Academia A publication of the
Higher Education
Policy Network

Becoming Radical' in the Academy: Trajectories of Civic Engagement for Hong Kong Youth[1]

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Abstract

This article compares the Hong Kong students' attitudes towards democracy in two cohorts: 1999 and 2009. Data were drawn from the IEA Civic Education Study carried out by the International Association of Educational Assessment in 1999, and a follow-up study ten years later. The students of 1999 cohort were educated largely in the final stages of British colonialism while the 2009 cohort received their education during the initial years of Chinese sovereignty. For both cohorts of students there has been limited experience of democratic processes and institutions but public contestation of democracy has always been a feature of the political landscape. The 2009 cohort in this study are of particular interest. They were fifteen years old at the time of responding to the survey but are now somewhere between eighteen and nineteen years old. It can be assumed that many of them were involved in the recent "Umbrella Movement" protests in late 2014.

The Rasch model was chosen to explore changes over time in attitudes towards democracy. With this methodology, change is reflected in any movement of items along the latent trait. Shifts were observed toward more support for democratic values by the 2009 cohort with an emphasis on what was perceived as good for democracy as well as an increased consensus about what can harm democracy. The results of this study, therefore, start to shed light on Hong

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Kong students' commitment to democracy demonstrated so clearly in the "Umbrella Movement" in 2014. This commitment appears to begin in early adolescence as shown in this study, and grow as the students reach maturity. Chinese sovereignty has not extinguished Hong Kong youth's democratic commitment.

Keywords

Civic engagement, Hong Kong, higher education, democracy.

The tradition of Political democracy in Hong Kong and the "Umbrella Movement".

Hong Kong does not have a history of political democracy but there are currently strong public sentiments in the community that support a more open and Western style democracy. This was shown most strongly in late 2014 when a youth initiated "Umbrella Movement" arose spontaneously to press the Chinese government for a more democratic process as part of its political reform agenda for Hong Kong (Ortman 2015). Since Hong Kong's integration into the People's Republic of China in 1997 these stirrings for democracy have been expressed especially through political parties such as the Democratic Party, the Civic Party, the Labour Party and the League of Social Democrats. It is perhaps civil society, however, that has often provided the most public displays of support for democratic causes. Apart from the "Umbrella Movement" mentioned above another example are the protests of July 1, 2003 when over 500,000 people took to the streets to express their concerns over proposed national security legislation. In addition, the so called 'post-80s' generation made their presence felt by staging public protests outside the Legislative Council to express their views on key social issues (Ip & Wu, 2013). Garrett (2013) documented, among other things, public protest in Hong Kong during the visit of Li Keqiang who at the time was the aspiring Chinese Premier-in-waiting. This was followed in mid-2012 by student demonstrations against a new national education curriculum (Morris & Vickers, 2015) resulting in the government's 'shelving' of its proposals. It could be argued that the recent ""Umbrella Movement"" was the culmination of these pent up feelings for greater democratic expression in Hong Kong.

This support for liberal democracy in the former British colony is not universal. There

are political parties such as the Liberal Party and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong that are much more aligned with the national government in Beijing. The tensions between the supporters of democracy and the supporters of Beijing are often played out in the Legislative Council where there are both popularly elected representatives and members elected by small interest groups (for example representing trades, professions and businesses) to what are called functional constituencies. Democracy, therefore, is quite contested in Hong Kong. This contestation is played out regularly in the media and in everyday discourse over issues such as universal suffrage, the direct election of the Chief Executive (equivalent to a Governor), the abolition of functional constituencies and the constant call from pro-democracy supporters for a 'road map for democracy' and human rights issues. Beijing moves at its own pace on all of these and does not appear to be overly influenced by them. Most recently China's National People's Congress has proposed a method for universal suffrage for the city's Chief Executive. Yet it is not considered "genuine" universal suffrage by pro-democracy groups since candidates have to be endorsed by a small nominating committee. The pros and cons of these different issues have regularly engaged the media and thus created a constant public discourse on democratic aspirations within what is essentially an authoritarian state structure.

