centralised and relative closed socialist era, since the early 1990s, Shanghai has re-connected to the world and achieved remarkable growth in its economy and education provision. Meanwhile, political control, the central-local governing relationship and Confucian culture have profoundly shaped its schooling and school management. The next section examines the historical changes to the nature and degree of school autonomy against this broader

³⁸ According to Loveless (2013, October 9), Shanghai parents would annually spend on average of 30,000 yuan (\$ 4800) on maths and English tutoring when their children in secondary schools.

background.

7.3. Historical development of school autonomy

In this section, I divide the development of school autonomy in Shanghai in particular and in China in general into four periods since the establishment of the PRC. From 1949 to 1965, China constructed a highly unified and centralised education system by imitating that of the Soviet Union. From 1966 to 1984, much of the system was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and the post-Mao era witnessed a renaissance of education and schooling in order to meet the escalating demand for economic development. Shanghai was tightly controlled by the Central Government during these two periods. A significant education decentralisation reform was initiated in 1985, which marked the beginning of the third period. For the subsequent 25 years, China experienced a series of reforms, devolving power to lower level authorities and encouraging diversity of education provision. Shanghai has since been a pioneer in almost all education experiments. The fourth period started from 2010 when the latest national and local education development plans were released. Shanghai as well as China as whole both seem to be characterised by a hybrid of decentralisation and recentralisation in some areas of school management.

Construction of a Soviet-inspired education system: 1949-1965

After the founding of the PRC, the Central Government emphasised industrialisation and political consolidation as priorities in the building of a socialist nation (Zhao, 2007). Following Mao's dictum "education must serve proletariat politics and be integrated with productive labour" (Gu, 2001), education was used as an instrument to inculcate the official ideology of Communism, foster unquestioning loyalty to the CCP, and produce a labour force with basic literacy and numeracy (Cleverley, 1991). To achieve this, the CCP sought to learn from the Soviet 'elder brother', as it believed "the best of Western science and technology

had already been absorbed by the Russians” (Pepper, 1987, p. 197). In the 1950s, as Pepper (1987) argues, China’s education system was “reshaped in the Soviet mould” (p. 197).

More specifically, nationalist schools were brought under the new Government’s control (Sun, 2004), private schools were nationalised (Zhao, 2007), and numerous schools were set up by people’s communes (Pepper, 2000). Consequently, almost all schools became public, administered and monitored by provincial education commissions and conforming to central stipulations on admission policies, school calendars, graduate placement, budget formats, teachers’ appointment and salaries (Hawkins, 2006). The CMOE provided unified teaching plans which articulated aims, requirements and arrangement of each subject, and prescribed the content and allocated curriculum time in syllabuses (Pepper, 1990). The People’s Education Press, placed under the leadership of the CMOE, was the sole authorised publisher of textbooks and teaching materials (i.e. teaching references and pupils’ learning materials including workbooks, supplementary texts, experiment sheets and atlases) for the whole country (Ye, 2014).

A national teaching-research system was established in the 1950s and has continued to have an impact on day-to-day teaching to the present day. At the time, subject-specific ‘teaching-research officers’ from all levels of education authorities were empowered to direct, supervise and monitor teaching activities. Within schools, all teachers were organised into teaching-research groups to collectively prepare lessons, practice teaching and supervise each other (Pepper, 1990). The rationale was elaborated in the CCP’s official newspaper, the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao*),

“Since all teaching work is carried out under a unified aim and plan, each subject taught by each teacher is, both qualitatively and quantitatively, essential for the realisation of the general aim and plan. If teaching work is not carried out through the guided, organised, and collective activity of the teaching-research office, it will be difficult to achieve the desired result”. (24th April 1954, quoted in Pepper, 1990, p. 42)

The national college entrance examination (*gaokao*) was introduced in 1952

for all secondary graduates, which as Pepper (1990) argues, reinforced the Soviet-style centralisation. The ‘key school’ (*zhongdian xuexiao*) system was set up in the 1950s aiming to identify and prepare the most academically capable pupils for higher levels of education with limited resources. As a result, the Central Government monopolised the provision, governance, resource allocation, curriculum and pedagogy across the county.

Destruction and reconstruction: 1966-1984

During the Cultural Revolution, education was regarded as a tool of ‘class struggle’ and the ‘newly-established national education system was destroyed (Gu, 2001; Zhao, 2007). Teachers were branded as intellectuals, sent to factories and villages to be ‘re-educated’, suffering severe persecution. Conventional schools were replaced with schools led by peasants, workers and soldiers. Schooling was shortened, whereas physical labour and military-associated projects were increased; the curriculum was dominated by studying the thoughts of Mao (Cleverley, 1991). After the end of the 1960s, classes were suspended; a huge number of urban pupils were sent to the countryside for years to learn from the peasantry (Jones, 2002). The college entrance examination was abolished; instead, political recommendations and class background determined college admission (Pepper, 2000). As Reed (1988) estimates, a total of 160 million young people did not receive sufficient education.

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 saw the beginning of the reconstruction of the education system. A milestone was the reinstatement of the college entrance examination in 1977. Deng stressed that “science and technology were the keys to modernisation, and education was the means to developing science and technology” (Gu, 2001, p. 112), which signalled the Government’s determination to prioritise education in national policy agendas (Hao, 1998). Recognising the limitations of centralised administration and the paucity of resources, local governments and governance institutions were encouraged to play a greater role in education provision and management (Ngok & Chan, 2003). From

the early 1980s, non-governmental forces (e.g. state-owned enterprises, social organisations and individuals) were allowed to finance schools. These initiatives paved the way for the reforms promoting education decentralisation since the mid-1980s.

Decentralisation and diversification: 1985- 2009

China's decentralisation reforms started in the public sector in the mid-1980s, which redefined the relationship among the central and local governments as well as their relationship to education (Pang, 2011). Significant changes occurred in governance, finance, and curriculum and examinations. Shanghai, as the sole 'education experimental zone' (Su, 2011), spearheaded almost all reforms within the purview of the national frameworks and policies.

Governance

The first and foremost moves to decentralise the education system followed the *Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee on the Reform of the Education System* in 1985 (hereinafter referred to as the '1985 Decision'). Critical problems identified in this document were the over-centralisation of the national system and the neglect of regional disparities. It proposed that more responsibility and power be granted to provincial governments, including school administration, formulation and implementation of specific policies, teachers' appointment, inspection over education institutions and the division of administrative power at the sub-provincial level. Meanwhile, the Central Government would continue to play a monitoring role and provide overall principles, guidelines and plans (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee & State Council, CCPCCC & SC, 1985).

These changes were further articulated in the *Programme for Education Reform and Development in China* promulgated in 1993 (hereinafter referred to as the '1993 Programme'):

“The Central Government stipulates the basic length of schooling, curricula design and standards, budgeted teaching posts, teaching qualifications and basic standards of teachers’ salaries; provincial, autonomous regional and Municipal Governments are given the authority to formulate the specific length of schooling and annual pupil admission, make teaching plans, choose textbooks and scrutinise local textbooks, and specify the ratio of teachers’ professional titles and specific standards of teachers’ salaries for their own systems.” (CCPCCC & SC, 1993)

In Shanghai, a governance framework of ‘local responsibility and bi-level management’ was established in the mid-1980s (Ngok & Chan, 2003). District governments became the direct ‘manager’ of individual schools, while a tight rein was kept by the Municipal Government.

The 1985 Decision also introduced the ‘principal responsibility system’ to schools, which set up a tripartite management structure:

“Under the guidance of the higher Party organisations and education department, principals take the full responsibility of teaching and administrative management of schools; schools’ Party organisations play the role as the political core; and congresses of teaching and administrative staff ensure schools’ democratic management and supervision”. (CCPCC & SC, 1985)

A range of educational laws were launched during this period, regarding compulsory education, vocational and technical education, higher education, teachers’ qualifications and educational finance (Hawkins, 2006). In parallel to these legislative developments was the establishment of the national inspection system aimed to ensure the implementation of laws and policies and consequently improve education quality (Wang, 2008). The National Education Supervision Agency was set up within the State Education Commission³⁹ in 1986, followed by the establishment of inspection offices at all local levels (Ma, 2005). The Municipal Government promulgated its own *Regulation of Education Supervision* in 1999, which specified that supervisors are responsible for supervising, examining and evaluating the educational functions of municipal and district governments and the

³⁹ The Ministry of Education was renamed the State Education Commission from 1985 to 1998.

performance of schools and teachers.

The huge gap in resource allocation between key schools and the rest received wide criticism. To promote greater educational equality, the CMOE decided that key schools can only exist at the end of compulsory education (Walker & Qian, 2012). In 1999, the SMEC abolished the ‘key school’ system at the primary and junior secondary levels, but replaced it with an ‘exemplary school’ system at the senior secondary level (SMEC, 1999, 2004a). According to Walker and Qian (2012), former key senior schools were in fact retitled as exemplary schools.

Finance

The 1985 Decision particularly emphasised that with the under-developed economy the Central Government could not afford to entirely fund such a vast education system. It therefore redistributed the fiscal responsibility for education between the centre and the province, stipulating that provincial governments should bear the majority of education expenditures and encouraging multiple methods of financing (CCPCCC & SC, 1985). The Central Government was still supposed to pay teachers’ salaries on the public payroll. However, as Cheng (1997) notes, that money was actually collected by local governments; it was merely rerouted to and reallocated by the centre. He describes this situation as “the centre hosts the banquet and the local foots the bill” (p. 395).

At the sub-provincial level, fiscal responsibility was further decentralised to county and township governments and even village committees in some rural areas (Zeng & Zhang, 2009). To increase education funding, local governments were allowed to levy taxes and an educational surcharge on industry, production and business, and to offer taxation discounts to school-run enterprises (Hawkins, 2006). Non-governmental actors were welcomed to open people-run (*minban*) schools⁴⁰ and make to donations to public-funded schools under government guidance, which well entrenched the ideology of ‘socialist market economy’ (CCPCCC & SC, 1985).

⁴⁰ The nature of the people-run school is contested. Mok (1997) argues that it is hard to differentiate between ‘people-run’ and ‘private’. But Ding (2012) demonstrates that governments have never been excluded from sponsoring people-run schools. More details will be provided later in the chapter.

This was reaffirmed in the 1993 Programme: “while the focus remains on state schools, encouragement will be given to the gradual establishment of people-run schools” (CCPCCC & SC, 1993). In what is known as a policy of ‘fishing’, local governments may top-up a small amount of subsidy as ‘bait’ to match larger donations from society (Cheng, 1997; Ye, 2014).

In fact, as Ding (2012) demonstrates, the majority of people-run schools (hereinafter referred to as ‘bureau-sponsored people-run schools’) have been sponsored by DEBs through their affiliated commercial companies and public schools, whereas only a small proportion (hereinafter referred to ‘independent people-run schools’) have received funding from non-governmental forces. DEBs’ leadership and sponsorship of people-run schools were legislated by the 2002 *Law on Promoting People-run Education* (hereinafter refer to as the ‘2002 People-run Education Law’). Besides, public schools were permitted to make extra money through collecting sponsorship fees from parents⁴¹ and running enterprises (Cheng, 2011). These ‘non-budgeted’ incomes enabled schools to pay for non-recurrent spending and reward teachers (Wong, 2006). Many scholars (e.g. Sun, 2004; and Hawkins, 2006) argue that, rather than a devolution of power, the decentralisation reforms in China were largely a transfer of fiscal burdens from the centre to the local.

In Shanghai, district governments became the main source of funding for public schools. The first five primary and secondary ‘people-run’ schools⁴² were established in 1992 and then spread over the country (Ngok & Chan, 2003). ‘Converted schools’ (*zhuanzhi xuexiao*) were created four years later and subsequently emulated by other provinces (Ding, 2012). There were two forms of ‘converted schools’, namely, ‘people-sponsor-and-government- subsidise’ (*minban gongzhu*) and ‘government-sponsor-and-people-subsidise’ (*gongban minzhu*). Ding (2012) points out that these schools were operated in the same way as people-run schools.

⁴¹ Pupils, who were unregistered residents, cannot meet academic entrance requirements, or gave up free school places that they were allocated, can buy their places at a high price.

⁴² There were a small number of people-run schools in Shanghai during the 1950s, ranging from 2.9% to 7.8% of all schools (Ding, 2012).

Curriculum and examinations

The 1985 Decision officially recognised regional distinctiveness and disparities within China and thus a uniform national set of textbooks was inappropriate. Since 1986, the Central Government has adopted the ‘One Guide-Multiple Textbooks’ policy, encouraging diverse local production of textbooks under central guidance (Hao, 1998). This marked the initiation of the first round of national curriculum reform. In 1988, Shanghai became the first that was given the power to design the curriculum. The Curriculum and Teaching Material Reform Commission was set up to take specific reform actions (Xu, 2012). Following Shanghai, other economically advanced areas and then later the remaining regions were successively allowed to determine their local curricula (Ngok & Chan, 2003). However, as Sun (2004) argues, this was essentially another form of centralisation – local governments replaced the Central Government in controlling the curriculum.

Almost a decade later, a new set of local textbooks were issued to all pupils in Shanghai. A major change was the introduction of optional and extracurricular subjects, which accounted for about 10% of curriculum time and were designed by the Municipal Government (Tan, 2012; Ye, 2014). Nonetheless, the Central Government maintained its control through prescribing compulsory subjects, limiting optional subjects to aesthetic education areas such as arts, sports and technological skills, and providing a national curriculum framework (implemented in 1993) on how new subjects should be developed. Hawkins (2006) thus argues that “while there is some tolerance for diversity, it is quite limited” (p. 35).

The second round of nationwide curriculum reform started in 2001 with the publication of the *Outline of Reform on Curriculum in Basic Education (Trial)* by the CMOE. The main goals during this phase were transforming pupils from passive receivers of knowledge to active participants in learning, shifting the pedagogic focus from ‘exam-oriented’ to ‘quality-oriented’ and, in particular, furthering curriculum decentralisation through the promotion of national, local and school-based curricula (CMOE, 2001). As a pioneer, Shanghai initiated its own

reform from 1998. As Ye (2014) argues, SBCD enabled schools to gain some control over their own curricula for the first time. Nevertheless, the *Guide of School-based Curriculum Management* published in 2002 clearly stated that SBCD should be guided by national and local curricula, concentrating on the areas not covered by them, and closely supervised by all levels of education authorities. It also specified how to design and assess SBCD at the school level and how to monitor and evaluate it at the local authority level (CMOE, 2002).

Teaching and learning, particularly in secondary schools, was long dominated by academic subjects, and overwhelmingly determined by examination syllabuses (Pepper, 2000; Tan, 2012). There was a popular Chinese saying portraying the college entrance examination as ‘millions of troops walking through a single-log bridge’. Concomitant with the curriculum reforms was an effort to move the education system away from exam-orientation (Ngok & Chan, 2003). Shanghai was again a leader in this reform. Since 1985, Shanghai was permitted to design its own college entrance examination, which as Cheng (2011) argues was the key to a localised curriculum. In 1994, the junior secondary schools entrance examination was replaced by the ‘neighbourhood attendance’ policy. In theory, all primary pupils were admitted to secondary schools according to their catchments areas divided by the SMEC. In reality, pupils can still choose better schools in other neighbourhoods by paying sponsoring fees. Notwithstanding these changes, entrance examinations for senior secondary schools and colleges were retained and highly centralised at the municipal level, focusing on national compulsory subjects.

