

Neoliberalism in Two Hong Kong School Categories

David Woo
University of Hong Kong

This article examines the link between the governance of Hong Kong's international school and Direct Subsidy Scheme school categories and changes in the broader Hong Kong society through a neoliberal framework. As Hong Kong's economy has grown since the 1997 handover to the People's Republic of China, an increasing number of people have come to Hong Kong. These people bring increased income, they have fewer children and they bring new expectations and practices for education. The government has responded to differentiated demand by developing the international school and Direct Subsidy Scheme school categories. Each has distinctive privatization features to increase inter- and intra-category competition and choice. Greater privatization has raised fears that social mobility for the poor is being stifled and school inequality and malfeasance will grow. It also places new burdens on parents and signals the continued changing relationship between school and society.

Government policy plays a significant role in mediating how education and society shape one another. In the case of Hong Kong, little attention has been paid to how the government mediates this tension between society and the education system. Yet there is a need to explore this mediation through policy because changes in Hong Kong's education system reflect developments in its broader society.

I examine the link between the governance of two school categories in Hong Kong's education system and changes in the broader Hong Kong society. I adopt a neoliberal framework for understanding changes to the Hong Kong socio-economic context and the governance of two Hong Kong school categories. I examine government policy because "the rise of neoliberalism is seemingly rooted in certain governments' policies" (Huang, 2012, p. 40). In the Asia-Pacific region, education systems in Australia and New Zealand have received attention in the literature as targets of neoliberal government reform. Exploring neoliberalism in the Hong Kong education system may yield unique insights because "in different socio-cultural contexts, neoliberalism may have different influences on educational practices" (Huang, 2012, p. 39). This article expands the understanding of neoliberalism in education and schools at societal, institutional and individual levels.

In this article, I first construct an understanding of neoliberalism in education. I then apply a neoliberal framework to a changing Hong Kong socio-economic context and the governance of two categories of Hong Kong schools: international schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools. I conclude with implications of these categorical changes on the Hong Kong education system and society.

Neoliberalism in Education

Neoliberalism is a generic term that assembles economic, social and philosophy theory. It encompasses state minimalism through deregulation and privatization of social services (Lee & Lee, 2013). Its adherents presuppose individuals and organizations act because of their rational self-interest. While marketplace principles such as competition best promote rational self-

interest in political, economic and social decisions (Huang, 2012), state welfare and intervention do not.

Neoliberalism is a phenomenon with practical origins as a governmental response to the 1970s economic climate in the United Kingdom (UK) and in the United States of America (USA). It transcends geographic boundaries, having influenced both northern and southern hemispheres, and western and eastern states. It is a dimension of globalization as it structures local and global relations through economy, comparison and competition.

This belief system leads to a form of state governance. A government aims to extend rational economic thought and systemic competitiveness to all areas of life in a market state, or a competition state, and imagined economy. The state divests responsibility for society's needs and unleashes "the techniques of rationality of business, the commercial, the private, into the public services and operations of the state" (Doherty, 2007, p. 273). In other words, the state enables individuals and organizations to care for themselves through privatization, by granting power to compete and freedom of choice. These affordances change traditional understandings of organizations because "important distinctions between state and market, public and private, government and business, left and right are attenuated" (Ball, 2007, p.8). And these organizations with greater operational freedom in a more competitive, entrepreneurial environment may produce more entrepreneurial, rationally self-interested people who perpetuate neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism creates a specific understanding of education in a state. The state facilitates its education system's transformation into an education services industry. Education and all its aspects become a matter of consumer choice and efficient commodification. Education, its schools and individuals, become products that "can be bought and sold like anything else" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). Therefore, valuation and value creation become paramount at several levels. The education industry must create value for the state economy. Schools as businesses must add value to students. Self-interested individuals must create value for themselves within this context by making rational economic choices. The market, and not the state, improves the education system because competition rewards excellent, efficient and productive individuals and organizations, and not mediocre individuals and organizations.

A particular discourse relating government, society and the individual operationalizes neoliberalism. Doherty (2007) has characterized it as consumerist and commercial. In the education discourse, key words include "freedom, choice, standards, excellence, tradition and parents' rights" (Doherty, p. 276). Ball (2007) has added that this discourse is framed by "an over-bearing, economic and political context of international competitiveness" (p. 2). Ultimately, this discourse perpetuates a belief that neoliberalism is naturally inevitable, morally absolute and desirable (Davies & Bansel, 2007). As these beliefs become more pervasive, so does the perpetuation of this discourse in society.

