

Staff Management in Privatized Education Systems

and the Professionalism of Teachers:

The Case of Macao

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Abstract

It is believed that the effectiveness and efficiency of school administration can be enhanced in a privatized system of education. However, such belief is narrowly based on studies on school choice and such impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The issue of staff management in understanding school administration is essentially overlooked. Using Macao as a case study for illustration and drawing on data from a qualitative study, this paper seeks to argue that school administration against a specific context of privatization can actually contribute to the unprofessionalism of teachers. The study illustrates that staff management should not be merely taken at an individual level as an interpersonal issue about trust or a matter of conflict management, but should be understood against a wider context, and also shows that schools in a privatized system of education are not necessarily effective or efficient in managing their staff.

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the 'choice' rhetoric of privatization/marketization has often been put forward in many educational reforms to address the concerns of the efficiency and effectiveness of school administration. This advocacy could be seen as a response to the inadequacy of centralized education systems, which are usually characterized as bureaucratic where schools are inflexible in administering themselves. Unsurprisingly, such a schooling system is considered inefficient and ineffective in responding to parents' demands or meeting students' needs. Indeed, the last few decades have witnessed a plethora of studies echoing the 'choice' rhetoric examining how privatization/marketization can allow schools to be more efficiently and effectively (e.g. designing more tailor-made, if not innovative, pedagogies) to meet students' individual needs (e.g. Cookson, 1992; Tannenbaum, 1995; Ladd, 2003; Bulkley, et al. 2010). While it remains debatable whether privatization/marketization provides more choices for parents and their children and/or whether privatization/marketization indeed enhances the provision of quality teaching (e.g. Brain and Klein, 1994; Gewirtz et al. 1995; Burch 2009; Orfield and Frankenberg, 2013), the major focus of most studies in the existing literature is on the relationship between school administration and the quality of teaching/learning against the context of privatization. Supposedly, staff management is also a crucial area in understanding the effectiveness and efficiency of school administration (e.g. Brazelay, 1992; Gorton and Alston, 2012). But, most studies seem to take staff management as an interpersonal issue (i.e. the social or person skills of the administrators) or a matter of conflict management (e.g. the style of the school management in handling conflicts), in that the emphasis is essentially placed on an individual level stressing how school management should foster a cooperative working environment that is conducive to conflict resolution or, even better, trust building (e.g. Cormick et al. 1996; Fleming and Amesbury, 2001; Rahim, 2002; Day et al. 2011; cf. Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves and



Fink, 2006). Seemingly, the wider context, which makes possible for conflict resolution or trust building, is overlooked, if not completely. Needless to mention, the power imbalance between school administrators and teachers in staff management is rarely addressed. Putting aside power imbalance, we should expect effective and efficient schools to respect highly their teachers' professional judgements and their teachers to enjoy a higher level of professional autonomy. In this way, school administration could, in turn, play a role in enhancing the professionalism of teachers. Despite the prevailing advocacy of privatization, although it remains to be researched whether school administration is indeed more effective or efficient in a privatized educational system, not much scholarly attention has been directed to investigating the link between school administration and the professionalism of teachers in a privatized education system. This paper seeks to explore this area. As any meaningful illustration should be contextualized, Macao, given its education system being essentially privatized, is taken as a special case for discussion.

In this paper, I seek to argue that school administration against a specific context of privatization can actually contribute to the unprofessionalism of teachers by referring to a qualitative study in Macao. In what follows, I shall first provide a general sketch of the social context against which our discussion is set: That is, a brief account on the development of Macao and some major changes in its education system over the last few decades, especially those related to our understanding of staff management. And then, I shall discuss the research design of the qualitative study and the data derived from which are used for specific illustration in this paper (including their limitations). After that, I shall move on to underscore some common practices of schools in Macao concerning their staff management and to argue how the fact that teachers in Macao are hired on a yearly contract basis could undermine their professionalism.