A hybrid of decentralisation and recentralisation: 2010-present

The *National Outline for Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* was put forward in 2010, and set out the latest national goals and strategies for education development. Both standardisation and decentralisation initiatives were proposed in this document. With regard to curriculum, teaching and examinations, it emphasised the adoption of compulsory subjects following national curriculum standards and ability-oriented evaluation

system for pupils, the promotion of Putonghua as medium of instruction and the implementation of exercise for one-hour per day. In relation to teachers, it stipulated that their appointment should conform to national qualification standards, standardised teachers' professional titles (*zhicheng*). It authorised provincial and sub-provincial governments to select, appoint and appraise teachers. It also reaffirmed the promotion of central-local-school governance and finance structure, principal responsibility system, multi-level inspection system and people-run schools. All these highlighted aspects are supposed to be achieved by local governments (CCPCCC & SC, 2010).

Referencing to the national version, the SMEC (2010) developed *Shanghai's Outline for Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* (hereinafter referred to as the '2010 Shanghai Outline'). On the one hand, schools were given more autonomy to select their preferred pupils and implement self- management and development, although no specific actions were proposed. On the other hand, it designed a series of recentralisation and standardisation initiatives. For example, the SMEC aimed to standardise schools' funding, arrangements of buildings and facilities, and teachers' allocation and their salaries in order to reduce the gaps between districts. The municipal inspection commission, teaching certificate validation system, and people-run education development funding were set up in an attempt to reinforce municipal guidance and monitoring. In particular, the power of personnel management was withdrawn from schools to districts – DEBs would be able to rotate teachers within their territory.

For a long time, the Shanghai education system was strictly controlled by the Central Government in almost all aspects as other Chinese regions. From the mid-1980s to the late 2000s, Shanghai spearheaded a set of education decentralisation reforms which have shifted some powers and responsibilities from the centre to the municipal level. Various types of people-run schools have also been established to diversify the system. Nevertheless, the Central Government has never excluded itself from controlling, supervising and guiding local education governance and management. More recently, with the purpose of improving

education equality, Shanghai as well as China as a whole seems to be framed in a hybrid of decentralisation and recentralisation at the municipal and district levels.

7.4. Current model of school autonomy

In contrast to most other Chinese regions with a ‘6-3-3’ schooling structure, Shanghai has adopted a ‘5-4-3’ structure since the late 1980s, which means five-years of primary education followed by four-years of junior secondary education, and after sitting for the Senior Secondary School Entrance Examination (*zhongkao*), pupils may proceed to three-year senior secondary education and prepare for the college entrance examination. Local secondary schools (excluding vocational schools and schools for special needs and migrant workers’ children) can be generally divided into ‘public’ and ‘people-run’ schools. Table 7.1 shows the number and percentage of these two types of secondary schools as well as their enrolled pupils in 2013.

Table 7.1. Number and percentage of public and people-run secondary schools and their enrolled pupils in 2013

Type of schools	Number of schools	Percentage of schools	Number of pupils	Percentage of pupils
Public	762	88%	593,500	89%
People-run	103	12%	75,179	11%
Total	865	100%	668,679	100%

(Shanghai Statistics Bureau, 2014b)

This section examines the degree and nature of school autonomy in Shanghai secondary schools, concentrating on public schools – the major type of schools, and also giving some consideration to bureau-sponsored people-run schools – the type of schools enjoying greater autonomy. Drawing on the analysis of policy documents, literature, and interview data with regard to public schools, I grade each sub-area of school management according to the framework developed in the literature review chapter. On this basis, a model of school autonomy in the current education system is generated, which can be compared with that in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Organisation and governance

Under the guidance of the CMOE, education governance in Shanghai is carried out through a so-called “Two Tier Government, Two Tier Management” system (Shen, 2007). The SMEC directly runs five senior public secondary schools; and 17 DEBs operate the remaining senior and all junior public secondary schools, and the majority of people-run secondary schools. Further, the SMEC is responsible for: (1) implementing laws, regulations and policies of education made at the central level; (2) formulating municipal laws, regulations and policies of education in accordance with the central framework and according to the overall goals of economic and social development of Shanghai; and (3) monitoring and evaluating schools’ performance (SMEC, 2009).

DEBs are given the power to: (1) formulate and implement specific policies within the municipal framework and according to districts’ specific social and economic development; (2) approve the establishment, annulment and modification of public and people-run schools; (3) conduct annual inspection and appraisal of individual schools; and (4) supervise non-degree education programmes operated by private agencies (SMEC, 2010). The Principal Responsibility System, introduced in 1985, continues to provide a framework for intra-school management. As Principal U and Principal N explained, the principal is in charge of daily operation; the school-Party secretary works on moral, ideological and political activities; and the congress of teaching and administrative staff ensures democratic engagement and supervision.

The SMEC (2010) stipulates that important issues should be decided by the principal after discussion with the vice-principal, the school-Party secretary and vice-secretary, and the chairman of the union at the ‘school administrative meeting’. As Scholar Y mentioned, with regard to key decisions, such as the appointment of school leaders and large procurements, “permission from higher authorities is required”. The introduction of the Principal Responsibility System was intended to empower principals in school management (Delany & Paine, 1991). However, Law (2009) argues that this is a division of labour rather than of power. The Central

Government clearly stated: “school principals’ first fundamental duty is to persistently implement the directives, policies and regulations of the CCP and the state” (State Education Commission, 1991). This is still the case. As Principal I experienced, principals “administratively manage schools under the close guidance and supervision of the Party organisations”.

Table 7.2 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.2. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘organisation and governance’ of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area	Description	Degree
Organisation structure and functions	Mainly determined by the SMEC and DEBs according to the guidance of the CMOE (e.g. the introduction of principal responsibility system)	1
Governance mechanism	Within the central framework, the SMEC and DEBs formulate specific municipal and district education policies and schools take charge of implementing policies	2
Types of schools	Approved by DEBs	1

The 2002 People-run Education Law requires every people-run school to set up a decision-making body (e.g. school boards or school councils) and specifies its structure, functions and power. Nevertheless, Chan and Wang (2009) note that key persons in the decision-making bodies of bureau-sponsored people-run schools are usually from or assigned by DEBs. Ding (2012) thus argues that decision-making bodies “do not really function” (p. 63). With the approval of DEBs, new people-run schools can be established and the junior sectors of public secondary schools can be turned into people-run schools.

Finance

Public schools in Shanghai are primarily funded by district governments; districts with a fiscal deficit can receive extra funding from the Municipal Government. Grants from the Central Government only account for a very small proportion (Xu, 2012). Compulsory education is free for pupils and tuition fees for

senior secondary pupils are stipulated and standardised at the municipal level. Principal O emphasised that “sponsorship fees are not permitted in Shanghai any more”. The finance department within the SMEC is responsible for making budget plans and managing donations. It also provides public schools with land, buildings and facilities, while schools take daily care of these state-owned properties. Besides, as Principal O and Principal U said, the SMEC lists how much incidental fees that schools can collect from pupils. For example, schools can only charge every pupil no more than 100 yuan for extracurricular activities and no more than 300 yuan for school uniform (SMEC, 2013a).

With regard to school expenditure, Principal N noted that “there is a very detailed stipulation informing you how many percentages of funding can be used on which items...but how to use this amount of money depends on schools”. Principal O added that “if the spending is less than 20,000 yuan, the head of the [school] finance department only needs to report that at the school administrative meeting; between 20,000 and 30,000 yuan, the spending has to be approved by the meeting; between 30,000 and 50,000 yuan, there should be a discussion during the meeting; over 50,000 yuan, the government would look into the procurement applications and pay the bills”. Financial reports are annually audited by DEBs, but not available to the public. Scholar V argued that “school autonomy is very limited in terms of finance... basically all the expenditures have to be made clear...there is little money can be used by schools freely”.

Table 7.3 summarise the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.3. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘finance’ of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Source(s) of funding	All levels of government, mainly from DEBs; donations are managed by the SMEC	1
Expenditure	Domains and quota are stipulated by the SMEC and DEBs; how to use them depends on schools; over a certain amount, the bills are paid by DEBs	1.5
Land, buildings and facilities	Provided by local governments and maintained by schools	1

Financial report and its availability	Audited by DEBs, but not made available for the public	1
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As mentioned above, DEBs are the main sponsors for the majority of people-run schools: most of them receive funding from the DEB-affiliated enterprises; some are funded by public schools; and a few are financially supported by state-owned enterprises as requested by district governments (Hu, Dong & Fang, 2011). The 2002 People-run Education Law empowers people-run schools to handle all their funds and properties, and make budgeting and expenditure policies. Nevertheless, the Municipal Government stipulates upper limits on their tuition fees. With regard to bureau-funded people-run schools, DEBs exercise a stronger control over their expenditure. An example is provided by Ding (2012); according to her, those schools have to deposit all their funds in designated bank accounts opened by DEBs and apply for specific spending.

Curriculum, teaching and examinations

The current Shanghai curriculum scheme (*kecheng fangan*) was released in 2004 by the SMEC, in compliance with national standards. It specifies curriculum rationale, goals, structure (i.e. subjects permitted and curriculum time allocated), delivery, evaluation, management, quality assurance and textbook planning (SMEC, 2004b). According to the CMOE's requirements, the SMEC categorises the curriculum into three components. As Principals interviewed in this study elaborated: (1) the *basic (national) course* (75-80%), which is subject-centric, standardised by the CMOE, compulsory for all public schools and centrally examined; (2) the *enriched course* (10-15%), which includes social activities (e.g. community service and social practice) and aesthetic learning domains; and (3) the *inquiry-based course* (5%), which comprises two types – one focuses on specific topics according to pupils' interests and the other is associated with compulsory subjects and disciplinary knowledge. The latter two courses are school-based and non-examined, but developed conforming to the SMEC guidelines.

Based on the curriculum scheme, the SMEC (2004c) produces curriculum standards for subjects of the basic course and curriculum guides for the enriched and inquiry-based courses. Principals interviewed all confirmed that textbooks for all compulsory and optional subjects are unified by the Shanghai Primary and Secondary Curriculum Reform Office within the SMEC. As Principal I described, “textbooks are blueprints and teachers are designers, how to carry out lessons based on blueprints is very important... teachers only implement textbooks, topics are clarified in textbooks” (*sic*). Principal U added that “in order to complete national curriculum, you could use some supplementary textbooks decided by schools”, but those provided by the SMEC are the basis. Following the municipal guides, schools are free to develop materials for the enriched and inquiry-based courses (SMEC, 2002).

The SMEC is in theory authorised to be in charge of Shanghai’s curriculum and textbooks with little consultation to the CMOE. However, Vickers and Yang’s (2013) study demonstrates that central control of what should be taught in classrooms has never been absent. According to them, the short-lived series of Shanghai senior secondary history textbooks, published in 2004, made a bold attempt to neither “feature laboured condemnations of Japan’s invasion of China” nor “reference to the war and attendant atrocities” (p. 34). When the CMOE found this out, it stepped in and required the SMEC to replace the ‘unpatriotic’ textbooks with a CMOE-verified version in 2007. They thus argue that “autonomy has meant mandating textbook editors to present the standard, approved narrative of the national and global past in a manner suited to local educational conditions” (p. 37).

As specified in the curriculum scheme, there are 40 weeks including 34 teaching weeks, two social practice weeks, and four weeks for examinations and special events per academic year. More specifically, taking junior secondary as an example, there are 34 periods per teaching week; each period lasts 40 minutes. According to Principal I, school days are also “united and regulated by the municipal... usually from 8 am to 4 or 4:30 pm... How many lessons [for each day], this can be decided by yourself, but you cannot beyond a regulated total amount of lessons” (*sic*). A typical school day is also required to have 15 to 20 minutes

morning/noon meeting and 35 to 40 minutes physical exercises (SMEC, 2004c). Principal N complained about the fixed schedule: “I think it’s not that reasonable, but it’s difficult to make a change”. For each subject, the allocation of curriculum time is also stipulated. For example, Table 7.4 shows the arrangement of subjects and curriculum time for junior secondary education.

Table 7.4. Arrangement of subjects and curriculum time for junior secondary schools in Shanghai per academic year

Subjects		Grade				
		6	7	8	9	
Basic course	Language and literature	Chinese Language	136	136	136	136
		Foreign Language	136	136	136	136
	Mathematics	Mathematics	136	136	136	170
	Social science	Thought and values	34	34	68	68
		History	136			
		Society				68
		Geography	136			
	Nature science	Science	170			
		Physics			136	
		Chemistry			68	
		Biology			102	
	Technology	Labour and technical skills	170			
		Information technology	68			
	Sports and fitness	Sports and fitness	102	102	102	102
	Arts	Music	68			
		Painting	68			
		Arts			136	
Expanded course	All learning fields	Subject-based; Activity-based	170- 136	170- 136	136- 102	136- 102

		Theme education; Communist Youth League activities	34-68	34-68	34-68	34-68
		Community service; Social practice	2 weeks per academic year			
Inquiry-based course			68	68	68	68

(SMEC, 2004c)

On completion of all these requirements, in theory, schools are allowed to make their own timetable within the fixed school terms. However, as Principal N complained, in reality, “we have too much curriculum... too many subjects, and the curriculum time is so long... we don’t really have much spare time”.

Shanghai is currently involved in the second round of a curriculum reform which started in 1998 aiming to further ‘quality education’ through promoting SBCD (SMEC, 2002; Tan, 2012). The interview data shows that there seem to have been various forms of SBCD conducted in practice. For example, Principal U from a school that takes X (a kind of Arts) as its specialism (*tese*), which is accordingly developed as its SBCD focus. According to Principal O, the adoption of the ‘neighbourhood attendance’ policy in 1994 has resulted in “a huge diversity of academic ability within classes”, SBCD in his school is thus “making lessons meet needs of individual pupils”. As to Principal D’s school, there are two kinds of SBCD, “one is designed to deepen the basic course; the other is based on pupils’ interests”.

Despite these different forms of SBCD, Tan (2013) notes that all schools are obliged to “take orders, receive training and carry out specific school-based initiatives from the district authorities” (p. 94). More specifically, according to Xia (2011), there are three models of designing specific courses: (1) the ‘*top-down design*’, meaning the whole course is determined at the district level; (2) the ‘*bottom-up, semi-open design*’, meaning the goal and the characteristics of courses are regulated by the DEBs, but schools can decide how to implement the courses;

and (3) the *'bottom-up design'*, meaning schools are able to create new courses, but have to be approved by DEBs. In addition, DEBs often develop a mandatory order clarifying the content, format and time allocation of SBCD and identify some common research foci in accordance with the 'five-year plan' of the Central Government (Tan, 2013).

The 'teaching-research system' continues to direct how curriculum should be delivered in classroom. In Shanghai, this system comprises three levels: municipal, district and school, and covers all subjects in the basic course. As Scholar Y and Principal T explained, district teaching-research officers frequently visit schools and classrooms, and directly supervise and evaluate teachers' teaching activities; the teaching methods and models recognised and praised by them are promoted across schools. According to Principal U and Principal O, teaching-research groups in each school usually meet once a week for about one to two hours to make collective lesson plans, share teaching experiences, discuss exam questions and problems encountered in teaching, and conduct research related to teaching.

Shanghai has recently adopted various forms of assessment, such as the 'Growth Record Booklet' focusing on pupils' developmental process (Shen, 2007) and 'Teaching Quality Test' emphasising pupils' holistic development (Tan, 2013). Nonetheless, according to Walker and Qian (2012) and confirmed by principals interviewed, the high-stake entrance examinations for senior secondary schools and colleges, standardised at the municipal level and consistent with national standards, are still the most important measurements both officially and unofficially. In addition, district-level and school-based tests are conducted at the end of each semester. According to Principal U and Principal N, DEBs often organise unified semester tests on one or two selected subject(s) and for one or two selected grade(s), in order to collect information about pupils' attainment, which is taken as one of the key indicators of school performance.