Criticism of neoliberalism in education stems from what neoliberalism excludes. Huang (2012) has argued that "neoliberalism wages an incessant war on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values" (p. 40). This withdrawing of values or virtue from the social good can be troubling because education aspires no longer to values but to measurable value, for instance, performativity through standardized assessments and qualifications. The immeasurable has no place in a neoliberal education. Huang (2012) has supported this argument by the changing significance of public examinations, which have a long history in Chinese society. The legacy of social prestige from competitive examinations in Chinese society is being replaced by a social

mobility meaning, because “the national examinations are now a critically selective mechanism in the labour market” (Huang, 2012, p. 43). Utility has replaced virtue in scholarship not only in China but in many nations where neoliberalism is pervasive.

In addition, Ball (1990) has argued that neoliberalism is “strongly counterposed to the worth or possibility of equality” (p. 34). Song (2013) has implicated this inequality by neoliberalism in arguing that English-language international schools in South Korea have become institutions to perpetuate social stratification and the elite class. Yet Ball (1990) has also provided a response to such criticism by saying that “inequalities are fair because the market is unprincipled, its effects are unintentional, there is no deliberate bias,” and that ultimately the market “produces a natural economic order and the poorer, the losers in the market, will benefit from the progress of the society as a whole” (p. 39, 37). A danger of such response is the construction of an anthropomorphic *market* by which people can divest themselves of individual responsibility for inequality, bias and principles that impact all. People do not have to be counter-posed to the worth or possibility of equality.

Neoliberalism in the Hong Kong Socio-economic Context

Neoliberalism has long influenced the Hong Kong socio-economic context. Hong Kong’s foundation as an entrepot for the British Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries set a precedent for economic competition and free, globalized flows of goods, services and people in the territory. In more recent years an economic boom in the early 1990s drew more foreigners to Hong Kong. This included Chinese, non-Chinese and pseudo-foreign people who, originally from Hong Kong, had secured foreign passports to hedge themselves from the risk emerging from Hong Kong’s handover to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Bray & Ieong, 1996).

Hong Kong underwent a major political change in 1997 marked by its handover to the PRC. It had been a colony of the British Empire and has become a Special Administration Region (SAR) of the PRC. Hong Kong’s constitutional document has granted the Hong Kong government a high degree of autonomy from the PRC political system. An electoral college selects the head of the Hong Kong government.

Hong Kong has experienced much political stability since the handover and this has led to further socio-economic change. The number of returnees to Hong Kong increased and new global migration patterns emerged. For the past decade, people in Hong Kong have experienced the tension of a steadily growing population and a precipitously declining birth rate. In 2001, the Hong Kong population was 6.7 million, and by mid-2011, the population of Hong Kong was approximately 7.1 million people (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). This steady growth, contrasted with the decreasing percentage of population aged 0-14, implies that adult immigration, as a result of rising economic prosperity in Hong Kong and political reintegration with the PRC, is increasing Hong Kong’s population.

In recent years, neoliberalism may be even more pervasive in Hong Kong society. Hong Kong has become “virtually an open society, exhibiting various religious beliefs, life styles, languages and political ideologies” (Yang, 2012, p. 393). Yang (2012) adds that materialism is pervasive in Hong Kong culture, and per rational-self interest, “people only become interested in things when they can see clearly their benefits from them” (p. 395). Furthermore, institutions and individuals are increasingly subjected to marketplace forces by a prevailing neoliberal discourse of meeting market demand. Employers have made demands over Hong Kong’s various industrial sectors, including housing and education. For instance, Hong Kong companies have expressed dissatisfaction over the quality of Hong Kong university graduates (Yang, 2012). These conditions perpetuate even greater individual and organizational entrepreneurialism, but

at the cost of social cohesion. Following what Davies & Bansel (2007) and Ball (1990) have observed in other socio-cultural contexts, increasingly, individuals and organizations in Hong Kong may only know how to relate to each other through economics.