Macao: Colonial Legacy and Recent Development

Macao was a Portuguese colony but was returned to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1999. Basic education for the local Chinese in Macao was ignored under Portuguese rule between 1887 and 1999 (cf. Gunn, 1996; Porter, 1996). Because of this colonial neglect, basic education for the local Chinese was essentially provided by the civil society: i.e. by private schools funded and managed by a variety of organizations, such as individuals, religious institutions, trading associations, neighbourhood associations, lineage associations, and the Federation of Labour Union (Clayton, 2009). Unsurprisingly, this colonial neglect was accompanied by a non-existence of institutionalized teacher training (cf. Vong and Wong 2010). There was essentially no local provision of teacher training before the 1980s; and, after that, the provision still basically relied on the People's Republic of China (PRC) or Taiwan. Even nowadays, many teachers in Macao are trained in the PRC or Taiwan, although some local tertiary institutions – e.g. the University of Macau – have gradually been taking up this task.

This colonial neglect of basic education had implications for the provision of quality teaching during the colonial time. Without support of any kinds from the Portuguese colonial government, private schools had only very limited funding for operation (cf. Yee, 1990). As a result, most private schools, understandably, could not afford to create decent infra-structure for a quality learning environment or to hire qualified teachers to provide a decent quality of basic education. The quality of basic education simply varied tremendously across schools. Besides, there was no coordination amongst schools: A variety of curriculums adopted by different schools types (also see the section on research design and data below) – a Portuguese curriculum for public schools, a Taiwanese curriculum for Catholic schools, a PRC curriculum for most schools run by traditional organizations, and a Hong Kong curriculum for other schools – coexisted; and, no common standardized examinations are set at the end of each level of education (Bray, 1992;



Choi and Koo, 2001; Bray and Koo, 2004). In order to get hired at school, teachers just needed to show that they were capable of teaching a curriculum adopted by their schools. While there were no common entry requirements for teachers, many teachers simply did not receive any teacher training at all; only very few had a bachelor's degree or received teacher training of some kind from the PRC or Taiwan and later on from Hong Kong (cf. Bray, 2002; Wu and Vong, 2016). Indeed, even in the late 1980s, only about 30% of teachers in Macao were qualified to teach (Wong, 1991). In brief, the general quality of education in Macao was in great doubt.

This colonial neglect of basic education also had implications for school administration. Private schools were essentially exempted from governmental regulation but enjoyed autonomy nearly in every aspect of school administration; e.g. private schools have their respective curriculums, examination criteria, and even academic calendars with different numbers of holidays as well as different holidays (Wong and Chan, 2014). What was of relevance in this paper was their autonomy in staff management. Private schools designed their own policies of teacher hiring and promotion, decided their specific wage and benefit packages for their prospective teaching staff, and set their own school ethics and guidelines for allocating job tasks to the teaching staff as well as for monitoring them. Teachers hired by public schools enjoyed a highly privileged tenure position, received a very high salary from the Portuguese colonial government, and taught a relatively small class (e.g. class size was usually smaller than 25) with fewer working hours. In stark contrast, all teachers in private schools were hired on a yearly contract basis, received laughable meagre pays (at the time even lower than many manual workers as well as casino dealers which did not require much qualification), and taught a large class (e.g. class size was usually larger than 60) with very long working hours. Literally, private schools could hire whoever the schools, or more specifically their principals, considered as qualified; meanwhile, principals could also fire whoever they considered as disqualified.

It was common that principals hired their relatives or friends, even when their relatives or friends did not have any teaching qualifications. And, it was also a common practice for principals to hire teachers to teach subjects that did not match the teachers' majors; for example, a teacher who majored in fashion design was hired to teach the English language or a teacher who majored in Physics was asked to teach Chinese History. Besides, teachers were also asked to do job tasks unrelated to teaching or their schools at all. It was not unheard of that teachers were asked to work for their school's sponsoring body on weekends for free; for example, some teachers were asked to call parents of their students on an election day for the Legislative Council so as to persuade them to vote for candidates favoured by the sponsoring body of the school. There was no labour union or any institution that teachers could turn to if they wanted to lodge a complaint of being maltreated or having unreasonable termination of their contracts. According to the Labour Law 7/2008 (see http://bo.io.gov.mo/bo/i/2008/33/lei07_cn.asp) in Macao, as long as private schools as employers provided teachers as employees with a legally required amount of compensation, private schools could terminate their contracts with teachers even without giving the latter any notification in advance. Teachers dared not say 'no' to even unreasonable requests or packages for fear of being fired on the spot or simply failing to get their yearly contract renewed. And, if they were to be fired, they could turn to nowhere to complain about their unreasonable dismissals. Put simply, teachers hired in private schools were put in a very vulnerable position; they were treated by their private schools, or more accurately their principals, not as professionals but dispensable employees. If the lack of governmental support was considered as giving a weak foundation for the professionalism of teachers in Macao, then a lack of governmental intervention could actually be viewed as weakening further teachers' professionalism.