Table 7.5 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the 'curriculum, teaching and examinations' of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.5. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘curriculum, teaching and examinations’ of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Textbooks	Determined by the SMEC	0
Subjects	Compulsory subjects are determined by the SMEC	0.5
Content of subjects and curriculum delivery	Prescribed by the SMEC; influenced by the ‘teaching-research’ system	2
School-based curriculum development	Guided by the DEBs; depending on pupils’ interests or schools’ specialists, or complementary to national curriculum	2.5
Curriculum time allocation	The total number of periods for each subject every academic year is stipulated by the SMEC	2
School calendar	School terms and days are determined by the SMEC; the specific arrangement is made by schools	2
Entrance exams	Standardised and organised at the municipal level	0

As stipulated by the Shanghai Municipal Government (1994), syllabuses and compulsory subjects adopted by people-run schools should be the same as public schools’. This is confirmed by E, the Head of the Teaching Department of a bureau-sponsored people-run school whose pupils are expected to sit for public entrance examinations. According to E, the textbooks used in her school are provided by the SMEC; and the curricula are designed, delivered and evaluated in tandem with the SMEC curriculum standards and examination syllabuses. As Chan and Wang (2009) point out, DEBs have also been known to intervene in matters of curriculum and teaching in people-run schools.

Teachers

Based on the *Teacher Law* and the *Teacher Qualification Ordinance* issued in 1993, Shanghai has developed its own Teacher Qualification System in 2001 to select competent degree holders (not necessarily trained) to enter the teaching profession (Shen, 2007). Within this system, as Principal I and Principal U explained, interviews and examinations for the teaching certificate are designed by

the CMOE and carried out by the SMEC and DEBs (SMEC, 2013). District human resource bureaus and DEBs approve the plan for budgeted teaching posts of every school. People who possess the teaching certificate are qualified to apply for the posts. Principal O pointed out that principals' power of teacher appointment has been reduced since 2006, as "schools have been put under the category of public institution, which means that the Government stipulates the size of budgeted posts and allocates salary grant according to that... principals cannot decide how many teachers they would like to have".

As explained by Principal I, Principal U and Principal D, schools are responsible for checking applicants' qualifications and organising trial teaching sessions; then, the Educational Human Resource Exchange and Service Centre in every district interview and examine school-selected candidates; and, on this basis, DEBs authorise schools to hire those they deem qualified. Principal O and Principal U added that, talented teachers without a teaching certificate may be given one-year probation" in public schools and "they can be transferred to more permanent terms only if they obtain a teaching certificate within that year. According to Zhao (2009), by 1996, approximately 95% of all Shanghai public school teachers have gained teaching certificates. Teachers are not civil servants, but their personnel profiles are kept and managed by district human resource bureaus (Wang, 2006). Principal U explained that, for the first three years, the contract needs to be renewed by schools every year; in the fourth year, a permanent contract is guaranteed as stipulated by the 1995 *Labour Law*. Since then, dismissal is not only a decision made by schools. Scholar V stressed that "all the changes in terms of manpower have to be approved by the education bureau".

With regard to continuing professional development, as the CMOE (1999) stipulated, teachers in their probation year should have no less than 120 hours training; junior teachers need to complete minimum 240 hours spread over five years; and for senior teachers the requirement is 540 hours. This would affect "teachers' continual employment, increase in salary and promotion prospect" (Tan, 2013, p. 136). As required by the SMEC, schools are responsible for making continuing professional development plans for individual teachers and at least half

of the training hours should be provided within schools. According to Principal I and Principal U, teachers have since 2012 spent increasing time in teacher development colleges (*jiaoshi jinxiu xuexiao*) which are established and run by DEBs. Nevertheless, Scholar V pointed out that what can be accounted for as continuing professional development is not specified. This, as Tan (2013) argues, provides the flexibility for teachers in choosing training time, form and content.

Teacher appraisal is primarily school-based; according to guidelines provided by DEBs, schools may design their own appraisal criteria and instruments (Zhang, 2008). Principal N illustrated that, by referring to self-appraisal, peer appraisal and appraisal by school leaders, every teacher is given a performance grade. According to Principal U and Scholar Y, the external appraisal is largely determined by teaching-research officers from the SMEC and DEBs⁴³, and linked with promotion within a hierarchical system of professional titles for teachers, namely, junior-grade (Level 3 and Level 2), intermediate-grade (Level 1) and senior-grade. In addition, there are two honorary professional titles given to extraordinary teachers: backbone (*gugan*) teachers and special-grade (*teji*) teachers. The ratio of professional titles is strictly set by the SMEC. Almost all principals interviewed found this problematic. For example, Principal I complained that “in our school, there are so many excellent teachers who cannot be promoted due to the limited quota”.

The implementation of the ‘merit pay’ (*jixiao gongzi*) system since 2009 in China has significantly affected the salaries of public primary and junior secondary teachers. In Shanghai, a teacher’s pay is composed of 70% *basic pay* and 30% *merit pay* (comprising 70% *basic merit pay* and 30% *reward merit pay*). The basic pay and basic merit pay are standardised across all schools and determined at the municipal level, according to teacher’s professional titles, responsibilities and workloads; and the reward merit pay is decided by schools depending on teacher appraisal (SMEC, 2009). In other words, as almost all principals interviewed complained, under the new system, they only have the power to determine 30% of the bonus which amounts to about 9% of total pay. Besides, this reform did not

⁴³ As Scholar Y explained, teaching-research officers can award excellent teachers with honorary titles and select teachers for competitions of demonstration lessons and important professional training; all these are crucial for promotion.

include senior secondary teachers. Therefore, senior secondary teachers may be paid less than their junior secondary colleagues. Principals can do little with that, even the income gap “disturbed the harmonious atmosphere” in their schools (Walker & Qian, 2012).

Table 7.6 summarise the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teacher’ of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.6. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘teacher’ of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area of school management	Description	Degree
Qualification and training	Teaching certificate is compulsory, but training before entering teaching profession is not necessary	2
Appointment and dismissal	Selected by schools and district authorities, DEBs authorise schools to sign contract with those they deem qualified	2.5
Continuing professional development	The minimum hours are required by the CMOE; training programmes are school-based and DEB-organised, but form and content are not stipulated	2
Appraisal	Primarily school-based; external appraisal by teaching-research officers from the SMEC and DEBs	2
Promotion	Determined by schools but strictly follow the stipulated ratio	1
Pay (salary and bonuses)	Mainly following salary scale; principals can determine 9% of the total salary	1
Legal status	Not civil servants, but their profiles are kept and managed by district authorities	2

Bureau-funded people-run schools enjoy more freedom in the appointment and dismissal of teachers, but the requirement of teaching certificate is the same as public schools (SMEC, 2011). Both Chan and Wang (2009) and Ding (2012) point out that DEBs put a large proportion of their teachers on the government payroll. This, on the one hand, attracts more people to work in those schools; on the other hand, enables DEBs to have a vital say in teacher management. All principals in bureau-funded people-run schools are assigned by DEBs. In fact, the majority of them are retired principals from the same districts, who are familiar with, and opt to obey, stipulations and regulations. Thus, as Ding (2012) argues, they are seen by

DEBs as “people on our own side” (p. 64).

Accountability

The main tasks of the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government Education Inspection Office include: (1) supervising the municipal and district governments and relevant bureaus over their educational functions; (2) formulating the municipal inspection standard; and (3) supervising public-funded educational institutions according to this standard. Under the guidance of the municipal inspection office, district education inspection offices are responsible for designing and implementing specific inspection plans (SMEC, 2005). According to Scholar Y, the education inspection system is not independent; all levels of education inspection offices are placed within corresponding levels of governments. As Principal U explained, the head of the district education inspection office is usually the vice district-head who is responsible for education. This intertwined structure further ensures the governments’ control over education practices.

Shanghai developed its own School Developmental and Inspecting Appraisal (*jiaoyu fazhanxing dudao pingjia*) framework in 1999, which aimed to facilitate the development and comprehensive implementation of “quality-oriented education” through “self-restraint, self-perfection, self-development, and other internal mechanisms” (SMEC, 2003). More specifically, the basic targets of school appraisal include school conditions, school development and school quality. Additionally, there are nine development domains, namely, school development target, school curriculum construction, teaching reform and student learning, school’s moral education, school’s cultural construction, educational subject research, teaching force construction, Student development and joint construction by school and community (SMEC, 2005).

As described by Principal U and Principal I, the process of appraisal comprises three phrases. Firstly, according to the appraisal, schools are required to conduct self-evaluation in terms of their three-year self-development plans and annual implementation plans; the self-evaluation reports are supposed to be released online.

Secondly, every two or three years, external inspector teams are dispatched by DEBs to schools (usually three days for each) to scrutinise the implementation of school development plans by checking self-evaluation documents, observing lessons, meeting teachers and conducting surveys with staff and pupils. Thirdly, school inspection reports are submitted to the inspection office and the feedback on school development is sent back to individual schools, but not made open to the public. Schools need to sort out the problems identified within a specified time.

The SMEC (2003) stated that this appraisal framework would enable principals to “autonomously manage the school”. However, Tan (2013) argues that it is still “used as a tool to ensure quality control and policy alignment”, as prescribed targets and criteria demonstrate the government’s expectations and specifically determine school management in the area of curriculum, pupil admission, finance and personnel (p. 105).

In addition, as Scholar V and Scholar Y mentioned, a variety of ‘model school’ competitions are organised by the SMEC and DEBs, such as ‘Ruling by Law Model Schools’ and ‘Construction of Cultural Environment Model Schools’. As principals interviewed in this study admitted, among all these honorary titles, the most attractive and important one is the ‘Experimental and Model Senior Secondary School’. As mentioned earlier, most of them are former key schools with high academic performance. The SMEC has attempted to rectify the examination system, which overemphasises exam results through awarding ‘model schools’ for their various merits. However, as Tan (2013) observes, the reality is that schools are expected to continue to ensure good academic outcomes while working hard to meet additional criteria.

There is no official ranking of schools in Shanghai. According to Principal U’s experience, “the result is not ranked publicly... they [DEBs] offer you [principals] a piece of paper, which does not show you the rank, but only some data, and then you can see where you are.” Principal N mentioned that DEBs “discuss all schools’ problems reflected through examination at the district teaching conference”. The SMEC merely provides the average score of each subject across the municipality for schools’ information; but this is not available to the public (Zhang, 2008). When

I talked to academics, principals, teachers, parents and pupils during the data collection, there seems exist an unofficial but well-acknowledged league table of pupils' attainment. Tan (2013) shares a similar experience with me. She notes that various websites rank schools and list the 'key/exemplar' schools at the municipal and district levels. Parents are keen to send their kids to the better public schools or well-established people-run schools in their catchment areas.

Table 7.7 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the 'accountability' of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.7. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the 'accountability' of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Goals and standards	Set in individual schools' development plans and in accordance with the School Developmental and Inspecting Appraisal	1
Evaluation and inspection	Annual self-evaluation and external inspection by the official inspectors every two or three years	1
Annual report	Scrutinised by the official inspectors	1
Availability of information	Not available to the public	0

School Developmental and Inspecting Appraisal is not applied to people-run schools. According to the 2002 People-run Education Law, people-run schools are subject to official inspections conducted by education, labour and social security administrative authorities in order to facilitate their development and guarantee the quality of their education service. Nevertheless, the timing, frequency and form of inspection are not clearly specified and largely dependent on higher authorities' decisions. Inspection reports are filed by DEBs and should be made accessible to the public.

Pupil admission and external relations

The 'neighbourhood attendance' policy has since 1994 been applicable to all public junior secondary schools. The catchment area for every school is determined

by DEBs. Only schools specialised in sports or arts, which are recognised by DEBs, can recruit up to 5% specialist pupils (SMEC, 2013b). As Principal I mentioned, “the number of pupils in each class is regulated as 35-40”. The enrolment plan is formulated by individual schools with the DEB approval (SMEC, 2013b). According to Principal O, “if the number of pupils qualified for admission exceeds what we can afford, then we select them at random”.

As Principal D mentioned, schools are encouraged to establish partnerships with other schools and business domestically and overseas receiving approval from DEBs. Parents who would like to get involved in school activities may join the parent committee. The establishment of parent committee is compulsory for all schools, although its power/duties/role is not officially specified. As Principal N explained, the goal of parent committees in his school is to strengthen the school-family relationship and develop “mutual understanding through inviting parents to visit schools, get to know how things work within schools and provide some suggestions”; he further clarified, however, this is “not decision-making”, but rather “participation”.

In theory, principals are free to talk to the media and researchers. However, the principal usually doubles as the vice school-Party secretary carrying political responsibilities. They are fully aware of what they should say and should not say during interviews. I experienced this during my data collection, which I have elaborated in the methodology chapter. Table 7.8 summarises the nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Shanghai public secondary schools.

Table 7.8. Nature and degree of school autonomy with regard to the ‘pupil admission and external relations’ of Shanghai public secondary schools

Area	Descriptions	Degree
Pupil admission	‘Neighbourhood attendance’ policy; only 5% places for specialist pupils in specialist schools	2
Relationship with other schools and business	Encouraged, but need to be approved by DEBs	4
Level of parents’ involvement	Invited to take part in school activities	2
Relationship with mass media	Determined by principals but they are	4

(or interview requests in general)	cautious about sensitive issues	
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The CMOE has since 2004 granted people-run schools the autonomy to have their own discretion on pupil admission. Nonetheless, as Ding (2012) argues, the SMEC and DEBs still keep tight control over the division of catchment areas, admission requirements, methods of selection and timetable, and fees charging. For example, as *the Xinhua News* (n.d., 2014, May 10) reported, the SMEC stipulated that pupils can only apply for two people-run schools and sets the dates for online applications and admission interviews for all people-run schools.

This section has developed a model of the nature and degree of school autonomy in Shanghai secondary schools, which is characterised by five features that are discussed in the next section.

7.5. Features of school autonomy

Centralisation and unification, based on the Soviet model, were applied to all sectors including education in Shanghai during the 1950s and 1960s. After the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai has reclaimed its pioneering role in the realm of education. Since the mid-1980s, the Shanghai education system as a whole has been given increasing autonomy by the centre. Devolved fiscal responsibility has been further shifted to districts and a range of non-governmental agencies and individuals have become involved in education provision. Since 2010 there seems to have emerged a hybrid of decentralisation and recentralisation, especially in regard to resources allocation. The current model of school autonomy in the main types of secondary schools also shows that the centralised control has not been reduced. Based on the understanding of the historical review and current model, five features of school autonomy in Shanghai are identified and elaborated below.

Firstly, the tension between decentralisation and centralisation has existed among all levels of authorities, namely, the centre, municipality, district and school.

In other words, autonomy has been given to lower levels of authority, while the control of higher levels has been maintained. For example, since the decentralisation reform starting from the mid-1980s, the Central Government has allowed Shanghai to design its own curriculum with minimal consultation. However, this has been on the premise of the implementation of the national curriculum or of the compliance with national standards and guidelines in the case of local and school-based curriculum. When there are inappropriate deviations (e.g. a resulting political embarrassment as Vickers and Yang (2013) demonstrate in their study), the Central Government would intervene. In addition, although schools are empowered to identify qualified teacher candidates, these candidates have to be interviewed and examined by district authorities, and the final say is strictly held by DEBs. Thus, as Wong (2006) argues, “there is still little evidence that an expansion of the decision-making power of schools will result from delegating power from the top” (p. 44).