These socio-economic changes and climate have significant implications for Hong Kong's education system. As foreigners and returnees come to Hong Kong, they bring higher education and income levels, and new expectations and practices for education (Yamato & Bray, 2002). For example, demand for English-language instruction has increased because children of returnees and new immigrants have come from countries where Cantonese, a language commonly spoken in Hong Kong, is neither a medium of instruction in school nor a primary language at home. People have also recognized that employers not only in Hong Kong but around the world seek employees with English language proficiency. Curriculum change has also been warranted because of the global knowledge economy and because children of returnees and new immigrants could likely not cope with the rigors of the mainstream education system (Microsoft Partners in Learning, 2011). Yamato and Bray (2002) and Yung (2006) have observed that a declining group of school-age children has placed both greater competitive pressure on all Hong Kong schools and, in the hands of richer parents who have fewer school age children, even more disposable income for education.

As Hong Kong schools traditionally "are remarkably homogeneous and cannot meet the increasingly diversified needs of parents and their children," and are "highly centralized and controlled," the government has a role in meeting differentiated demand and expanding choice for education (Yung, 2006, p. 96). The government has responded to socio-economic changes by emphasizing diversity in its education policies, creating school places to meet demand, and designating the education sector as an economic growth area for Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2009). It remains optimistic about operationally privatized school categories not only as an indicator of economic growth but as a driver of it. The government forecasts continuing growth of school places in these categories from 2011 to 2016 (HKSAR Government, 2011). Its actions suggest that neoliberalism in education is being increasingly normalized. The following sections explore this neoliberal normalization in two school categories.

International Schools

The creation of the international school category illustrates well how the Hong Kong government extends market rationality, privatization and the competition state to the education system. An international school is "not easily defined and is subject to much academic debate" not least because it is characterized by heterogeneity, differentiation, and accounting for revenues and costs (MacDonald, 2007, p. 152). Nonetheless, the Hong Kong government has commodified international schools in the Hong Kong system by developing a discrete category for them. The Hong Kong government also admitted the difficulty in categorizing the schools because they are not homogeneous (Education Department, 1995). The government has developed a degree of cohesiveness for the category by differentiating this category from other school categories by, for example, phasing out international schools from the DSS because at one time international schools could join the DSS to receive recurring government subsidies.

The government has largely privatized operations in international schools and this hastens commodification and competition within the category and for the Hong Kong education system. International schools are self-financing and receive government assistance only in the form of land grants. They have full discretion to determine their student admission requirements. The government has also decreed that people can distinguish international schools from other types of schools by international schools' employment of non-local

curriculum and their students not sitting for local examinations (Education Bureau, 2004, p. 3). Yamato (2003) and Yamato and Bray (2006) have identified types of Hong Kong international schools which market themselves by language of instruction, targeted pupils, structure and governance, school foundation year, curriculum, examinations and higher education prepared for, religious or philosophical orientation, location, market specialization, age range, school year, private expenditure and range of school fees. These types can be often recognized from the names of Hong Kong's international schools and are ways by which international schools differentiate themselves in consideration of parents' needs.

The neoliberal governance of the international school category has reflected Hong Kong's changing socio-economic climate. It has been perpetuated by the discourse of subjecting education to global market forces to benefit the state economy. The government has given such reasons as China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the post-1997 economic recovery and the rapid economic growth in the early 21st century or its supporting and expanding the international school category (Education Bureau, 2004). This is because all that stimulates an inflow of foreign professionals, expatriates, and temporary Hong Kong residents in the state for either work or investment (Education Bureau, 2009). Besides, the government has recommended international schools for non-Chinese speaking Hong Kong students and for non-permanent Hong Kong residents (Education Bureau, 2010).

Competition for places in international schools is keen. The government has said this demand from overseas families, coupled with demand from local families, will create an imbalance in demand for and supply of student places in international schools for at least five years (Luk, 2013). The Hong Kong government has problematized student capacity in the category as a shortage. The Education Secretary, Eddie Ng Hak-kim, predicted that international primary schools would fall short of meeting market demand by at least 4,200 student places in the 2016-2017 academic year (Luk, 2013).

The privatization within the category limits how the government can address this shortage. For instance, as the government has privatized control over class sizes, international schools have been unenthusiastic to the government's plea to increase class size (Luk, 2013). Similarly, the government has privatized control over student-intake so international schools can largely determine their student body demographics in terms of overseas students and local students. As the government has said that local students fill only 14 percent of international school student places, international schools have catered to non-local students in the main (Luk, 2013). The government can no more than plead with international schools to place even greater priority on admitting overseas students (Luk, 2013).