Since the 1999 handover and the setup of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) government, there has been a drastic increase in governmental investment in education. In particular, because of the increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP) resulting from the liberalisation of Macao's gambling laws in 2002 and the growth of the gambling and gaming sector, expenditure on education, including basic education, between 2002 and 2009 in total has nearly tripled; and, the total invested in every student has likewise tripled in absolute terms, increased from MOP\$ 13,083 (US\$1 is approximately equal to MOP\$8) in 2002 to MOP\$ 35,794 in 2009 (Wong and Chan, 2014). As a result, the goal of providing a lengthening free and compulsory basic education for all school-age students has gradually been achieved. And the provision of a free basic education has also become very institutionalized within a very short period of time: seven-year (one-year pre-primary and six-year primary education) basic education has become free and compulsory since 1995 and in 1997 this provision of free and compulsory education was extended to ten years (i.e. the previous seven-year basic education and three-year junior secondary education); and, from 2007 onwards, by law all school-age students have enjoyed fifteen years of free compulsory education (i.e. three-year pre-school education and six-year primary education and six-year secondary education). The Macao SAR government has basically achieved this goal by providing subsidies for existing private schools (rather than building new government schools) through inviting private schools to join a free education network. Indeed, more and more private schools have joined the free education network. At present, the majority of school-age children enjoy a free basic education at private schools inside the school network subsidized by the Macao SAR government, although the proportion of students outside the school net remains around 14-16% (Wong and Chan, 2014).

Apart from providing a free basic education for school-age children, more resources have also been invested to improve the pays and benefits of teachers hired in private schools in the hope that the

quality of teachers could be changed for the better. For example, monetary incentives in the form of monthly allowances from the government have been used to encourage in-service teachers to read a certificate/diploma in education. And, the qualifications of teachers have greatly increased over the last two decades. In contrast to the 1980s, when around 70% of teachers were unqualified to teach (Wong 1991), by 2007 about 80% of teachers in Macao were qualified to teach and many of them had a bachelor's degree or a post-graduate degree (the website of Macao Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ)). In addition, 'The legal frame for regulating teachers hired by private schools' (hereafter referred to as 'The Private Legal Frame') – a teacher law – was passed in March 2012 whereby the entry requirements of teachers at different educational levels (i.e. pre-primary, primary, and secondary teachers), their duties and working hours, and the pays and benefits for teachers of different qualifications and experiences and their promotional prospects were clearly set. In particular, private schools are expected to spend no less than 70% of the governmental subsidies received for their teachers' salaries and benefits. What all these measures suggest is not merely more regulation of teacher hiring but more protection for teachers hired in private schools.

However, all such efforts and thus improvements do not change the fact that most schools in Macao are private schools (rather than public schools). Over 95% of students attend private schools; the majority of them are run by the Catholic Church or traditional organizations (Bray and Koo, 2004). And, the majority of teachers (about 95%) are still hired in private schools. It is suggested that this privatized system has failed to provide high quality schooling in Macao (Tang and Morrison 1998). Indeed, despite such a drastic improvement in teachers' qualifications, the figure above suggests that by 2007 a significant proportion – some 20% – of teachers hired in private schools are still unqualified to teach. Besides, the passing of 'The Private Legal Frame' does not seem to change the fact that teachers hired in private schools remain in a vulnerable position:



legally speaking, private schools are still free to hire teachers to their liking, without reference to accepted qualifications; teachers remain hired on a yearly contract basis; and, private schools can fire them at any time without notifying them in advance, even if it were to be considered as an unreasonable dismissal, as long as they provide them with a legally required amount of compensation. It was true that in 2012 there was an initiative in Macao concerning the possibility for setting up professional ethics for teachers in Macao, and that this led to heat debates amongst teachers themselves. Some teachers even saw this situation as an opportunity of acquiring for teachers in Macao a professional status that had been enjoyed by their counterparts in many developed industrial societies. Nevertheless, the majority of teachers in Macao were not engaged in such a pursuit and some simply did not see teachers as professionals at all.