Secondly, the transfer of autonomy has been primarily from the Central Government to the local (municipal and district) governments; limited autonomy has virtually reached the school level. For example, the SMEC, replacing the CMOE, has enjoyed the power to design and organise the entrance examinations for senior secondary schools and colleges, and determine textbooks and the enriched and inquiry-based courses. In other words, curriculum and examinations in Shanghai are still highly centralised. DEBs have been authorised by the SMEC to collaborate with other relevant district bureaus to, for example, determine school funding (with finance bureaus), manage teachers’ profiles (with human resource bureaus), appoint school leaders (with organisation bureaus), and make annual plans for budgeted teaching posts (with human resource and finance bureaus). Scholar Y used a metaphor to describe the relationship between schools and higher authorities – “a school is like a needle and education departments and other relevant authorities at higher levels are thousands of threads; as long as one of the threads is lifted, the needle is moving”.

Thirdly, decentralisation reforms initiated by the Central Government have been mainly used as strategies to reduce the fiscal burden for education provision,

which was stated clearly in the key official documents (e.g. the ‘1985 Decision’ and the ‘1993 Programme’). However, centralisation has been revisited when inequalities and regional disparities have arisen. In Shanghai, the uneven economic development among districts has led to inequality in terms of education investment. It is in this context that the Shanghai 2010 Outline has proposed recentralising and standardising education expenditure, resource allocation and teacher appointment. The same pattern is evident in China in general (Hawkins, 2006). Karlsen (2000) rejects the claim that “the model of decentralisation and centralisation [is] as waves following and replacing each other” by referring to Norway and British Columbia (p. 534), however this seems not inaccurate in the case of China.

Fourthly, the power of sponsoring and governing the vast majority of people-run schools has been highly concentrated in the hands of DEBs, which is not essentially different from their public counterparts. According to the 2002 People-run Education Law, all people-run schools are given a high level of autonomy in curriculum, appointment and dismissal of teachers, school fees and expenditure, power and functions of school decision-making bodies, and pupil admission. However, only independent people-run schools, accounting for 10% of all people-run schools, are arguably ‘private’ and obtain great autonomy in these management areas. The remaining 90% of people-run schools still keep a close relationship with DEBs financially and managerially. These bureau-sponsored people-run schools are mainly distinguished from public schools in their capacity to select pupils and charge them higher tuition fees, although autonomy in these areas is enjoyed under the frameworks and guidelines set by the SMEC and DEBs. Therefore, the relationship between people-run schools and the government is described by Chan and Wong (2009) as ‘controlled decentralisation’.

Lastly, the governing relationship between schools and higher authorities has been characterised by a Confucian authority culture strongly intertwined with political control. According to Law (2009), the obedience to and respect of people in authority originating from a Confucian heritage culture has extended into the contemporary Chinese culture of school management. A typical interaction between principals and government officials can be described as: the former grasp every

opportunity to report schools' achievement, and bring needs and problems to the latter in order to gain understanding, support and approval. Moreover, as demonstrated earlier, the central authority maintained in all areas of school management has been partly for political reasons (Ngok & Chan, 2003). Political intention has been embodied in the central frameworks and policies of schooling and curriculum, and also reflected in the structure of the education system. These characteristics have facilitated the inter-penetration of administration and political-work and ensured that the will of the CCP-led Government would be faithfully implemented at the local level.

7.6. Conclusion

The development of the Chinese education system has paralleled economic and political reforms, shifting from the highly centralised and standardised Soviet model to the decentralised and diversified socialist-market model since the mid-1980s. The fiscal burden of the massive national system has been the main driven force. In consequence, more autonomy with regard to education governance, finance, curriculum and examination has been devolved to the municipal level and further to the district level in Shanghai, whereas schools have been merely given limited autonomy. However, when there have emerged district disparities in recent years, Shanghai has re-adopted the strategy of recentralisation and standardisation of resource allocation (including funding and personnel). In spite of all these changes, the central control has remained by providing a variety of national guidelines, frameworks and standards, and through a dual Party-government system which has been reinforced by the Confucian authority culture. Additionally, the emphasis on academic performance has resulted in exam-oriented education system, which has directed day-to-day teaching and learning in Shanghai to follow prescribed curriculum and examination syllabuses. Therefore, individual schools in reality have obtained very limited *de facto* autonomy.

In the next chapter, the English representation of school autonomy in East Asia is compared to the ‘reality’ of that perceived within domestic contexts. The models of school autonomy in three East Asian societies studied are also compared and discussed.

Chapter 8. Comparison and discussion: the representation, ‘reality’ and policy referencing

8.1. Introduction

In the last five chapters, I have:

- (1) examined how school autonomy in East Asia has been represented by policy-makers in England since 2010, which has addressed the first research question; and
- (2) investigated and developed models describing the nature and degree of school autonomy in three high-performing East Asian societies, namely, Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai, which has provided the answer to the second research question.

This chapter focuses on the third research question. In doing so, three comparisons are conducted:

- (1) the English representation of school autonomy in East Asia and the ‘reality’ as perceived domestically;
- (2) the policies and practices pertaining to school autonomy amongst the three East Asian societies studied; and
- (3) the reforms initiated to increase school autonomy in these four societies.

Drawing on the literature review chapter, this chapter then extracts the main arguments of this study from these comparisons. It discusses the nature of EPB as a specific form of ‘externalisation’, whether transnational EPB results in a global convergence of national education systems and the distinction of policy borrowing and referencing. In addition, this chapter seeks to further the understanding of the ‘East-to-West’ borrowing, which attempts to flag up the possibilities for contemplating how postcolonial theoretical resources might be further developed to inform research on EPB. Lastly, the conclusion to this chapter and this study overall is made.

8.2. School autonomy in different management areas

The promotion of Academies and Free Schools in England has been primarily justified on the assertion that high levels of school autonomy have contributed to the high performance of East Asian education systems. With reference to various areas of school management, this section firstly examines whether school autonomy in East Asia projected by policy-makers accords with that perceived domestically. Secondly, it investigates the similarities and differences of school autonomy amongst the three East Asian societies studied.

Comparison between England and East Asia

In Chapter Four, I have identified six areas of school management to which the UK Government has made changes so as to grant greater school autonomy, namely, governance and management, curriculum and school calendar, and teachers' qualifications and salaries. Table 8.1 summarises autonomy in the main types of secondary schools in England and East Asia in these six areas. From it, it can be seen that there is little congruence between the English representation and the 'reality' with regard to the nature and degree of school autonomy. In other words, the policy initiatives promoted in England do not replicate their East Asian models.

More specifically, in England, there are no restrictions on who can apply to establish public-funded schools. Individuals (e.g. teachers and parents), education institutions (e.g. universities and independent schools), organisations (e.g. charities, community and faith groups) and businesses are all encouraged to open and run Academies and Free Schools. In Hong Kong, SSBs (e.g. faith groups, alumni associations and organisations) are permitted to establish aided and DSS schools by using public funding, but no school has been set up by teachers and parents. In Singapore and Shanghai, governments (national/municipal/district) are the sole providers of public education.

Additionally, both Academies and Free Schools in England are not under the control of local authorities, while all public schools and 90% people-run schools in

Shanghai are directly or indirectly sponsored and governed by DEBs. As a city-state, Singapore also has a comparable intermediate level of governance and administration – cluster superintendents.

With regard to curriculum, Academies and Free Schools in England are free to opt out of the National Curriculum and pursue their own missions and ‘ethos’. Whilst the system of school inspection and public examination tends to encourage convergence, schools can still promote their own belief systems (e.g. religious beliefs), choose textbooks and select which examination boards they use. In contrast, the vast majority of schools in all three East Asian societies are required to adopt the national/central curriculum. Even those with greater autonomy in designing curriculum, such as DSS schools in Hong Kong and autonomous schools in Singapore, have limited *de facto* deviations. The powerful role of the national/central curriculum in East Asia is reinforced by the states’ control over the textbooks used, teacher education and the existence of a single national/central examination body. In essence, the national/central examination, widely seen as a key path towards social mobility, is based wholly on the national/central curriculum which is codified in the approved textbooks. For a school to stray away from that curriculum would be akin to institutional suicide.

Head teachers in England are given the power to set school terms and hours. The EDB in Hong Kong provides general guidelines as to the minimum school days per academic year and requires schools to submit the list of holidays for approval. In theory, schools in Singapore and Shanghai are encouraged to flexibly design their own calendars within fixed school terms. However, in reality, there is limited space left for them to do so, as the SMOE and SMEC prescribe curriculum time which accounts for the major proportion of school hours.

For English teachers, the total amount of their salaries can be set by head teachers, whereas there are mandated salary scales stipulated by education departments in the three East Asian societies. What can be decided by schools are the annual performance bonus in Singapore and the reward merit pay in Shanghai which represent 9% of total salary. Only a small number of schools such as independent schools in Singapore and DSS schools in Hong Kong are free to

Table 8.1. Autonomy in the main types of secondary schools in England and East Asia

Autonomy in the main types of secondary schools			England (Academies and Free Schools)	East Asia		
				Hong Kong (Aided schools)	Singapore (Government schools)	Shanghai (Government schools)
Areas of school autonomy	Governance and management	Who can set up public-funded schools?	No restrictions	Government and SSBs	Government	Government
		Who runs and manages public-funded schools?	Free from the control of local education authorities	EDB and SSBs	SMOE and cluster superintendents	CMOE, SMEC and DEBs
	Curriculum and school calendar	Are schools required to follow the national/mainstream curriculum?	No	Yes	Yes, except for three independent schools which can provide alternative certificates	Yes, all public schools, even most people-run schools
		Can schools set school terms and hours?	Yes	No, the EDB stipulates less than 190 days and 90-93 holidays a year	No, terms and curriculum time are stipulated by the SMOE	No, terms and hours are strictly stipulated by the SMEC
	Teachers	Can schools hire untrained/unqualified teachers?	Yes	A teaching certificate is a requirement for permanent appointments	Teachers are centrally selected, trained, and appointed by the SMOE	A teaching certificate is required by law
		Can schools set teachers' gross salaries	Yes	No, salary scales and allowances regulated in the Code of Aid	Yes, but only annual performance bonus	Yes, but only the reward merit pay
Greater autonomy is given to whom? (%) of all public secondary schools			Academies and Free Schools (57%). All schools are encouraged to convert to Academy status and 500 new Free Schools launched	DSS schools (13%), many elite aided schools joined the DSS from 2000 which enables them to charge fees and select pupils	Autonomous schools and independent schools (21%), mainly high performing schools which recruit the most able pupils	Local authorities and independent people-run schools (1%), rather than the vast majority of schools

determine the entire salary within their own budgets. In particular, the merit pay system in Shanghai has been specifically cited to legitimate English head teachers' power to reward the best (Gove, 2013). However, what is not made explicit is that only 9% of Shanghai teachers' pay, the merit-based component, is determined by principals according to their performance.

A teaching certificate is not compulsory in England to enter the teaching profession. As *The Guardian* (Adams, 2014, December 29) reported, the number of unqualified/untrained teachers in Academies and Free Schools rose by 2,600 in 2012 to nearly 8,000 in November 2013, meaning by then teachers without qualified teaching status represented nearly 6% of the 141,000 full-time teaching staff. There are also a small number of unqualified/untrained teachers in East Asia. However, this group of teachers are restricted to teaching some non-examination subjects in Hong Kong, temporarily employed to fill gaps in Singapore and required to obtain a teaching certificate within their one-year probation period in Shanghai. Without exception, a teaching certificate is required for those who plan to stay in the profession in all three education systems. Furthermore, in Hong Kong, the EDB has since 2005 stipulated that all new teachers should be graduates and professionally trained; in total, 96.4% of secondary school teachers are trained university graduates (EDB, 2015j). In Shanghai, schools can only hire those who have teaching certificate and are deemed qualified by DEBs. Teachers in Singapore are selected and employed by the SMOE and then trained at the National Institute of Education – the sole teacher education institution which works closely with the SMOE.

Comparison amongst three East Asian education systems

The comparison above has also demonstrated the similarities and differences amongst the three East Asian education systems in those six areas. Drawing on the models developed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I compare and contrast them in other areas. The Figures below respectively show the variations in terms of organisation and governance (Figure 8.1), finance (Figure 8.2), curriculum, teaching and examination (Figure 8.3), teachers (Figure 8.4), accountability (Figure 8.5) and

pupil admission and external relations (Figure 8.6). From them, it can be seen that the three systems share some common features.

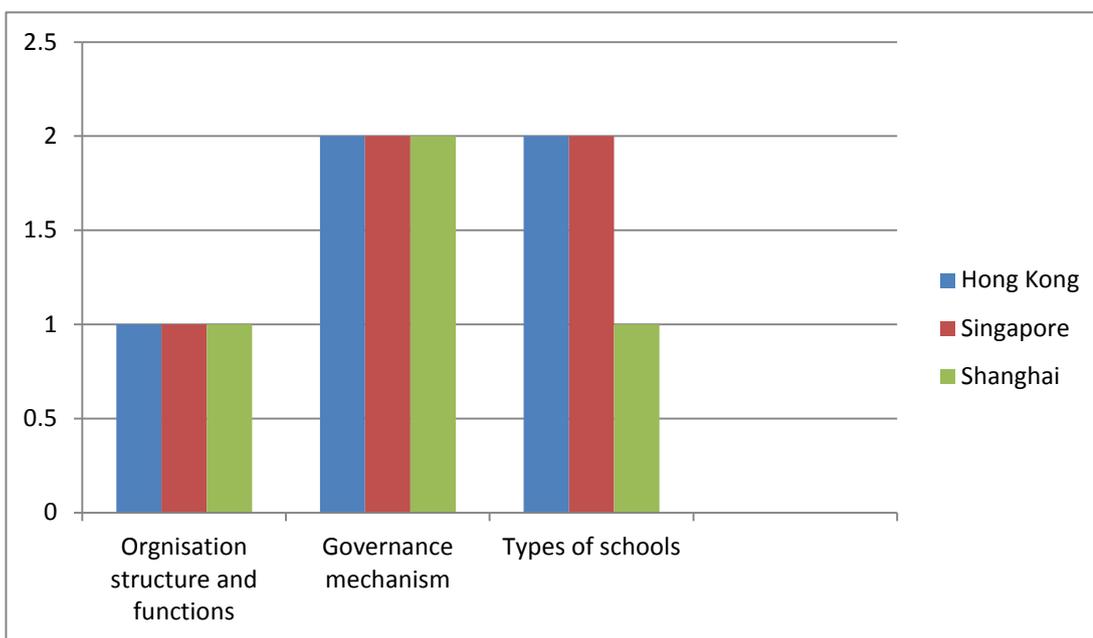


Figure 8.1. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to ‘governance and organisation’