However, the government has acted as a broker and facilitator in the education system and in that way has addressed this international school student place shortage. It has increased the supply of classes indirectly by granting schools more land, perhaps the scarcest of all material resources in Hong Kong. It has increased the number of international schools by granting vacant school premises or greenfield sites to international school operators for the building of new schools. For instance, the government recently has increased international school student capacity by 1,700 places by awarding three vacant school premises to international school operators (Luk, 2013). Furthermore, the government has facilitated increased competition and choice for international schools by expanding the geographic distribution of these international schools, which makes them more geographically accessible to Hong Kong society. The government hopes this would further globalization and facilitate, "interaction and collaboration

between teachers and students of international and local schools in the region" (Education Bureau, 2006, p. 1).

The Case of the English Schools' Foundation

Recent changes to the English Schools Foundation (ESF), a sub-category of international schools in Hong Kong, exemplify how the governance of the international school category extends the competition state. Founded in 1967 and enduring as the largest and longest running operator of international schools in Hong Kong, the ESF originally followed an English curriculum and was purposed with relieving the government from operating English schools for English-speaking children. The ESF was tasked with meeting the educational needs of the entire foreign community at that time because of a lack of development in international education services in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2004). In return, the ESF received recurrent government subsidies in addition to being able to charge school fees. This subvention helped the ESF to position its schools as some of the least expensive in the international school category. Officially, the only substantive difference between ESF schools and other international schools is in the area of funding (Education Bureau, 2004 p. 2).

As the number of Hong Kong international schools has grown in response to the changing socio-economic context, so has the criticism of the ESF by international schools. The schools have complained about the uneven playing field in the category because of the ESF's recurring government subsidies. These schools and their supporters have exerted mounting pressure on the government to place the ESF in a more transparent and fair category rather than leave it in the limbo of an international school sub-category. The government acknowledged that the ESF schools' unique position in Hong Kong's education system was a result of historical legacy and that this unique position was untenable in the long-run as greater public accountability over its subvention was needed (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2011). As a result, the government has drastically reduced the government-subvention advantage that ESF schools have enjoyed since 1979. ESF recurrent subsidies were frozen in 1999 as an interim measure while the government investigated possibilities for making the ESF more self-financing. From 2003 to 2005, the government further reduced subsidies. While the ESF management had argued for a restoration of funding, it ultimately agreed to a government plan to eliminate the recurring subsidies over 13 years from 2016 (Siu, 2013). The ESF management anticipates school fees to increase by 23 percent.

DSS Schools

The DSS scheme illustrates well how the Hong Kong government extends market rationality, privatization and the competition state to the education system. The Hong Kong government created the DSS in 1991. As the name suggests, the distinguishing feature of this category of Hong Kong schools is a direct government subsidy. The DSS system in Hong Kong and school voucher schemes in other states are similar insofar as the government bears a part of the cost of schooling and parents the other. However, the difference in schemes is that in Hong Kong the voucher or subsidy is given to the schools instead of the parents. DSS schools receive a recurrent government subsidy comparable to what a baseline school would receive from the government per student.

Like with international schools, the government has privatized many DSS school operations thereby injecting competition and differentiation into the category. However, DSS school operations have been privatized to a lesser degree than international school operations to maintain differentiation between the two categories. DSS schools are less self-financing. The government's recurrent subsidy mechanism influences how a school will charge parents

because a school will lose its recurrent subsidy if it charges a school fee above a certain level. In addition, a DSS school must set aside money for student financial assistance if it charges between a fee band. With this type of financial constraint, a DSS school can move either towards high school fees and a smaller government subsidy or more towards low school fees and a more generous government subsidy. The DSS subsidy mechanism was designed to be administered simply and to discourage excessive profiteering (Education Commission, 1988).

The government created the DSS scheme with Hong Kong students in mind (Audit Commission, 2010). Therefore, while international schools and ESF schools have full discretion to determine their student admission requirements, DSS schools require a degree of government oversight over their student admission requirements, specifically in gearing admission more toward Hong Kong permanent residents. These constraints ultimately preserve the distinctiveness of the DSS category and extend the competition state and commodification pressure not only to schools in the category but also to the education system.