This discourse has characterized Hong Kong in the eighteen years since the Territory was formally returned to China by the British government. It is against this background that we have investigated Hong Kong students' understanding of democracy and whether it has changed over time. We were particularly interested in how democratic understandings and commitment to democracy grow. Political socialization is a process that is not well understood although generally acknowledged to be important in the

development of political values and actions.

This paper, therefore, is concerned particularly with trajectories of students' understanding of democracy. We use data from two samples of 15-year-old students in Hong Kong secondary schools and speculate whether the trajectory that is identified might have propelled students into more radical forms of protest by the time they reached university age. The first sample participated in the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., [2]) when a survey was administered in 1999. The second sample completed the same survey in 2009. This comparative study establishes the first trajectory regarding students' understanding of democracy at two different points in Hong Kong's history. The students of 1999 cohort were educated largely in the final stages of the British colonialism while the 2009 cohort received their education during the initial years of Chinese sovereignty. For both cohorts of students there has been limited experience of democratic processes and institutions but public contestation of democracy has always been a feature of the political landscape. The 2009 cohort in this study are of particular interest. They were fifteen years old at the time of responding to the survey but where are now somewhere between eighteen and twenty years of age at the time of the 'Umbrella Movement" referred to above. Many would have been eligible for voting in local District Council elections and for the democratically elected seats in the Legislative Council and they may well have participated in the "Umbrella Movement" protests. Their views towards democracy and related issues of citizenship have the potential to influence the future discourse shaping the development of democracy in Hong Kong. The results of this study will hopefully contribute towards greater understanding of how young people's attitudes towards democracy can change when democracy is seen to be threatened and how such threats might lead to more

radical action.

Background literature

Almond and Powell (1996, p.47) pointed out that "each community's political culture exists uniquely in its own time and place. The attitudes and beliefs of its citizens are shaped by their personal experiences." In Hong Kong this has meant that democracy has been an aspiration rather than a reality both during colonial times and under Chinese sovereignty. As far as schools have been concerned, students in formal education have not been required to learn about democracy (Lee 2003) and civic education has been characterized as "depoliticized" (Leung and Ng, 2004). How have Hong Kong students fared in this environment?

From a comparative perspective Kennedy, Hahn and Lee (2008) used a number of related citizenship measures from the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, et al., 2001) to compare the citizenship attitudes of students in Hong Kong, Australia and the United States. These measures can be related to democracy, especially such features as voting, respecting the government and supporting activities that benefit the community including environmental protection. Overall, however, the Hong Kong students did not think it was important for good citizenship to be engaged directly in politics by either joining a party or discussing politics. In other words, students' views of citizenship were more socially rather than politically oriented.

A surprising finding that emerged from the comparative study referred to above was that, in general, Hong Kong students endorsed many aspects of citizenship more

positively than did Australian students. Hong Kong students' attitudes to citizenship seemed to be more like those of their peers in the United States. Social, cultural and historical explanations seem to suggest that living in a democracy such as Australia does not guarantee that young citizens will automatically endorse democratic values strongly. On the other hand, aspirations for democracy, rather than democracy itself, may well have provided a context in which Hong Kong students came to value democratic processes and institutions.

Building on the above study, Kennedy (2010) focused exclusively on Hong Kong students' values in relation to citizenship. He identified a pattern in students' responses to a range of question asked in the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). His results indicated that Hong Kong students were aware of three kinds of citizenship obligations: political, social and patriotic. As with the Kennedy, Hahn and Lee (2008) study, social obligations were more heavily endorsed than political obligations. Furthermore, perhaps more importantly, there were strong correlations among these three dimensions. This suggested that students may have a more integrated conception of citizenship responsibilities and Kennedy (2010) called such a conception 'civic consciousness'. Exactly how this consciousness developed, however, was left unexplored.