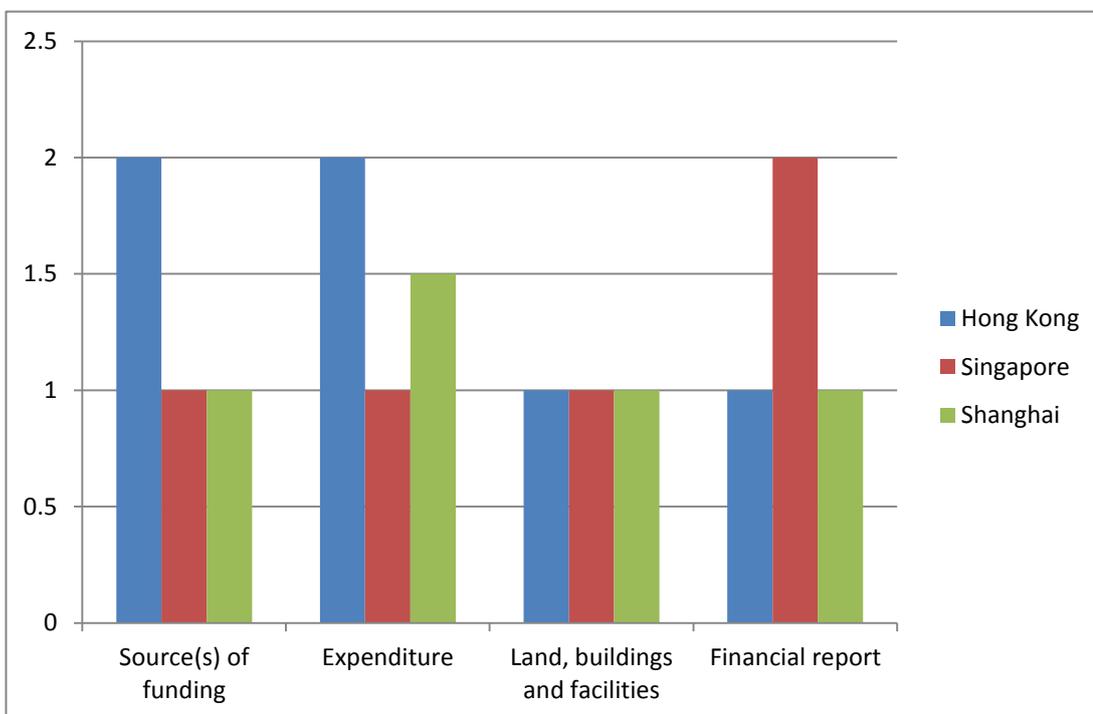


Figure 8.2. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to ‘finance’

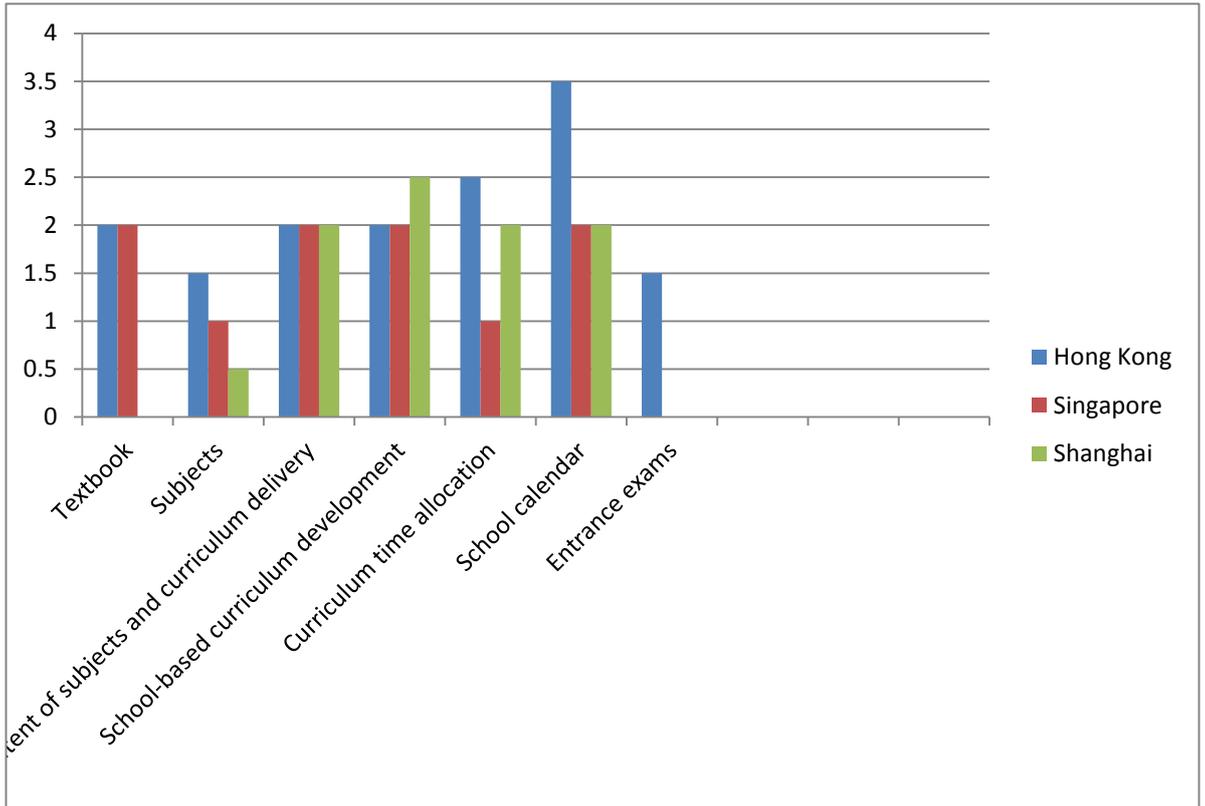


Figure 8.3. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to 'curriculum, teaching and examination'

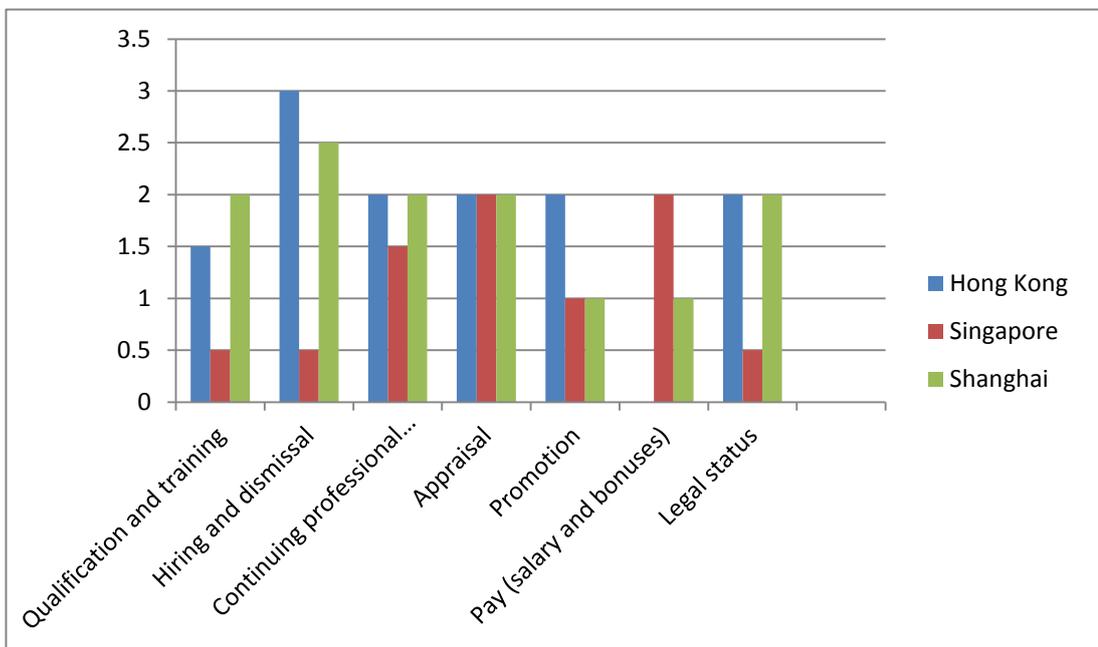


Figure 8.4. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to 'teachers'

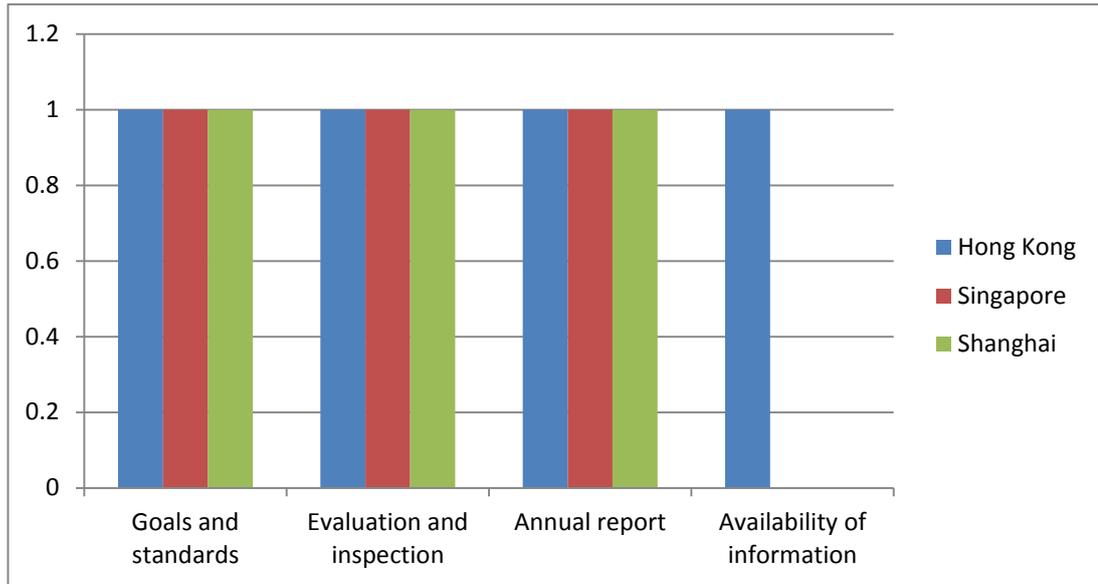


Figure 8.5. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to 'accountability'

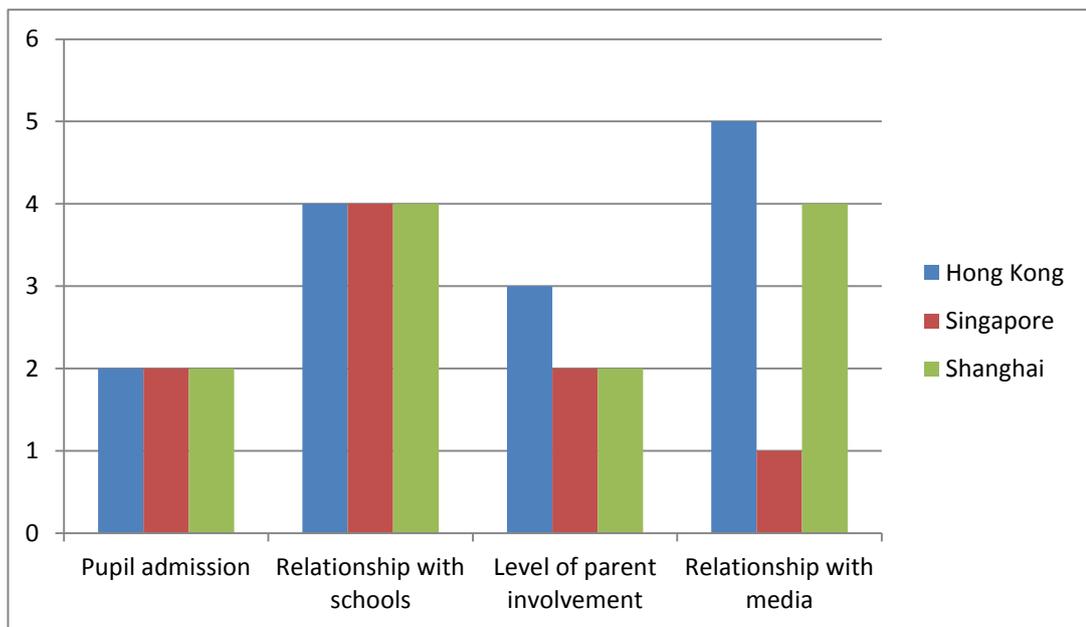


Figure 8.6. Degree of school autonomy in East Asia with regard to 'pupil admission and external relations'

Schools' organisational structures and internal governance are determined by education departments. More specifically, all aided schools in Hong Kong are required to establish IMCs which undertake daily operations. Membership of clusters in Singapore is compulsory for all government and aided schools (including autonomous schools) and, as the SMOE stipulates, different types of schools should accordingly establish different kinds of school management bodies.

In Shanghai, all public schools are managed under the principal responsibility system.

Although official school ranking systems (and their publication) do not exist or have been abandoned in the three systems, the media is still enthusiastic about producing unofficial rankings acknowledged and valued by educators, parents and the general public, which put schools under great pressure and drive them to concentrate on academic performance. Therefore, in theory teachers are encouraged to develop diverse teaching methods in favour of critical and creative thinking; however, in practice, the most effective methods which are perceived to help pupils obtain good exam results dominate day-to-day teaching.

With regard to continuing professional development, all these systems stipulate minimum hours, provide lists of recognised courses and relate these to promotion prospects. In addition, what can be counted as continuing professional development is not specified, which generates flexibility and freedom for schools and teachers to choose the form and content of continuing professional development programmes. Teacher appraisal is centrally designed and initiated, and carried out at the school level. Promotion is determined by schools but conforms to strictly-stipulated ratios of professional titles, such as CMs and GMs in Hong Kong and junior-, intermediate- and senior- grade in Shanghai.

Schools in these systems are required to prepare development plans and conduct self-evaluations which are validated by external review teams sent by their education departments. Development plans are drawn up in compliance with national/overall goals; and self-evaluation and external reviews are based on a set of prescriptive criteria / standards / performance indicators. Governments in all these societies are the providers of land, buildings and facilities, while individual schools are responsible for their daily maintenance. Schools are encouraged to build relationships or partnerships with other schools and businesses under central guidelines.

In Hong Kong, parents enjoy comparatively more power than their counterparts in the other two societies in terms of the levels of involvement in school management. They can be nominated as office-bearers of Parent-Teacher

Associations and/or be elected as members of IMCs to participate in decision-making with other members as stipulated in the Education Ordinance. In contrast, parents in Singapore and Shanghai are welcome to engage in school events and activities, but not managing schools.

In all three societies, the government constitutes the major source of school funding, even for schools with independent or private status, such as DSS schools in Hong Kong, independent schools in Singapore and the majority of people-run schools in Shanghai. In addition to public funding, aided schools in Hong Kong are able to receive extra grants from SSBs, obtain donations with the approval of IMCs and charge a certain amount of fees as stipulated in the COA. Although donations are permitted in the other two societies, they are centrally received and managed by the SMOE-dominated Education Fund in Singapore and the SMEC and DEBs in Shanghai.

With regard to expenditure management, the domains (the areas in which schools can spend money) and quota (how much money schools can spend in each area) are specified by the education departments in all three systems. Consequently, schools are only able to decide how to use funding according to central stipulations. Notwithstanding these commonalities, in Shanghai, the approval from DEBs is required when schools' expenditure exceeds a certain amount; in Singapore, government and aided schools' bills are paid directly by the SMOE. Schools are all required to prepare annual financial reports for official audit; however, only those in Hong Kong and Singapore have to make their reports available to the public.

As described above, the three societies adopt similar accountability frameworks, but the public availability of the information varies. Schools in Hong Kong are required to upload development plans and self-evaluation reports to their websites; external review reports are only reported to schools' stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, pupils and school managers). In contrast, these reports in Shanghai and Singapore are kept confidential.

