

*The Statecraft of Promoting Community-Wide Civic Education in Hong Kong**

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Abstract

The state plays a vital role in shaping the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens in the realm of civic education. Since the early 1980s, the significant political changes associated with decolonization and retrocession have transformed the landscape of civic education. Differences over a shared sense of citizenship, and how this should be represented in education, have been prominent in discussions of the Hong Kong community over the years. The task of community civic education in Hong Kong largely rests with the Home Affairs Bureau and its advisory body, CPCE—a committee established in 1986 for advices and implementing activities outside schools in conjunction with the Government and concerned community organizations. However, the Government has attempted to manipulate and steer the Committee's work through its terms of reference, its organizational restructuring, its activities, its funding support, and the appointment of members. As a result, the Committee has been constrained by its composition, powers, and

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functions, and these have impaired its role as an advocate for civic education. This article ends with a discussion of the conditions, constraints, and strategies of the state in exercising hegemony.

People in a political community have to learn the basic orientations of their membership, including knowledge, values, norms, and feelings. Such political socialization, through both formal and informal education, is used in modern states for the purposes of social control, political mobilization, and political propaganda. Many educators and government officials recognize the significance of formal schooling in inculcating and perpetuating particular political ideologies in the minds of citizens, often via civic education. Conventional schooling aside, voluntary associations and the community are also significant sources and agents of political learning.¹

The state and civil society are mutually constitutive, and state policies strongly shape civil society.² Through legal means and policy instruments, the state creates the institutional framework and the space in which civil society takes shape and operates. Civil society embraces a broad spectrum of organizations, which are of different types, sizes, purposes, and organizational forms.³ These organizations represent and reproduce their own beliefs and values in their activities. Civil society itself is also a contested arena along cultural and political lines, with an intricate interplay of forces and struggles across diverse groups and areas. Accordingly, there are disputed notions of citizenship, in terms of both its meaning and the weight that different groups attach to particular elements or values of citizenship.

French Marxist Louis Althusser argues that the state power exercises its cultural domination over its people in his discussion of “ideological state apparatus.”⁴ The phenomenon of civic education can be further illuminated with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, understood as a form of cultural-political strategy of the dominant groups to maintain control.⁵ This ideological domination rests in the shifting alliances among the various groups led by the state. The state also adopts selective tactics to deal with multiple forces, so as to achieve dominance. These complicated struggles on the cultural terrain, together with the relative autonomy of civil society, influence the dynamics of hegemony.

Important for Hong Kong in transition, civic education is highly sensitive as it is a contested terrain intertwined with ideological and