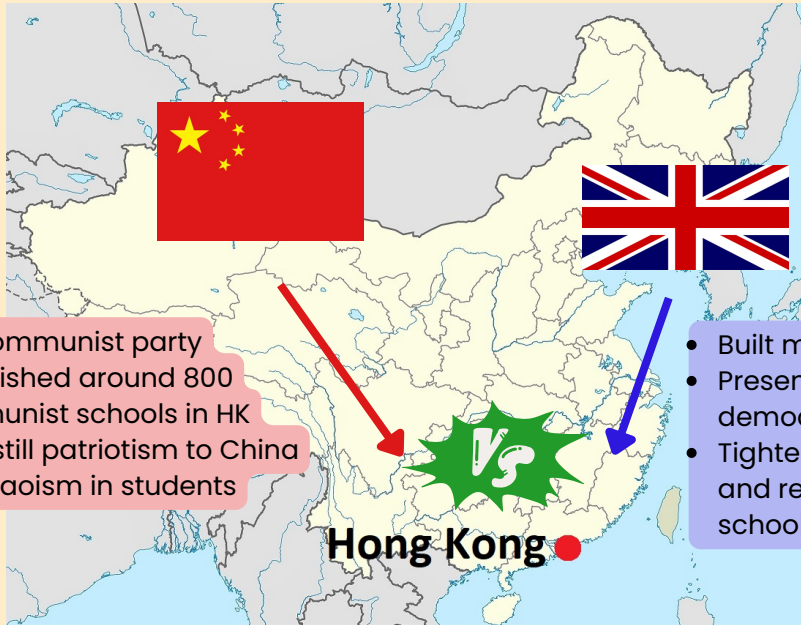


# The Art of Justification: Hong Kong Education 1940s-70s

Research by Angel Sun / Supervised by Professor Anne Gerritsen

## INTRODUCTION

- Cold War
- Hong Kong was a British colony (1841-1997)
- Both communist and capitalist camps sought to expand influence on Hong Kong education



The communist party established around 800 communist schools in HK --> instill patriotism to China and Maoism in students

- Built more public schools
- Presented the benefit of democracy to students
- Tightened inspection and registration of schools

### The British colonial government was caught in a dilemma

Strict investigation and suppression against communist schools would violate the principle of freedom of speech, thus eroding the government's good name of liberty.

**How to suppress the expansion of communist while being democratic?**

## METHODOLOGY

- Study primary sources at the National Archive in London  
eg. government conference minutes, telegram between government officials
- Take existing scholarship articles as reference

## OBJECTIVES

- Close archival research on educational policy in the colonial era
- Study the rhetoric the colonial government used to protect the good name of British democracy
- Generate new possibility in the existing scholarship

## HOW DID THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT JUSTIFY ITS COUNTER-COMMUNIST EDUCATIONAL POLICIES?

### 1 "It benefits all pupils"

#### New subject 'CIVICS'

- Can promote the spirit of selflessness
- Help students practice their rights and duties as a citizen and "an individual"
- Train students in logical and critical thinking

#### Deregistration of Chung Wah Middle School (1967)

- Stressed that the school was de-registered because students made bomb there during the 1967 riot, rather than its communist political leaning

Shifted the focus of the policies from the political motive to their positive impacts on pupils --> less likely to be accused of oppressing the communists and being undemocratic.

"The Governor explained that his policy was to suppress violence, rather than interfere in instruction in Thoughts of Mao."

### 2 "Enough evidence to justify"

#### Closure of Tat Tak Institute (1949)

- Suspected that the Institute was communist
- But did not take action because "the inspectors could not find evidence that communist or other political activities were being carried on"
- Closed the school after 2.5 years because it could obtain enough evidence

#### Deregistration of communist schools' headmasters

- Pui Kiu Middle School & Yu Hua School
- Made sure that it had "positive and directive" evidence before de-registering them

#### Publicity Campaign

- Planned to publicise the poor academic results of communist schools on press
- Called for a halt to the campaign because students' results had improved

"...we could not produce [evidence of subversive activities] and to wait until subversion exposed itself for all to see..."

Demonstrate that the government upheld the rule of law and never suppressed the schools illegally

### 3 "Non-discriminatory"

#### Closure of Chung Wah Middle School (1958)

- Stressed that it was the government's responsibility to protect children
- The police just carried out the court order

#### Registration of a new communist school (1968)

- Allowed registration though it might be communist
- "We cannot reject to reasonably well-conducted schools just because they are communists."

#### Other regulations

- Also regulated textbooks of pro-Kuomintang schools to prove its impartiality
- Slowed down the registration of new communist schools with "legal or administrative delays" so that the government did not appear "blatantly discriminatory"

The impartial attitude of the British government helped it maintain a positive image of fairness, but...

"All the above measures...would be applied to schools generally and without discrimination against communist schools. They would, however, tend to hit communist schools harder than others."

## SUBJECTIVITY

Many clauses of the Education Ordinance were ambiguous and whether a school breached the law largely depended on the subjective judgement of the Director of Education.

For example, the Director could refuse to register a school if "it appears to him that...the proposed manager is not a fit and proper person to act as supervisor" or "such applicant has not established that he is a person of good character."

## CONCLUSION

The British colonial government justified its counter-communist educational policies by arguing that its policies benefited students and they acted legally and impartially. This art of justification is its common practice in different parts of the empire.

Freedom, democracy, and liberty were the sources of British greatness. The rhetoric of extending British standards of justice to the colony could legitimise and rationalise colonial rule.



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