Within each system, different types of schools are selectively granted autonomy to different extents; but the criteria and process of selection vary. In Singapore, the SMOE formulates the criteria of independent schools and invites

existing high-performing schools to submit their applications for conversion. It also runs a vetting body to scrutinise applications against the criteria. At first, autonomous status was only given by the SMOE to schools with academic merit and schools had no say on whether they would like to turn into autonomous schools or not (Chan and Tan, 2008). This has been changed since 2000. Applications for autonomous status can now be initiated by schools and schools may reject conversion if it is recommended by the SMOE. But the key criterion for becoming an autonomous school has remained academic success. In Hong Kong, the DSS is implemented on a voluntary basis; the EDB holds the power of making criteria and granting approval. This is similar to public schools which would like to convert to people-run schools in Shanghai.

Based on these comparisons, ironically, schools in England enjoy higher levels of autonomy than their counterparts in the three East Asian societies which have been used as sources of evidence to increase school autonomy in England. Moreover, drawing on the distinction between ‘operational power’ and ‘policy and operational power’ in the conceptual framework of this study, whilst some ‘operational power’ is given to East Asian schools, English schools are granted ‘policy and operational power’. The English representation seems to have been based on a set of selected, ambiguous, or even sometimes inaccurate portrayals of school autonomy in East Asia, which largely distorts its ‘reality’. Within East Asia, education systems are characterised by the varied nature and degrees of school autonomy in different areas of school management. Therefore, it is problematic to essentialise and homogenise them as a ‘reference group’.

8.3. Reforms of school autonomy

While reforms designed to increase school autonomy have been introduced in East Asia, their rationale, scope, form and nature differ considerably from those promoted in England.

Firstly and most significantly, in England, the models of schools provided with

high levels of autonomy, notably Academies and Free Schools, are neither given the formal power to select pupils on academic merit nor to charge parents extra fees, and are targeted at all schools and pupils. Those without Academy status are encouraged to convert. This was made explicit in the 2010 SWP – “it is our ambition... to help every school which wishes to enjoy greater freedom to achieve Academy status” (DfE, 2010, p. 12). Many academics (e.g. Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998; Ball, 2007; Glatter, 2012) attribute this ‘whole system’ reform approach to a predominant tradition of the English education system relying on various voluntary forces since the 19th Century and a consistent commitment to the ‘free/quasi market’ underpinned by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism over the past three decades. As Hatcher (2010) argues, the expansion of Academies and Free Schools has also been justified by the rhetoric of achieving social inclusion through ‘equality of opportunity’ and raising standards of attainment in all schools, although he argues it has in fact protected middle class advantage.

In contrast, greater autonomy in Singapore and Hong Kong has mainly been transferred by their governments to a small and selected number of schools. In Hong Kong, although the DSS was not originally designed for elite schools, the EDB revised the scheme in 2000 to allow DSS schools to select pupils and charge fees, which has attracted prestigious Band One aided schools to convert to DSS status. Providing these schools with admission and finance privileges has introduced a degree of elitism into the education system; and this shift has aligned it more closely with a political and economic system which has, throughout colonial times and currently, been dominated by an elite comprising the government and business leaders (Goodstadt, 2014). Hong Kong’s Chief Executive revealed his own elitist views recently when he rejected demands that his post be elected through more ‘open voting’. He explained that such an arrangement would mean “you would be talking to half of the people in Hong Kong who earn less than \$1,800 a month. Then you would end up with that kind of politics and policies”. As Krugman (2014, October 23) opines, his concern was that the bottom 50% of Hong Kong’s population would vote for policies that might aid the poor and harm the rich.

A central message in Singapore's national narrative is that the society generally and the education system specifically are underpinned by meritocracy and consequently people's life chances depend solely on their ability and hard work (Mauzy & Milne, 2002). Following meritocratic principles, the most academically able pupils go to the best schools which possess the most resources and capable teachers. This education system is premised on the belief that the brightest rise to the top and eventually contribute to national development. In this context, greater autonomy has been selectively granted to academically 'high-flying' schools (including 28 autonomous schools and eight independent schools out of 170 public-funded secondary schools) in order to better cater for the need of the future leadership of the country. Therefore, in both Hong Kong and Singapore, 'better' schools have been allowed to exercise greater autonomy. Both cases differ markedly from the situation in England and are contrary to the claims in the SWP and OECD reports that by being granted more autonomy, schools can better improve themselves.

Since the late 1970s, China has struggled with the tension between the need to foster socio-economic development through empowering local authorities, particularly in terms of financial management, and the Central Government's imperative to control them politically (Landry, 2008). Hawkins (2006) argues that the decentralisation reforms generally and decentralisation of education specifically have not involved the redistribution of political power, but been primarily driven by fiscal considerations – the Central Government could not afford to wholly fund such a vast education system. This has in effect resulted in more autonomy being transferred from the centre to the local, along with the responsibility for providing individual schools with funding. Therefore, decentralisation in the case of Shanghai has mainly taken place at the municipal level rather than the school level. Meanwhile, although enterprises, non-governmental organisations and individuals have been encouraged to set up and/or fund people-run schools, in fact, the vast majority of such schools are financially and managerially controlled by DEBs. Overall, education policies and practices in Shanghai are still highly centralised and standardised across all schools within the municipality in almost all the areas

examined earlier.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the reforms of school autonomy have often been rhetorically interwoven with the trend of marketisation. This is evident in both England and East Asia, but with different meanings. In England, increasing school autonomy has been interpreted as a specific means to develop a 'free market' and redefine the role of the state in the education sector (Whitty et al., 1998). According to Wolfe (2011), Academies and Free Schools, although publicly funded, are categorised as independent schools in law and do not conform to statutory provisions applying to state (maintained) schools. Glatter (2012) argues that,

“...there is a distinctive element – the gradual defenestration of the intermediate tier of government with an apparent goal of having just two significant layers of governance: the individual school operating in a competitive local market and a distant central government and its agencies as the sole political authority.” (p. 570)

The purpose of DSS schools in Hong Kong and people-run schools in Shanghai is to reinforce private education provision in order to supplement public provision. Nonetheless, the Hong Kong Government emphasises its beliefs in market values and managerialism (Chan & Tan, 2008), while non-government organisations and individuals in Shanghai are only encouraged to make financial contributions (Ding, 2012). The introduction of independent schools in Singapore aims to pursue excellence through promoting autonomy to the best schools. Policy-makers stress that this policy is an attempt to diversify the education system through providing some public-funded schools with greater autonomy in finance rather than through enlarging the private education sector that principally admits those who are able to pay (SMOE, 2004; Tharman, 2004).

With regard to the future, Singapore seems to have no plans to expand independent and autonomous schools. The number of independent schools has been maintained at eight since 1992; 18 autonomous schools were set up between 1994 and 1997, only 10 more have since been granted 'autonomous status' (Tan, 2007).

In Hong Kong, DSS schools have been subject to growing critical scrutiny as a result of financial malfeasance in some schools (Legislative Council, 2014). Meanwhile, the public increasingly concern that DSS schools' priorities, such as high fees some schools charge, admission policies and more extensive financial resources, are likely to result in education inequality (Tse, 2002). It seems unlikely the scheme will be further expanded in the near future.

Shanghai's latest development plan proposed to re-standardise schools' funding and facilities, and teachers' allocation and salaries at the municipal level, in an attempt to reduce the growing disparities across districts (SMEC, 2010). The case in England is different. Subsequent to the SWP, the number of Academies and Free Schools was dramatically increased by the Coalition Government. In 2015, the Conservative Government passed the new Education and Adoption Bill a few weeks after taking office, which has provided legislative support for the expansion of Academies and Free Schools.

In terms of function, the literature review has argued that complete decentralisation seems not to exist; East Asia is no exception. As many academics argue, education systems in this area have experienced 'recentralisation', 'decentralised centralisation', or 'centralised decentralisation'. For example, Pang (2008) argues that the introduction of IMCs in Hong Kong has resulted in the decrease of the intermediate control power of SSBs and accordingly the tightening of the government's central control power. In Singapore, Ng (2008) notes that "the government still carries a great responsibility for achieving national outcomes" and what has been decentralised is actually the tactical power of management (p. 122). In China's education system, as Ngok and Chan (2003) point out, the Central Government has never eased its rein; Shanghai as a local government unit can only govern and manage schools within the purview of national stipulations, guidelines and frameworks.

Furthermore, all three East Asian societies are primarily composed of ethnic Chinese and have been profoundly influenced by Confucianism. This cultural heritage has deeply influenced the tradition of exam-oriented schooling. Moreover, as noted earlier, individual autonomy has not been as significant and applauded in

East Asian societies to the same degree as in the ‘West’, which frames the context within which school leaders and stakeholders perceive and exercise their autonomy when making decisions and implementing policy initiatives. By emphasising the importance of respect for and obedience to seniority/authority/order, this cultural element has shaped the internal operation of schools and the relationship between higher authorities and schools (Kim, 2009; Law, 2009).

Additionally, as Kasahara (2013) notes, they all can be described as ‘developmental states’ (although to varied extents) which have strong and interventionist governments with power and organisation to achieve their development goals. In this scenario, almost all the reforms of school autonomy in these societies have adopted a ‘top-down’ approach, been implemented in an authoritarian and hierarchical manner, and have been recentralised by national/central frameworks, standards and guidelines. The variation is that, in Singapore and Shanghai, acknowledged as ‘authoritarian states’, reforms have been compulsorily introduced with little resistance from the ‘bottom’. In contrast, education policies in the colonial Hong Kong were formulated symbolically and adopted voluntarily. After the handover, the non-transparent and undemocratic political system has increasingly disaffected the public; and education policy has been compulsorily implemented which has caused some tensions between major SSBs and the SAR Government.

By contrast, in England, greater autonomy for all schools, associated with a number of reforms aimed at promoting school competition, the diversity of education provision and parental choice, has been and continues to be advocated by politicians of all persuasions (Higham & Earley, 2013). Significant policy initiatives include the 1988 Education Reform Act under the Conservative leadership; the introduction of Academies during the New Labour years; and, the expansion of Academies and Free Schools by the Coalition Government. Over the last three decades, successive Governments have consistently accumulated the power of the state, ‘liberated’ schools from local authorities in the name of removing bureaucracy and promoted new types of highly autonomous schools. Moreover, as Glatter (2012) observes, each of these Governments seems to have

gone further down the route of school autonomy, or more general ‘free market (neo-liberal) thinking’, than its predecessor (also see Hatcher, 2010). It is in the context of this wholesale belief in the self-evident benefits of school autonomy that English policy-makers have sought external justification for their reforms. East Asia has provided a convenient, if not wholly accurate, source of external referencing.

As elaborated in the literature review chapter, the promotion of school autonomy has globally operated in parallel with the promotion of school accountability. Comprehensive accountability systems introduced in all four societies have ensured that decision-making at the school level is in conformity with national/central frameworks and policies. However, their rationales and forms differ significantly from each other. In England, school accountability is designed to make information and data about schools publicly available, assist parents to make choices and encourage competition between schools (DfE, 2010). As Ehren et al. (2015) observe, England’s accountability system has moved away from “relying on schools’ self-evaluations to inform inspection assessments” to “relying on student achievement data” (p. 377). Meanwhile, external inspection is undertaken to grade, rank, categorise and label schools⁴⁴ in order to close or sanction poor performers (Morris & Han, 2015, July 10). As announced by the current Secretary of Education, Vicky Morgan, schools categorised as ‘coasting’ or ‘inadequate’ schools in Ofsted inspection would be forced to turn into Academies (DfE, 2015, June 30).

In contrast to England, in Singapore, the information about school self-evaluation and external review is not made open to the public and formal ranking was abandoned. Schools in Shanghai are required to upload their self-evaluation reports onto schools’ webpages, whereas DEBs would not release schools’ external review reports. There is no official ranking of schools in Shanghai and the title of ‘key school’ was abolished in 1997 at the junior secondary school stage. In Hong Kong, schools are required to make their self-evaluation reports

⁴⁴ Since 2015, schools can be judged as ‘outstanding’, ‘good’, ‘requires improvement’, ‘inadequate’ and ‘coasting’.

online but only encouraged to make external review reports accessible to the public. Schools in Hong Kong with a majority of Band One pupils (i.e. the most academic able pupils) are publicly regarded as Band One schools; however, schools are not officially banded.

Rather than closing, sanctioning or converting schools, school accountability frameworks adopted by East Asian systems emphasise self-management and improvement, and the delivery of centrally-determined education goals and values. In particular, the accountability mechanisms in Hong Kong, such as the Basic Competency and Territory-wide System Assessments, are meant to inform policy. In all three systems, self-evaluation has been recentralised and standardised by education departments through prescribing the targets, domains, standards / criteria / performance indicators (Tan, 2013; Ng, 2008; Law, 2007). It is noteworthy that no schools in all three East Asian societies have been given more autonomy because of their poor performance. In this sense, the policy that converts ‘coasting’ and ‘inadequate’ schools to academies in England is observably contradicted to that of autonomous and independent schools in Singapore.

Overall, the reforms of school autonomy in England and the three East Asian societies have involved different proportions of schools, adopted different approaches and served different functions. These variations have been strengthened by the promotion of marketisation and school accountability. The concept of ‘school autonomy’ has been reconstructed, incorporated or re-contextualised, and reconceptualised to both reflect and advance the prevailing values/ideology, or as Schriewer and Martinez (2004) term it, the ‘socio-logic’, which has driven policy in each of the domestic contexts. In addition, drawing on the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ governance in terms of school accountability proposed by Ehren et al. (2015), England and East Asia seem to have adopted completely different approaches to evaluate schools and guarantee education quality.

8.4. Externalisation, convergence and policy referencing

Thus far, I have compared the nature and degree of school autonomy and the

reforms of school autonomy in the four societies. In the light of the literature review, this section particularly focuses on references to East Asia in England and the implications of this ‘externalisation’.

As reviewed in Chapter Four, school autonomy has been promoted in England since the 1980s, which has led to significant changes in the way that schools have been funded, governed and managed. Nevertheless, the reforms designed to promote school autonomy have remained intensely controversial, mainly on the issues of pupil attainment, social equality, democracy and privatisation (Eurydice, 2007a; Glatter, 2012). During the 2000s, such reforms were legitimated by both national (e.g. City Technology Colleges and Academies) and foreign (e.g. Charter Schools in the US and Free Schools in Sweden) exemplars. However, negative results of external evaluations, in particular PISA, seemed to discredit the New Labour Government’s education policies and accordingly England’s old references mentioned above. The 2008 economic crisis verified and heightened this discourse of failure in terms of education quality (Forestier & Crossley, 2014). When the Coalition Government took power, the policy agenda of further promoting school autonomy called for new role models. East Asia has stood out where England has ended up in failure, and thus been reconstituted as a source of solutions to England’s education ‘crisis’.

As discussed in the literature review, ‘world-class’ models / international standards have become the key ‘external point of reference’. As Waldow (2012) comments, “Finland would hardly have achieved the status of an educational utopia... if not for the OECD PISA study and the league tables generated from it” (p. 415). This seems also apply to East Asia. As Sellar and Lingard (2013a) argue, PISA has strengthened the global trend of ‘looking East’ as a form of ‘externalisation’ of national reform agendas. OECD (2013) self-portrays its role as “identifying the characteristics of high performing education systems” and allowing “governments and educators to identify effective policies that they can then adapt to their local contexts” (p. 12). It seems to be disinterested and de-contextualised, and therefore universal and objective. However, Auld and Morris (2014) argue that “the ‘what works’ rhetoric, far from being non-ideological, channels research into a

narrow vortex of ‘what matters’ on policy-makers’ terms” (p. 155). This can also be seen in this study: the global policy network of knowledge brokers, including the OECD, Policy Exchange and McKinsey, has served as a vehicle of policy in the management of evidence.