In sum, despite drastic changes in the Macao education system since the 1999 handover, the system remains a system of private schools whereby much of the Macao SAR government's responsibility lies on funding allocation and very general regulation of school practices aiming at making basic education more freely accessible to all school-age students, rather than enhancing the professional development of teachers and/or promoting a decent quality of teaching/learning. This is a specific context against which the link between school administration and the professionalism of teachers is to be explored. For specific illustrations in the following discussion, I shall draw on some findings from a qualitative study of teachers in Macao that I began in 2010 while teaching at the Faculty of Education, the University of Macau.

Research Design and Data

The research material used for illustrations below is derived from a larger scale qualitative study in Macao conducted between 2010 and 2013 in which teachers from the same school type being interviewed in group constitutes a part. The study seeks to look into how school

practices could be related to a number of hotly debated educational issues in contemporary Macao, such as high rates of grade retention, school dropouts, educational choices of final-year secondary students of different socio-economic background, and the professionalism of teachers. The major study targets include official statistics and documents (including school regulations of all schools and research findings on teachers and schools conducted by DSEJ posted on the DSEJ website), school dropouts, and students (in junior secondary form three and senior secondary form three) and teachers from different school types. Official statistics and documents are analysed and also referred to wherever necessary; school dropouts and senior secondary form-three students are interviewed individually; and, focus-group interviews are arranged for junior secondary form-three students as well as for teachers. In this paper I shall focus on the part of material collected from conducting focus-group interviews with teachers.

Teachers for the above-mentioned study were recruited from different school types. At present, there are four major types of schools in Macao: government schools, schools run by traditional organizations, schools run by the Catholic Church, and the remaining few so-called 'other' schools (e.g. a university-affiliated school, an international school, and few Protestant schools); the first type is public schools and the other three types are private schools run by their respective sponsoring bodies. While schools of the four types have their respective educational missions, schools of the same type share similar, if not the same, missions and practices (including setting similar school regulations for students and similar ethics and guidelines for teachers). In order to solicit teachers' views on school regulations, school practices related to grade retention, the professionalism of teachers, school administration, and the prospect of setting up of teachers' professional ethics in Macao, I recruited teachers from each school type and conducted a number of focus-group interviews for them. During each focus-group interview, each teacher of the group was asked to share freely with other teachers,



with my presence and a research student of mine as moderators, their views, usually with reference to their personal experiences, on the issues related to the above-mentioned topics.

In order to obtain a wider range of different views, I sought to use my social connections in Macao to recruit teachers of different years of experiences and ranking (i.e. frontline teachers or administrators; in Macao there is no further official differentiation in ranking amongst frontline teachers, in that head teacher is just a title rather than an official rank with a different pay and benefits; and, administrators, especially principals, are not necessarily promoted from frontline teachers but usually appointed by the governing board of schools). Despite the research design, given that there are only three government schools in Macao no teachers from government schools were recruited.

In the end, 24 teachers in total – 13 men and 11 women – were recruited from the three types of private schools: Nine from schools run by traditional organizations, eight from Catholic schools, and seven from ‘other’ schools. Eight teachers recruited are new teachers (teaching less than five years), another eight are experienced teachers teaching more than five years, and the remaining eight are very experienced teachers teaching more than ten years; while the majority are frontline teachers, there are three administrators. Teachers from each school type were divided into two groups for separate focus-group interviews; in total, six focus-group interviews by school type were conducted with the 24 teachers between March and June 2013. Each interview lasted slightly more than two hours; it was then transcribed and translated from Cantonese, a local dialect, to English. For the present purposes, two themes of the transcripts of six focus-group interviews are of relevance: staff management (especially the appraisal system and mechanisms of hiring and firing) and the professionalism of teachers. In particular, I seek to refer to what the teachers in this study say in the interviews (with fictitious names) as specific illustrations to support my argument that teachers are hired on a yearly contract basis, together with the existing administrative

practices in schools, could somehow undermine teachers' professionalism in Macao.