The neoliberal governance of the DSS category has reflected Hong Kong's changing socio-economic climate. The government has said the category was introduced to directly grow and strengthen an independent, operationally privatized education sector for Hong Kong's pluralistic society (Education Commission, 1988). The government has expanded the sector by both creating more schools and envisioning a "full-scale transformation of all government schools into DSS in the future" (Yung, 2006, p. 96). At present, nine percent of all schools belong to the category and that number is growing. Specifically, long-standing and highly-respected schools, or prestigious schools, have joined the scheme in growing numbers.

That increase, and that prestigious schools are opting-in, have provoked public controversy which reflects the traditional criticisms of neoliberalism and fears of the neoliberal climate in Hong Kong. Recently, St. Stephen's Girls College, one of the most prestigious schools in Hong Kong, decided to join the DSS scheme and soon after St. Paul's Secondary School, another prestigious school, decided to join the DSS scheme. In keeping with other prestigious Hong Kong schools that have joined the DSS scheme, these schools will charge some of the highest fees for schools in the scheme. Chiu and Walker (2007) have argued that this is because DSS school fees are often based on a school's reputation, which outstanding academic results influence. Yung (2006) has also noted that more resourceful schools, particularly those prestigious schools with long histories and a strong alumni bodies, charge more than other DSS schools not least because they have a more expansive funding network.

Parents and alumni are worried that these schools will exclude people with limited financial means from attending them because these schools no longer offer free education (Siu, 2013; St. Paul's Secondary, 2013). Parents and alumni wonder to what extent privileged classes are pressuring the schools to change school categories. They worry that poorer students may feel shame when finances factor into participation in school-based activities (Siu, 2013). These worries and fears reflect the association of neoliberalism with "private education for the rich and public education for the poor" (Song, 2013, p. 139). They also assume that an education from a prestigious school is a good, or proper, education and that a prestigious education should not be limited to the rich (Siu, 2013). Protesters have not explicitly acknowledged how a prestigious education is tied to further ambitions to wealth, social mobility and the imagined possibility of individual entrepreneurial success in a neoliberal economy (Davies & Barnsel, 2007).

The government has addressed the controversy with its prevailing neoliberal discourse, reiterating and extolling school diversity and choice, and the amoral, unintentional market bias. The government has maintained that the scheme attracts and benefits schools because it grants greater control over management and finances to member schools (St. Paul's Secondary, 2013). Furthermore, it has declared that there is neither need to regulate the number of DSS schools nor need to call DSS schools prestigious (Siu, 2013). It has also emphasized that not all schools have been accepted into the scheme, that the percentage of all schools in the scheme remains small and that most DSS schools do not charge high tuition fees (Siu, 2013). It has reiterated that the government's recurrent subsidy mechanism inhibits most DSS schools from charging high fees, and that the government continues to guarantee free education for all, without a compulsion to pay fees (Education Commission, 1988). However, more schools charge fees and the number of free schools diminish. While the government has extolled increasing parental choice, presumably within the DSS category and between school categories, it has not put to rest any fears about parental choice within the decreasing number of free schools, particularly free, prestigious schools.

The Neoliberalism in Two Hong Kong School Categories

The government has developed two distinct school categories in the Hong Kong education system and primary school student enrolment in these categories is growing year on year while it is eroding in non-international, non-DSS education categories (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Each category has a set of operational constraints yet with privatization within each school category, competition and differentiation ultimately exist within and between these school categories. This section first explores the government's explanation that the DSS and international school categories are complementary (Education Bureau, 2010). It then examines some of the broader societal implications for neoliberalism in two Hong Kong school categories.

The government has privatized school fees in such a way that schools in these categories can compete and differentiate themselves, leading to a wide range of education offerings on the price spectrum. Table 1 lists select international and DSS schools and their primary school fees to illustrate competition and differentiation within and between these two school categories. In the main, those groups that receive recurrent government subsidies are able to charge less than what other schools charge. The Kennedy School, an ESF school, is able to charge less than what two other international school competitors charge, and generally DSS schools charge less than what international schools charge. In that way, even the DSS schools with the highest school fees are more affordable than many international schools, although more prestigious DSS schools may charge more than less prestigious DSS schools. Since international schools do not receive recurrent government subsidies, they must raise revenue through their school fees.