Many studies, as noted in the literature review (e.g. Schriewer, 2000; Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Steiner-Khamisi, 2004), have identified the gap between policy rhetoric and policy practice in the process of EPB, and the transformation of the ‘borrowed’ policy because of re-contextualisation. As demonstrated in this study, the gap and process of transformation are also evident in the construction and interpretation of ‘reference societies’. Through the filtration and selection of external evidence, an imagined East Asia has been developed and whether its images actually reflect anything ‘real’ is beside the point. As Waldow (2012) argues, “the model is in the eye of the beholder” (p. 417). What matters is that the symbolic power associated with this ‘social imaginary’ of high-performing education systems has legitimated England’s long perceived policy agendas. In this case, it would be more accurate to say that ‘borrowing’ from East Asia does not take place in England; East Asia has only been referenced discursively and superficially. Therefore, ‘policy referencing’ does not necessarily result from ‘policy learning’ and result in ‘policy borrowing’.

In the literature review, I noted that world culture theorists have recently employed the concept ‘loose coupling’ to explain the undeniable and profound differences across nations of education systems and refine the assumption of worldwide convergence through emphasising a specific set of education reform perspectives. Green and his colleagues investigated education development and globalisation in a group of eastern and western countries from the 1980s to 2000s (Green, 1999; Janmaat, Duru-Bellat, Green & M éhaut, 2013). They illustrate that whilst policy rhetoric and general policy objectives have tended to converge, very limited evidence of *de facto* convergence can be identified at the level of structures and processes. This is similar to what has been found in this study. As demonstrated above, although substantive reforms have been pursued under the common mantra of enhancing school autonomy (or education decentralisation), the rationale, scope,

form and nature of the formulation and implementation of policies in England and different East Asian societies have both varied markedly, and been specifically defined by their socio-political contexts.

Furthermore, these variations are not merely a function of implementation issues or local variants on a common theme; as shown above, the nature, purpose and conceptualisations of ‘school autonomy’ are also fundamentally different in each of the contexts that have been studied. This has brought about a significant gap between the English representation and the ‘reality’ of East Asian education systems, which will neither result in England’s following a direction of reform similar to that adopted by ‘world-class’ models, nor lead to education convergence between England and East Asia towards international standards. However, this may not be a major concern, as ‘world-class’ models and international standards are, as has been demonstrated above, diverse in their own practices. Besides, as Steiner-Khamsi (2014) argues, there is no agreement what they actually mean. In sum, the UK Government seems to have created a ‘myth’ to mobilise the public’s belief and obtain their support for reforms; that is, by ‘borrowing’ selected and distorted features of imagined ‘world-class’ models, England can improve its education system to ‘world-class’.

8.5. East Asia as a source of policy referencing in the West

Four societies involved in this study are often seen as paradigmatically ‘East’ and ‘West’. Chapter Four has investigated the response to East Asia’s educational success in different western countries. Primarily drawing on the works of Said and Bhabha reviewed in the literature review, this section discusses the ‘utopian’ and ‘dystopian’ images of East Asian education and the power/knowledge relationship embedded, which further explores the essence of ‘East-to-West’ EPB. It is noteworthy here that, the following discussion specifically focuses on the ‘East/West’ dichotomisation which has emerged in the global discourse of EPB. As was shown earlier, English policy-makers often reference to East Asia as their inspiration for reform. In addition, in comparison with Said’s Orientalism, the

portrayal of the ‘East’ seems to have developed new and generally more positive features in recent years. Therefore, the terms ‘East’ and ‘West’, albeit problematic, are retained. However, as argued above, there are significant variations among East Asian societies and the ‘East’ cannot be simply homogenised as an identical referencing unit.

‘Utopia’/‘dystopia’; competitor and threat

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, contrary to Said’s ‘Orientalism’, there has emerged a reverse description of the ‘East’ as an advanced, developed and desirable model – a ‘utopia’ of education – in England, the US and Australia, which has provided ‘what is wanted’ and justified reform initiatives to improve their own education systems. In contrast, the stereotypical images of ‘dystopian’ East Asian education systems have been retained in Germany and accordingly used to demonstrate ‘what is not wanted’. Notwithstanding different ‘social imaginaries’, western countries studied have shared the dichotomisation of ‘East/West’ or, more precisely, the tradition of ‘Orientalising’ the ‘East’ as the ‘other’ (Said, 2003).

Meanwhile, as examined earlier, these western countries commonly see East Asia as the main competitor in the global economic race. The associated anxiety and fear can be partly explained in the light of Bhabha’s (1994) concept ‘ambivalence’. According to him, the coloniser has never ceased to be anxious about its capacity to maintain the colonial authority. In the case of East Asia, the term ‘yellow peril’, coined in the late 19th century, is one of the oldest and most persuasive phrases in the western tradition. As Marchetti (1994) defines, it “combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East” (p. 2). Tchen and Yeats (2014) emphasise that, rather than “misinformation” of and a “figment of an overactive imagination”, it is,

“... a structured tradition of concepts and practices hard-wired into the political culture of Western enlightenment modernity itself. Globalised especially by British and Anglo American expansionism, its patterning is a relational and

recurrent process of identity formation and disidentification.” (p. 357)

A good example reflecting the British fear of China was the creation and popularisation of a fictional character ‘Dr. Fu Manchu’ for a period of over 70 years from the 1910s. He was featured as an evil criminal genius and his criminal activities included drug trading and white slavery (Frayling, 2014). Facing the emerging ‘Asian Century’, the ‘Fu Manchu’ syndrome seems to have continued to date. For example, as Peerenboom (2008) points out, China is sometimes assumed to be “a brutal, anachronistic and authoritarian regime, a threat to geo-stability and to the economies of the industrial world” (p. 2). In the recent trend of ‘East-to-West’ EPB, the ‘Orientalised East’ described by Said as ‘childish, feminine, undeveloped and inferior’ has no long prevailed in the West. Instead, as Rizvi (2014, October 28) argues, some aspects of the old Asian culture, such as hard working, discipline, collectivism and strategic intelligence, have deemed to be attributable to its achievements in education and competitiveness in economy, which worries the ‘West’.

Perhaps, for those aforementioned western countries, the acknowledgement that East Asia has ‘beaten’ them has not just hastened the worries of being left behind, but also eroded their sense of-superiority. This appears to be similar to what Rappleye (2007) observes: in the 1970s and 1980s, Japan, as an IEA star and economic juggernaut, was viewed by the US as a model worthy of emulating and a challenge that needed to be confronted. In facing a loss of supremacy, Germany has held its strong beliefs in the excellent European representative – Finland (Takayama et al., 2013). Anglo-Saxon countries have expressed their disappointment and shock about their poor performance compared to the ‘East’, because, as the title of Friedman and Mandelbaum’s (2011) books suggests⁴⁵, *That Used to be Us*. Further, the sense of superiority vis-à-vis the ‘East’ that is embodied in the culture identity of the West seems to have been used to manipulate the public’s emotions in debates about education performance and reform.

⁴⁵ This book asserts that unless the US recognises the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, it will fall behind in the competition with East Asia.

Imagining the ‘other’: the production of knowledge about East Asian education

Said (2003) argues that “the Orientalist, poet or scholar... makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West” (pp. 20-21) and through which the ‘West’ restructures and maintains its political, intellectual, cultural and moral power over the ‘East’. As discussed in the literature review, instead of individuals, the knowledge of ‘what works’ in ‘world-class’ education systems generally and East Asian education systems specifically has been increasingly provided by the global policy network.

In an analogy to “missionaries of our time”, Barnett and Finnemore (1999) argue that various international organisations are not impersonal systems or structures, but rather as “purposive actors” (Grek, 2009, p. 24), “armed with a notion of progress, an idea of how to create a better life, and some understanding of the conversion process” (p. 712). Some of them play a role as the ‘lender’ of education policies, programmes and institutions, both conceptually and financially, through their loan conditions and policies (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). Among them, the OECD has become one of the most powerful and influential ‘missionaries’ and ‘lenders’ in England and many other countries. It has increasingly impacted on national education governance through a series of league tables; through its indicator projects collaborated with World Bank and UNESCO; and through its national and thematic policy reviews (Lingard & Grek 2007; McGann, 2008; Grek, 2009).

Dating back to the 1960s, 18 European countries plus the USA and Canada found the OECD in order to provide a platform for seeking answers to common economic problems and coordinate transnationally. The post-war period witnessed an expansion of the membership to include Eastern Europe; and co-operation with non-member economies and civil society organisations. As Sellar and Lingard (2013b) argue, this process can also be seen as a promotion of “the emergent hegemony of neoliberalism and a global capitalist economy” (p. 715). Currently, the OECD has 34 member economies that commit to liberal democracy, human

rights and market economies; most of them are high-incoming western economies with high levels on human development index and a Christian religious background. Carroll and Kellow (2011) argue that the OECD is characterised by an intergovernmental structure, which enables it to exert soft power through developing an ‘epistemic community’ of politicians, bureaucrats and policy experts in member economies.

Among all the policy-oriented works of the OECD, PISA has been accepted as the major tool providing reliable and robust statistical data and analysis of education and economic performance in national settings (Grek, 2008). As announced on the OECD website, there will be more than 70 participants in PISA 2015. The design, implementation and data analysis of PISA are delegated to an international consortium of research and educational institutions led by the Australian Council for Educational Research. Alongside the release of PISA results, the OECD also publishes a series of context questionnaires and reports in which features of ‘world-class’ education systems, including East Asia, are identified and elaborated. These outcomes aim to help the OECD economies better locate their education development, support or criticise existing education policies, improve their education systems and, consequently, succeed in global socio-economic competition – ‘beating’ East Asia. In essence, East Asian education systems are instrumentally reduced to a set of core features which can help the ‘West’ regain its authority/superiority and ‘surpass’ the ‘East’.

However, as argued in this study, the extent to which these features reflect the ‘reality’ of East Asia education system can be highly questioned. The western-centred policy network has defined the criteria and measurement of ‘world-class’, ranked education systems, and explained the factors attributable to high performance. Through working closely with national policy-makers, this set of ‘world-class’ knowledge has gained superiority to other narratives. Even in the academia, Takayama (2011) criticises that academic knowledge production has been predominated by “near one-directional flow of intellectual influence from the western metropolises to ‘other’ peripheries, or the ‘world system’ of academic knowledge” (p. 450). The power/knowledge relationship underlying and

maintaining Said's 'Orientalism' seems to have continued to characterise 'East-to-West' EPB. The 'reality' of East Asia largely depends on how it is social-imaginarily represented, especially by the powerful West. In this sense, 'East-to-West' EPB is discursive and imagined.

Notwithstanding, as Buruma and Margalit (2004) argue, the stereotyped 'dehumanising' images of the 'West', conceptualised as 'Occidentalism', have also long been painted by Asians and other non-westerners. The rhetoric of 'global competition' and an associated anxiety about 'lagging behind', intensified by the memory of colonisation and imperial wars, has dominated the discourse of national development in East Asian societies as well. Key policy documents in Hong Kong (e.g. *Learning to Learn*, 2000), Singapore (e.g. *Teach Less Learn More*, 2004) and China (e.g. the *2010-2020 National Outline*, 2010) have highlighted that the main task of their education systems is cultivating more and better talents to enable them to succeed in global markets and outperform their competitors. In particular, China's national achievements in the competition with advanced western countries in various fields have been politically interpreted as the defeat of the West, which wipes out of the hundred years of humiliation imposed by the western imperialists and demonstrates the power of China and its people.

Overall, the 'East' is 'Orientalised' as the 'other' opposed to the 'West'. Unlike its old face as described by Said, in some western countries, East Asia has been portrayed as possessing the world's best education systems. Recognised as a competitor and threat, high-performing East Asia appears to have generated challenge and anxiety/fear. In the globalisation context, a western-centred network dominates which represents East Asia to other nations; in this sense, there seems no genuine 'East-to-West' EPB. Nevertheless, English policy-makers still attempt to gain legitimacy for their policy agendas through mythologising that, by emulating this represented model, the unsatisfactory English education system can compete successfully against East Asia in the global market.

8.6. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated and explained the gap between the English representation of school autonomy in East Asian education systems and the ‘reality’ perceived domestically. Overall, the level of school autonomy in England is much higher than that in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai; and in these four societies, school autonomy granted to different groups of schools serves different functions. It has also compared the models of school autonomy in the three East Asian societies, and demonstrated that there are significant variations within this imagined homogeneous ‘reference society’. So far, all the research questions have been addressed.

On this basis, this study has argued that the degree and nature of school autonomy and the rationale, scope, form and nature of reforms of school autonomy are essentially varied and determined by the prevailing socio-political priorities in each context. More specifically, in Hong Kong, school autonomy has been used to strengthen the role of elite/fee-paying schools; in Singapore, it was used to reinforce meritocracy by providing greater autonomy to those schools catering for the academically most able pupils; and, in Shanghai, the priority was to devolve fiscal responsibility from the central to the local. In marked contrast: autonomy in England was driven by a Libertarian desire to reduce the role of the state and to encourage diversity and competition amongst and between all schools. As Gibb (2014) explained, the reforms designed to increase autonomy “reaffirmed” his belief that “good government does not improve public services. It enables public services to improve themselves”.

Rather than engaging in policy *borrowing*, the UK Government has selectively *referenced* policies in East Asia in an attempt to legitimate its long preferred policy agendas. In this case, global education convergence, or ‘international standards’ and ‘world-class’ models, merely exists at the rhetorical level. Put different, the four societies studied have gone down divergent routes to a generic theme which has been reconceptualised to respectively fit their own ‘socio-logic’. ‘Looking-East’ for ‘international standards’ and ‘world-class’ models, which has appeared as a reverse

form of EPB, does not necessarily lead to a better western understanding of the 'East'. In fact, the knowledge of East Asian education systems has been manipulated by a western-centred global policy network, which does not result in education policy following the flow of 'East-to-West'. In short, 'East-to-West' EPB is discursive and imagined. The representation, as a social-imaginary, seems to overwhelm the 'reality' and is politically used to gain the public's support for preferred education reforms.

One continuing concern in comparative education is 'whether a country can learn from other countries' experience'. Perhaps answering this significant question should be on the premise of clarifying 'does a country really want to learn from elsewhere'.