Before I move on to discussion, readers are reminded of the limitations of data reported below and should thus be cautious in interpreting the following specific illustrations. Data were collected from a small sample of self-selected teachers who were asked to recall their relevant experiences in discussing specific topics set in this part of the study, although the data were supplemented by and/or triangulated with information from various sources in the study. And, most of these self-selected teachers are recruited through a friend of mine who is very well-connected in the field of education in Macao. As this friend is self-positioned as more critical and dedicated than most teachers in Macao, it seems logical to expect that his recruits are perhaps somehow inclined to be more committed to the profession of teaching than an average teacher and also more critical on the topics discussed than most teachers. In recalling what happened to them as well as to their colleagues, the teachers may reconstruct their experiences; reliability could be an issue. Their accounts were not cross-referenced with people concerned; validity may be in doubt. And, what the teachers experienced and how they looked at the issues under discussion were not necessarily statistically representative.

Putting aside the issues of reliability and validity, I somehow consider that the ways in which teachers of this study expressed their views and used their personal experiences for illustrations should be analysed further and could very well be used as evidence supporting the criticism that most teachers in Macao are not so professional, although I would not infer this directly or firmly from these interviews. The theme that the teachers in this study were actually not so professional emerged during the focus-group interviews, which shocked me and my research assistant. While it remains to be researched that how typical these teachers are in terms of their professionalism as well as their views on professionalism, I suspect that these teachers offer some teachers' perspectives particular to



each school type and thus represent some specific teacher types. And yet, more work is required to verify this suspicion. Despite this and all these limitations, I argue that the views and experiences of the teachers interviewed are insightful and could be used for specific illustrations for the present exploratory purposes.

Staff Management and Teachers' Professionalism

To reiterate, since the 1999 handover, especially the passing of 'The Private Legal Frame' in 2012, the entry qualification for teachers has been legally set higher, and the work situation of teachers hired in private schools in Macao has also been improved. In principle, teachers hired in private schools in Macao now work considerably shorter hours (or receiving monetary compensation for extra work time) but for a much higher level of pay and benefits than did their predecessors a few decades ago. Private schools are required to pay their teachers according to their qualification, seniority, and also performance annually appraised; and, private schools are also required to assign their teaching staff to teaching duties, as well as non-teaching duties, with a weekly upper time limit. Undoubtedly, the majority of teachers hired in private schools have somehow benefited from these changes.

However, whether such changes have enhanced the professionalism of teachers in Macao remains to be seen for three major reasons. First, it is doubtful if the quality of teachers could be immediately improved right after the required entry qualification is set higher than before without making much governmental effort or without devoting much resource to improve teacher education. Second, in practice, unqualified teachers, old or new, are still around. It is true that the pays of teachers hired in private schools are now quite attractive relative to many other jobs (e.g. the occupation of dealers did not, and still does not, require essentially any qualification but dealers' pays had been much higher than teachers for many years, particularly since 2004). A teaching job was

especially attractive to qualified people when the economy did not do so well over the last few years. But, because of an increasing student population, teachers are in strong demand in Macao. Given this shortage and also a high turnover rate of teachers, it remains plausible for principals, albeit reluctantly, to hire unqualified teachers. Put slightly differently, despite 'The Private Legal Frame,' it is not illegal for private schools to hire unqualified teachers: As long as principals and individuals they want to hire have come to an agreement, the individuals who are even unqualified can still become teachers, albeit at a lower pay. And, the third reason for doubting the enhancement of the professionalism of teachers by 'The Private Legal Frame' is the fact that teachers hired in private schools remain hired on a yearly contract basis. To reiterate, according to the Labour Law 7/2008, as long as employers (i.e. private schools in this case) provide a required amount of compensation, they can fire their employees without being required to give notification in advance or even to provide reasons. Given the Labour Law 7/2008, and the fact that there are still no labour unions that teachers can turn to for lodging a complaint of maltreatment or unreasonable dismissals, teachers remain in a vulnerable position vis-a-vis private schools. I shall argue that school administration operating under these circumstances in Macao could set confining school ethics and guidelines, leaving principals' power unchallenged, and thus undermine the professionalism of teachers.