School Name	Tuition Fee (HK\$)	School Type
Hong Kong International School	\$155,700	International
Kellett School	\$123,500	International
German Swiss International School	\$120,900	International

Kennedy School	\$66,100	International (ESF)
Diocesan Boys' School	\$40,000	DSS ¹
St. Paul's College	\$30,000	DSS ¹
Po Leung Kuk Camoes Tan Siu Lin Primary School	\$14,800	DSS
WF Joseph Lee Primary School	\$12,000	DSS

¹*Recognized, prestigious Hong Kong schools*
 Source: Individual school websites

Table 1 does not dispel arguments about neoliberalism advancing socio-economic inequality. As the Hong Kong education system can be divided between school categories, those that charge school fees and those that do not, this creates a division between families that can pay school fees and families that cannot. Not only that, but since there is a wide range of education offerings along the price spectrum, families are further divided into those that can pay hefty school fees and those that cannot. Likewise, schools' finances vary greatly. Ultimately, people and schools with greater financial means have greater educational choice. This can create a clustering inequality whereby students and schools of greater economic social and cultural influence cluster together and students and schools without these privileges are clustered together (Chiu & Walker 2007). In addition, with the increase in schools that charge fees, parents increasingly shoulder the financial burden for schooling in Hong Kong society. This reflects a socio-economic context where parents can increasingly shoulder this burden. Besides, increasing parents' financial stake in schools can possibly motivate parents to become more active, demanding school stakeholders. Ball (2007) has described this as a second-order privatization whereby neoliberalism changes social relations between schools and parents, and changes parents' responsibilities and participation in education.

This second-order privatization may be warranted because school administrators can more freely use funds to increase marketplace competitiveness. However, as in the case of higher education institutions, this may increase rent-seeking behavior in Hong Kong schools and these practices may counterpose teacher professionalism. Additionally, within the past decade, ESF and DSS managers have been rebuked for financial malpractice (Audit Commission, 2004). In light of financial mismanagement and malfeasance by these school administrators, parents may need to demand greater accountability for school operations so that their interests are protected. The government may need to broker this transparency as DSS schools have launched recriminations, arguing that the government has not provided clear accounting and financing guidelines (Yau, 2010).

The government's commodification of the education marketplace within and between these two Hong Kong school categories has placed significant, new demands on parents. As standardization between schools break down as the government increasingly privatizes school operations, parents bear the burden of becoming responsible, informed consumers who exercise rational economic thought in selecting schools. This second-order privatization further changes relationships between schools and parents, and changes the meaning of citizenship and responsibility.

Conclusion

In this paper I examined recent policy developments in Hong Kong's education system by linking changes to two Hong Kong school categories to changes in the broader Hong Kong society. Hong Kong's socio-cultural context is unique not least because Hong Kong is an economically prosperous SAR. The Hong Kong government has sought complete integration of Hong Kong into the global knowledge economy, beginning with the liberalization of its financial markets and continuing with the liberalization of its education system.

The government has applied neoliberalism to Hong Kong education by creating two school categories and increasing the number of schools in them. Although there may be fundamental differences between business organizations and schools, the Hong Kong government has increasingly treated these institutions in similar ways by surrendering education within and between these two school categories to market forces. While neoliberalism in these two school categories increases choice at societal, institutional and individual levels, Lee and Lee (2013) note that these choices are, ultimately, materially unequal. Individual, rationally self-interested choice may be no more than an illusion. Neoliberalism in education can exacerbate existing inequality between individuals and between schools, and correlated with employment relations and income distribution, these inequalities can exacerbate labor market inequality and social polarization. By increasingly surrendering Hong Kong education to market despotism, the government expands institutional discrimination in Hong Kong society.

The Hong Kong government's aim for education and the Hong Kong people's aim for education may differ greatly. Insofar as the Hong Kong government has created two Hong Kong school categories and has expanded them indicates the success of its neoliberal education reform. However, the public controversy from the increase in DSS schools demonstrates that social discontent against neoliberalism exists in Hong Kong and may increase. In view of this, Shin (2011) notes that "sustainable neo-liberal reform requires a social safety net to reduce social conflicts and political instability due to social discontents and social unrests" (p. 72). On the other hand, I also aim to encourage readers to scrutinize the education system and recognize the contrast in perceived choice versus real choice in a neoliberal society. The social discontent against neoliberalism in Hong Kong also demonstrates the existing space for the contestation over neoliberalism practices and the education value system. People do not need to divest themselves of individual responsibility for inequality, bias and principles that impact society. They do not have to be counter-posed to the worth or possibility of social equality.

David Woo is a research student at the University of Hong Kong. Email: h0489314@hku.hk.

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