Appendix 1. Conceptual framework for school autonomy - grading benchmarks

Organisation and governance

Area of school management	Degree of school autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operation – strong control (1)	Operation – weak control (2)	Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Organisation structure and functions	Determine by a high authority; schools cannot make any changes	Structure is determined by a higher authority; schools may prescribe functions of departments, approved by a higher authority	Structure is determined by a higher authority; schools may prescribe functions of departments in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Governance mechanism	Governed by a higher authority	Governance framework is determined by a higher authority; schools are responsible for daily operation,	Governance framework is determined by a higher authority; schools are responsible for daily operation in	School self-governance, but key decisions need to be approved by a higher authority	School self-governance in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely school self-governance

		approved by a higher authority	compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority			
Types of schools	Determined by a higher authority	Determined by a higher authority; schools can convert, approved by a higher	Determined by a higher authority; schools can convert in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools

Finance

Area	Degrees of autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operation – strong control (1)	Operation – weak control (2)	Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Source(s) of funding	Only funded by the government	Funded by the government; schools can receive other funding, approved by a higher authority	Funded by the government; schools can receive other funding in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools

Expenditure	Determined and managed by a higher authority	Determined by a higher authority; schools are responsible for daily expenditure, approved by a higher authority	Determined by a higher authority; schools are responsible for daily expenditure in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined and managed by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined and managed by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined and managed by schools
Land, buildings and facilities	Provided and maintained by a higher authority	Provided by a higher authority; daily maintained by schools	A higher authority provides land and standard buildings and facilities, but schools can purchase above-standard buildings and facilities with their own budgets; maintained by schools	Purchased and maintained by schools, but need to be approved	Purchased and maintained by schools in compliance with guidelines	Freely purchased and maintained by schools
Financial report and its availability	Written by a higher authority; (Not) released by a higher authority	The report is written by schools according to prescriptive format and audited by a	The report is written by schools and audited by a higher authority; the availability of the report is suggested	The report is written by schools and submitted to a higher authority	The report is written by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely (not) written/released by schools

		higher authority; the availability of the report is determined by a higher authority	by a higher authority			
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Curriculum, teaching and examinations

Area	Degree of autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operational – strong control (1)	Operational – weak control (2)	Policy and operational – strong control (3)	Policy and operational – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Textbooks	Determined by a higher authority	Textbooks are determined by a higher authority; deviation needs to be approved	A list of approved textbooks from which schools may choose	Textbooks are determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Textbooks are determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Subjects	Determined by a higher authority	Subjects are determined by a higher authority; deviation needs to be approved	A list of permitted subjects from which schools may choose	Subjects are determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Subjects are determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools freely
Content of subjects and curriculum delivery	The content of subjects and how to deliver them are	The content of subjects is prescribed by a higher authority;	The content of subjects is prescribed by a higher authority;	The content of subjects and how to deliver them are determined by schools, but need to be	The content of subjects and how to deliver them are determined by schools	The content of subjects and how to deliver them are

	prescribed by a higher authority	schools may determine how to deliver them, approved by a higher authority	schools may determine how to deliver them in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	approved by a higher authority	in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	determined by schools freely
School-based curriculum development	No school-based curriculum development	Identical to the national/ mainstream curriculum	Complementary to the national/ mainstream curriculum	Schools create new curricula, but need to be approved issued by a higher authority	Schools create new curricula in compliance with guidelines	Schools create new curricula freely
Curriculum time allocation	Prescribed for schools by a higher authority	The number of periods for each subject is stipulated; curriculum calendar ⁴⁶ is made by schools, approved by a higher authority	The number of periods for each subject is stipulated; curriculum calendar is made by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	The number of periods for each subject is determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	The number of periods for each subject is determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
School calendar (terms and	Determined by a higher authority	School terms and days are stipulated by a	School terms and days are stipulated by a higher	Both school terms and days are determined by schools, but need to be	Both school terms and days are determined by schools, in	Determined by schools freely

⁴⁶ Curriculum calendar means the arrangement of periods for subjects.

days)		higher authority; school calendar ⁴⁷ is made by schools, approved by a higher authority	authority; school calendar is made by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	approved by a higher authority	compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	
Entrance exams	Centrally designed and organised by a higher authority	Exams are centrally designed by a higher authority but organised by schools, monitored by a higher authority	Exams are centrally designed by a higher authority but organised by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Exams are designed and organised by schools, monitored by a higher authority	Exams are designed and organised by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely designed and organised by schools

Teachers

Area	Degree of autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operation – strong control (1)	Operation – weak control (2)	Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Qualification and training	A teaching certificate and teacher training are compulsory;	A teaching certificate and teacher training are compulsory; teacher	A teaching certificate is compulsory, but can be issued without	Qualification requirements are determined by schools, but need to	Qualification requirements are determined by schools, in	Qualification requirements are determined by schools

⁴⁷ School calendar means the weekly and annual arrangement of lessons and activities.

	teacher training is centrally provided	training is not centrally provided	training	be approved a higher authority	compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	freely
Appointment and dismissal	Selected, appointed and dismissed by a higher authority	Contract is signed with and terminated by a higher authority; schools may selected qualified candidates, approved by a higher authority	Contract is signed with and terminated by a higher authority; schools may selected qualified candidates, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Selected, appointed and dismissed by schools freely
Continuing professional development	Continuing professional development is compulsory; training courses are provided by a higher authority	Continuing professional development is compulsory; a list of recognised training courses are provided from which teachers and schools may choose	Continuing professional development is compulsory; teachers and schools may choose training courses in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	The requirements for continuing professional development and training courses are determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	The requirements for continuing professional development and training courses are determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	The requirements for continuing professional development and training courses are determined by schools freely
Appraisal	Designed and conducted by a	Appraisal is designed by a higher	Appraisal is designed by a higher	Appraisal is designed and	Appraisal is designed and	Freely designed and

	higher authority	authority, school-based evaluation is validated by a higher authority	authority, school-based evaluation is conducted in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	conducted by schools, but need to be validated by a higher authority	conducted by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	conducted by schools
Promotion	Determined by a higher authority	Criteria for promotion is determined by a higher authority; schools may propose the promotion list, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Criteria for promotion is determined by a higher authority; schools may propose the promotion list in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Promotion is determined by schools, but need to be validated by a higher authority	Promotion is determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Pay (salary and bonuses)	Determined by a higher authority	Salary scale is determined by a higher authority; schools may determine bonuses, approved by a higher authority	Salary scale is determined by a higher authority; schools may determine bonuses, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Legal status	Teachers are	Teachers are not	Teachers are not	Terms and	Terms and	Teachers are

	civil servants	civil servants, but they are subject to civil servants' terms and conditions	civil servants, but they are subject to civil servants' conditions (or terms)	conditions for teachers are determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	conditions for teachers are determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	private employees, schools are free to determine terms and conditions
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Accountability

Area	Degree of autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operation – strong control (1)	Operation – weak control (2)	Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Goals and standards	Determined by a higher authority	Overall goals and standards prescribed by a higher authority; schools set their own goals and standards, approved by a higher authority	Overall goals and standards prescribed by a higher authority; schools set their own goals and standards in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Evaluation and inspection	Evaluated and inspected by a higher authority	The system is designed by a higher authority; schools	The system is designed by a higher authority; schools	Evaluated by schools, but need to be validated by a	Evaluated by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by	Freely evaluated by schools

		conduct self-evaluation which is validated by a higher authority	conduct self-evaluation in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	higher authority	a higher authority	
Annual report	Written by a higher authority	The format is stipulated by a higher authority; the report is written by schools and scrutinised by a higher authority	The format is stipulated by a higher authority; the report is written by schools	Schools determine the format and write the report, but need to be scrutinised by a higher authority	Schools determine the format and write the report, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Schools freely determine the format
Availability of information	(Not) released by a higher authority	What to be made available to whom are determined by a higher authority; schools can determine how and where to release that information, approved by a higher authority	What to be made available to whom are determined by a higher authority; schools can determine how and where to release that information, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by schools	Determined by schools in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	(Not) released by a higher authority

Pupil admission and external relations

Area	Degree of autonomy					
	No autonomy (0)	Operation – strong control (1)	Operation – weak control (2)	Policy and operation – strong control (3)	Policy and operation – weak control (4)	Full autonomy (5)
Pupil admission	Pupils are centrally allocated by a higher authority	A central allocation system is determined by a higher authority; within this system, schools are allowed to admit a small proportion of pupils based on their own discretion, but need to be approved by a higher authority	A central allocation system is determined by a higher authority; within this system, schools are allowed to admit a small proportion of pupils based on their own discretion in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Schools determine student admission, but needs to be approved by a higher authority	Schools determine student admission, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Schools freely admit pupils
Relationships with other schools and businesses	Determined by a higher authority	A series of programmes provided by a higher authority through which schools may set up relationships with other schools and business	A list of schools and businesses provided by a higher authority from which schools may choose	Determined by schools, but need to be approved by a higher authority	Determined by schools, in compliance with guidelines issued by a higher authority	Freely determined by schools
Level of parents’	No involvement	Low involvement, schools can only	Schools can invite parents’ to	Schools can involve parents in school	Schools can be run by parents	Schools can be set up by

involvement		inform parents of pupils' performance	participate in school activities and events	management		parents
Relationship with mass media (or interview requests in general)	Not allowed	Who teachers and principals can talk to and what topic they can talk about are stipulated, approved and supervised by a higher authority	Who teachers and principals can talk to and what topic they can talk about are stipulated by a higher authority	Determined by schools, but the policies need to be approved	Determined by schools in compliance with regulations	Freely determined by schools

Appendix 2. List of key interview questions

School task area	Interview question(s)
Textbooks	Who decide which textbooks are used in your school?
Subjects	Can school make the decision about which subjects should be taught? How about the allocation of curriculum time for each subject?
Timetable	Who make the timetable about the beginning and ending of school terms and days and the timing for school events and examinations?
Content	How do teachers in your school plan and deliver their lessons? Is there any guide that they should follow or reference to?
School-based curriculum	Does your school have school-based curriculum? Who design it? How is school-based curriculum delivered and evaluated? How much time is allocated to school-based curriculum?
Exams	What are the exams that your pupils sit for? Who design and organise those exams?
Qualification of staff	What are the requirements of becoming a teacher? (Is teaching certificate compulsory for entering teaching profession?) Who determine these requirements?
In-service training	Is in-service training compulsory for teachers? Who decide the time, form and content of training? Who provide training courses?
Appointment and dismissal	Who select teachers for your school? Who sign contract with teachers? If a teacher is not suitable for his/her position, can school terminate the contact?
Appraisal	Who appraise teachers? What are the criteria and who design the criteria? Can school promote/reward high-performing teachers?
Structure of school	What is the organisational structure in your school? Who make the decision over that?
Differentiation (streaming and setting)	What is the type of your school? Can school convert to another type of school?
Decision-making structure	Who make the decision over school management? Who is in charge of school daily operation?
Source of finances	What are the sources of funding?
Management of finances	How does your school manage the funding?
Responsibility for buildings and facilities	Who provide land, buildings and facilities? Who is responsible for daily maintenance?
Information system	What and where the information about school is released to the public? Who decide that?

Salary of staff	Who decide teachers' salary?
Legal status of staff	Whether teachers are civil servants?
Recruitment of pupils	How does your school recruit pupils?
Competition between schools	How do you describe the competition between your school and other schools?
Relationship with other schools and business	Can you establish partnership with other schools and business? Do you need to ask for permission from higher authorities?
Parental involvement	Can parents involve in school management and activities?
Goals and standards	What are the mission, ethos and goals of your school? Who decide them?
Evaluation	How is your school evaluated? What are the domains and criteria evaluated? Who is responsible for determining the criteria
Availability of evaluation results	What the information from evaluations is made available to the public by whom (schools or inspection authorities)?

Appendix 3. List of interviewees

Name	Society	Description
C	Hong Kong	Principal of an aided school managed by a large sponsoring body.
P	Hong Kong	Principal of an ordinary DSS school managed by a large sponsoring body. Before that, he was a principal of an aided school for several years.
F	Hong Kong	Scholar from a Hong Kong university, who is specialist in school management, leadership and accountability.
R	Hong Kong	Scholar from a Hong Kong university, who is specialist in education policy, school management and parental involvement in school education.
H	Hong Kong	Recently retired principal of an aided school, currently teaching school leadership in a Hong Kong university.
K	Hong Kong	Experienced education journalist, who has been living and working in Hong Kong for more than 20 years.
Q	Hong Kong	Principal of an aided school managed by a small sponsoring body.
A	Hong Kong	Scholar from a Hong Kong university, who is specialist in curriculum studies and comparative education
Z	Hong Kong	Principal of a recently-converted DSS school managed by a large sponsoring body; the school used to be an aided school
B	Hong Kong	Recently retired principal of an aided school, currently teaching school leadership and management in a Hong Kong university.
X	Hong Kong	Scholar from a Hong Kong university, who is specialist in school management, leadership and team work
W	Singapore	Policy-maker
L	Singapore	Vice principal of a government school
J	Singapore	Scholar from a Singapore university, who is specialist in school management, leadership and policy studies
G	Singapore	Scholar from a Singapore university, who is specialist in school management and accountability
M	Singapore	Scholar used to work in a Singapore university and recently re-located, who is specialist in teacher education and school leadership
S	Singapore	Scholar from a Singapore university, who is specialist in education and development, teacher education and policy studies
Y	Shanghai	Scholar from a Chinese university, who is specialist in education policy and change and curriculum studies
O	Shanghai	Principal of a prestigious government school

E	Shanghai	Head of department of a bureau-sponsored people-run school
U	Shanghai	Principal of a government school with specialist
N	Shanghai	Principal of a government school with specialist
I	Shanghai	Principal of a low-performing government school
V	Shanghai	Scholar from a Chinese university, who is specialist in school management, leadership and accountability
D	Shanghai	Vice-principal of a prestigious government school
T	Shanghai	Recently retired vice-principal of a prestigious government school with specialist

Appendix 4. Information sheet



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Imagining school autonomy in high-performing educational systems: East Asia as a source of policy referencing in England

Researcher: Yun You

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Yun You. I am doing my PhD research at the Institute of Education, University of London. This information sheet tells you about my research. If you have any questions about the research before, during or after taking part please contact me on: yyou@ioe.ac.uk

What is the research about?

This research focuses on educational policy borrowing from East Asia to England. During recent decades, education systems in East Asian societies, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, China and South Korea, have been described as the best education systems in the world and cited as the ‘inspiration’ for education reforms in England, due to their students’ high performance in a series of international examinations such as PISA and TIMSS. Based on the key features of East Asian education systems identified by the UK government, the reforms of school governance were proposed in the 2010 UK White Paper. The main concern of my research is to determine whether the key features of East Asian education systems identified by the UK government accord with those identified within East Asia. Therefore, I would like to seek your understanding/perception of the school governance in East Asia based on your background.

Who will be in the research?

I would like to interview junior secondary school principals from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore, and scholars who are familiar with the education systems in East Asia.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you would like to take part in the research you will attend one interview by yourself which will last about one hour. This will take part in the school or any place you prefer. In the interview I will ask you questions on topics such as curriculum, teaching, teacher qualification and examination. The interviewer will be myself and it will be voice recorded.

Will my participation be confidential?

The only people who will have direct access to your name and your information will be myself. In line with the Institute of Education, University of London ethics policy, all the information you give me and your name will remain confidential to all other people. The information will be stored on password protected computers and in any written or verbal presentation of the research your name and school/group name will remain anonymous.

What happens if I change my mind?

If you change your mind about participating in the research you have the right to stop and withdraw from the research at any point.

Could there be problems for you if you take part?

I do not expect you to have any problems if you take part. There may be some topics you do not want to discuss and that is fine. If you have any problems with my research, please call me or email me immediately.

What will happen after the interview?

If you are interested, I would like to send you the interview record and final findings when I finish my thesis.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Yun You

Email: yyou@ioe.ac.uk

Address: 20 Bedford Way, London, UK, WC1H 0AL

Mobile: xxxxx

Department of Lifelong and Comparative Education

Faculty of Policy and Society

Institute of Education, University of London

This research is supervised by Professor Paul Morris

Email: P.Morris@ioe.ac.uk

Appendix 5. Consent form



**Leading education
and social research**
Institute of Education
University of London

CONSENT FORM

Study title: Imagining school autonomy in high-performing educational systems: East Asia as a source of policy referencing in England

Researcher name: Yun You
Department of Lifelong and Comparative Education
Faculty of Policy and Society
Email: yyou@ioe.ac.uk
Mobile: (44)7412353280/(86)13810493012

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to be interviewed and agree for the data to be used for the purpose of this study

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I could withdraw from the research at any time without my legal rights being affected.

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name)..... (Signature).....

Date.....

Name of researcher (print name)..... (Signature).....

Date.....

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