School Ethics and Guidelines for Teachers

Each organization has its expectations of its staff of different positions; and, the ethics of the organization is embedded in such expectations. With a view to making sure that its staff live up to its expectations, it seems sensible for an organization to make its expectations explicit to its staff, in the form of staff guidelines for example. Private schools in Macao are no exception: All private schools have designed their own school ethics and guidelines for their teachers; and, private schools of the same type tend to have a

similar, if not the same, set of school ethics and guidelines. However, regardless of school type, most school ethics and guidelines in Macao are basically concerned about administrative procedures (e.g. leave application) and teachers' appearance (e.g. dress code) and behaviours, as all teachers expressed in focus-group interviews. Here are some examples:

'There are two major parts in our school guidelines for staff. One is about behavioural norms in every aspect. ... The other is like appendices of our contract, such as your rights and duties. ... For example, the guidelines state clearly the procedures you should follow in applying for maternity leave.' (Kau, male, from a school run by traditional organizations)

'Each teaching staff is given a booklet when joining our school – guidelines for staff. Just as there are school regulations for students, so there are also school guidelines for teachers. Most of the guidelines are about teachers' behaviours, appearances, and clothing. For example, teachers should be punctual, and you shouldn't smoke. ... There are also some guidelines on teachers' qualifications – teachers should have such and such qualification on education. ... But, much more attention is directed to teachers' outfits. ... For example, it is stated that men teachers have to wear trousers and women teachers have to wear skirts. And there are more requirements for women; for example, the colour, length, and style of the skirt are specifically stated. It's a bit like a uniform. ... Some guidelines are about work ethics. For example, teaching staff are not allowed to take up part-time jobs or accept gifts from parents.' (Suet, female, from a Catholic school)

'Most guidelines for staff are about what are the appropriate look, behaviours, and attitudes of teachers. ... There are also guidelines on what we should do when a black rainstorm or typhoon number eight is hoisted.' (Wan, female, from an 'other' school)

It sounds sensible to give staff a sense of what is an appropriate dress code for their organizations. But, instead of stressing the professionalism of teachers, private schools in Macao are essentially concerned about how a teacher should dress himself/herself (e.g. the colour and length of a skirt) and how a teacher should look (e.g. their hair-style and appearance). And, some private schools even have strong views on how teachers should spend their leisure time (i.e.

what leisure activities are appropriate to teachers), as is revealed by a teacher in a case where his colleague is fired because of his private life.

Lung: I remember, two years ago, a male teacher in our school had an appalling private life after school – he went to pubs and discos every night. A lot of colleagues reported this to the principal. Well, it's obvious that he is unfit for a teacher. ... He wasn't fired immediately simply because the gambling industry was booming and it was very difficult to find a replacement (teaching his subjects) at the time. ... Finally, when the principal could find a replacement, he fired that teacher; and that teacher also accepted the fact that he wasn't fit for teaching. ...

Researcher: Does this kind of life style affect his teaching?

Lung: Well, actually his private life didn't affect his teaching. But, as a teacher, he should be a role model for students, I think. Well, this is how we Chinese set higher (moral) expectations of teachers. (Lung, male, from a Catholic school)

According to these descriptions, such school ethics and guidelines for teachers are not so much different from school regulations for students. In a way, we can say that teachers in Macao are not so much different from students being closely monitored by their schools. But, most teachers in this study openly accept such kind of control; some teachers, while admitting that some expectations on appearance and/or behaviour were perhaps rather strict, suggested their compliance somehow out of fear of having their contract terminated or not renewed. We can perhaps interpret teachers' deference or even compliance to strict, if not unreasonable, expectations as a consequence of teachers being hired on a yearly contract basis, thus of the power imbalance between school administrators and teachers, as a teacher also implies.

'I think teachers have to comply with their school ethics and guidelines. ... The ethics and guidelines reflect the core values and goals of the school. ... Besides, teachers are vulnerable contract worker paid to work for the school. Failing to do what is expected of them, teachers may find it hard to get their contract renewed. ... Without clear guidelines, teachers would have made minimal effort. ... It's absolutely necessary to have clear guidelines so as to make sure that every



teacher does all assigned tasks.' (Yuen, female, from a school organized by traditional organizations)

But, what this teacher also suggests in explaining her acceptance of such control is that some teachers are actually not professionals but contract workers who need to be monitored. In other words, some teachers themselves also buy into the external/school standards in judging teachers by referring to their appearances and behaviours; I argue that this somehow suggests that such standards are ingrained in some teachers in Macao. And indeed, all the teachers in this study also see their appearance, behaviours, and life styles as constituting their professional identity, as a teacher makes explicit.

'We teachers are role models for students. ... We have to pay attention to our behaviours. ... How can we smoke, drink, and speak foul languages? ... I think, teachers are a social role, social status, and a professional. Our image is very important. ... I find schools' expectations sensible. It's reasonable to expect teachers to dress properly, especially women teachers. After all, we spend so much of our time teaching in classroom. If you don't dress properly, you may be a side-track to students, especially when they are at puberty stage. ... It's a matter of impression. We have to be clean and tidy so as to show to people that we are professional.' (Wan, female, from an 'other' school)

In short, the views of the teachers in this study on the professionalism of teachers are at a superficial level, revolving around an appearance and/or behavioural level (e.g. teachers should not swear or smoke or drink; and, teachers should have a clean and tidy appearance in order to look professional). I argue that this observation is rooted in the power imbalance between school administration and teachers shaped by the existing Labour Law 7/2008: This law allows private school to set strict or even unreasonable demands on their teachers (in the form of school ethics and guidelines) and leaves their teachers with no option but compliance and even internalization of schools' demands; and this, in turn, undermines teachers' professionalism.

Monitoring of Teaching

If school ethics and guidelines are taken as an indirect and subtle mechanism of control over teachers, then perhaps principals' monitoring can be seen as a direct and explicit control mechanism. While principals' monitoring of teachers has already been partly incorporated in school ethics and guidelines, it is a rather common, albeit unspoken, practice for principals in Macao to carry out their daily patrolling. Principals patrol around the corridors of each floor of the school building, so that they can see how teachers teach (i.e. doing it outside of each classroom rather than getting into the classroom), and more specifically, they can see if each classroom is in a 'good' shape. At first glance, it seems reasonable that principals are concerned about the teaching quality of their teachers; and, in this way the practice of patrolling can arguably play a role in enhancing the professionalism of teachers in Macao. However, on closer look, without getting inside the classroom to sit in the class, principals are actually not concerned about the teaching quality in doing their daily patrolling; rather, what principals are concerned is whether students of each class are sitting still under very strict control of their teachers. It is not unheard of that teachers get fired simply because their classes are more 'active' than principals' expectations. In short, principals' power is unchallengeable or principals are simply invincible under the existing circumstances in Macao, as is mentioned by all teachers in this study. The following teacher articulates this point:

'We teachers in Macao are used to principals' power. Such power imbalance can't be addressed, even with the implementation of "The Private Legal Frame." Schools remain private schools and teachers are still hired on a yearly contract basis. ... Yes, we have school ethics and guidelines. But, they don't serve to protect our rights. In practice, our principal is the law; when s/he says "yes," who dare to say "no"? ... In theory, there are procedures that the school should follow in firing an incompetent teacher. But, the truth is when the principal does his/her daily patrolling and sees for once that a student of yours leaves his/her seat, your contract won't be renewed for the following year, period, even when you are doing fine throughout the whole year. ... Basically, the principal



can do whatever s/he wants to teachers.’ (Jing, male, from a school run by traditional organizations)

Readers should note that students moving a little (even in their seats) or even actively participating in classes is considered to be unacceptable in many schools in Macao. An ideal class should be very quiet without students making any sound; failing to keep their class under control, so to speak, teachers are seen as incapable or incompetent, at least by their principals and administrators. While some teachers may not agree with such teaching practice/philosophy, there is not much room for teachers to negotiate with school administrators in Macao: When they are hired on a yearly contract basis, many teachers dare not try out different teaching strategies, let alone voicing out or defending their educational philosophies. This situation does not seem to change even after the implementation of ‘The Private Legal Frame,’ when teachers remain hired on a yearly contract basis. It is true that the renewal of teachers’ contract is now tinged on the annual appraisal of their teaching performances, making the mechanism of contract renewal more transparent than before. But, when the appraising panel is constituted by eight people including the principal and the majority of teachers appointed by the principal (i.e. only one or two teachers are elected by all teachers to become panel members), and when there are no mechanisms for appeal, teachers remain very vulnerable having to terms with this contract renewal every year, as is expressed by the following two teachers.

‘There are countless cases of unreasonable dismissals of teachers. ... The common practice is that around January or February the principal would ask each teacher whether they would like to stay for another year. But the principal won’t get back to you till very late. ... Without giving you any reasons, the principal could just give you a letter before the summer vacation (i.e. July or August) begins telling you that your contract is not renewed for another year. ... A colleague of mine was very upset and felt very hurt last year when her contract wasn’t renewed. She asked herself if she ever did anything wrong; but then, the school didn’t give her any warning. ... We were all very sympathetic with this teacher for she was recognized as a good teacher. ... But, you can’t do anything. (What

you can do is) try your luck to get a position in another school.' (Ling, female, from a Catholic school)

'It is absolutely legal for a principal to fire any teachers that s/he doesn't like as long as s/he provides the teachers with an amount of compensation – usually the teacher's previous month's salary – required by the Labour Law. ... Most schools hire teachers in February or March. ... Teachers simply can't do anything if their schools let them know that their contracts aren't renewed in July or August. ... While principals expect their teachers to let them know before April whether they would like to stay for another year, principals never inform their teachers their final decisions within a reasonable timeframe. ... Principals are holding a double standard in treating themselves and their teachers. It's so unfair to teachers. ... Given the existing circumstances, teachers are really helpless.' (Suet, female, from a Catholic school)

Teachers need autonomy to assert their professional judgments; and, teachers' professionalism cannot be actualized when their professional autonomy is not protected. Given their vulnerability in Macao, it is not difficult to understand that the majority of teachers are forced to yield to their schools' demands in order to keep their jobs. It even seems demanding to expect teachers to stand up for themselves. Perhaps this is partly a reason for a very high turnover rate of teachers in Macao; and, it is also believed to be a reason for failing to attract quality and/or professional teachers to join the teaching profession. In this way, their vulnerability could arguably be seen as an obstacle for the professional development of teachers in Macao.

Concluding Remark

It is believed that in a privatized education system everything will fall into places in accordance to the principle of supply and demand. With regard to staff recruitment and management, private schools are expected to be able to recruit teaching staff who share their missions and educational philosophy; and, the quality of their teaching staff is supposedly correlated to their employment packages offered. Put simply, compared with centralization or bureaucratization,



privatization/marketization is believed to make school administration more efficient and effective, which supposedly creates an environment more conducive to teachers' enjoying professional autonomy and making professional judgement and thus enhances the professionalism of teachers. This paper seeks to explore this area by referring to Macao as a case study.

Macao is taken as an example of a privatized education system, because the majority of its schools are private schools where over 95% of students study and about 95% of teachers work. In this privatized system, it is unclear how schools are particularly efficient or effective in managing their staff, which is beyond the scope of this paper. But, it is quite clear that because of the power imbalance between school administrators and teachers, resulting from Macao's colonial legacy and the lack of governmental protection of teachers' rights, teachers in Macao are put in a very vulnerable position. This vulnerability lays a very weak foundation for the professionalism of teachers in Macao, in that this vulnerability does not allow teachers to stand up for themselves against unreasonable requests or demands, let alone asserting their professional judgments wherever necessary. Rather, this vulnerability allows private schools to exercise their control, of various kinds, over teachers, some even being unreasonable or even against teachers' professionalism. Meanwhile, this vulnerability also somehow makes teachers rationalize and then internalize their schools' expectations of them. In this way, this vulnerability, fostering teachers' rationalization and internalization of school control, undermines further the professionalism of teachers in Macao. The very fact that the education system is privatized gives the Macao SAR government a justification for not taking any intervention. In this sense, a privatized system per se could be seen as making possible the above-mentioned practices of school administration and thus undermining the professionalism of teachers in Macao. In sum, despite the limitations of the data used for specific illustrations in this paper, I argue that the vulnerability of teachers in Macao, which has not been addressed by recent governmental effort on reforming the

education system, not merely lays a weak foundation for the professionalism of teachers in Macao but also undermines further the development of teachers' professionalism. While this argument remains tentative and more work is required to verify it further, Macao as a case study, however special it may seem, serves to urge us educational administration scholars to rethink the potential gains from the privatization of education.

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