Radicalization as a means of expressing democratic sentiments is a recent phenomenon in Hong Kong and is relevant to this study. Initially it was seen in the emergence of the so called 'post 80s' generation as a new force in local politics. Styling themselves as the Anti-Express Railway Group, they opposed a government initiative to build an express rail link from Guangzhou to Shenzhen and Hong Kong. By doing so, they signaled a new wave of civic engagement that appeared to be more radical and less

accommodating than that of traditional democracy advocates. One of their members described their agenda in this way "The 'Post 80s' group felt the city needed a more aggressive opposition movement to force change." (*MySinchew.com*, 24 February 2010). In this case, they did succeed in overturning the government's agenda. Yet several years later, a "post-90s" group using similar tactics of sit-ins and large scale protests did succeed in forcing the government to withdraw its national education curriculum (Morris & Vickers, 2015). The "Umbrella Movement", largely consisting of university students but with support from the community groups, emerged towards the end of 2014 as an opposition group to the government's plan for universal suffrage. It too did not achieve its purposes, but it did succeed in turning world attention to Hong Kong's fight for democracy (Ortman, 2015)

This raises the very important issue of how these young people became radical in a political environment overseen by an authoritarian government in Beijing and dominated locally by the conservatism of a local administration influenced by business interests and free market economics. The radicalism of the "post 80's" and "post 90s" students and other young people raises an issue of central concern to this study concerning political socialization in the Hong Kong context.

This issue was addressed by Leung (2006), who interviewed socially and politically active Hong Kong students in their final year of high school and the first year at the university. The students in his sample generally shared a common experience: a teacher who took a particular interest in their civic education both in and outside school. This interest went so far that in some cases the teacher accompanied the students to demonstrations. Leung's (2006) sample was small so the results cannot be generalized but they do indicate that political socialization takes place in multiple ways including

informal education experiences which are hardly ever documented. How these informal experiences shape students' political attitudes remains an important area for future research.

Against this background of a growing radicalism in Hong Kong society this paper aims to contribute to an understanding of Hong Kong students' attitudes to democracy – an important aspiration for many Hong Kong people. Such aspirations have become particularly obvious in the post-handover period and thus it seems important to acquire a better insight into how young people view democracy, its characteristics and its importance.

Methodology

Instrument and data analysis

The IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) used 162 items to measure students' citizenship attitudes and values (Sections A to N of the Student Questionnaire). Section A consisted of 25 items related to democracy (Schulz and Sibberns, 2004, pp.246-248**)** and these are shown in Table 1. Students from 28 countries judged whether each of these statement was 'good' or 'bad' for democracy. Four response categories were available: 1=very bad for democracy, 2=somewhat bad for democracy, 3=somewhat good for democracy, or 4=very good for democracy. The initial analysis of these items reported in Torney-Purta et al.(2001, pp 71-76) did not report the scale properties of the items so the analysis was confined to reporting the item level statistics.

The original 25 democracy questions shown in Table 1 were drawn from the CivEd database, publicly accessible from the website of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (http://www.iea.nl/cived.html). We used Hong Kong students' responses to construct our baseline measure. In addition, we surveyed a comparable sample of Hong Kong students in 2009 using the same questions. Details of each sample are provided below.

 We used a Rasch statistical model[3] containing important properties that facilitate comparison. The main advantage of the Rasch model is that it transforms ordinal rating scale observations, such as responses to survey items, into interval level data so that the analysis yields more precise and accurate measurements (Bond & Fox, 2007). This was an important issue for two reasons. Psychometrically, if the data met the requirements of Rasch analysis we could be confident that our analyses would provide us with valid, reliable and comparable outcomes. Politically, the topic of democracy is a sensitive one in Hong Kong and therefore we wanted to be sure that any claims we made in this study would be based on the sound empirical evidence that we felt Rasch analysis was capable of providing.

Sample

Two samples were used. The 1999 IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) drew a representative sample of 4,997 from students between the ages of 14 years and 14 years and 11 months in Hong Kong, the average age for the 1999 sample was 15.27 (sd=0.827). In 2009, as a part of a research project that aimed to investigate Hong Kong students' attitudes to citizenship in the post-handover period, 602 secondary school students were surveyed with the same questionnaire that was used in 1999. They

were Secondary 3 students and their average age was 15.35 (sd=0.728). For the purpose of analysis and comparision, 500 students were randomly drawn from each of the 1999 and 2009 samples

Results

To facilitate comparisons between the two student samples, the mean student score was set at zero. This became the reference point for estimating student responses to the questions. The adoption of a zero point differed from the default setting of Rasch analysis software but in this case it facilitated the direct comparison of responses from both samples. Tests of both samples indicated that responses to the 25 survey questions contributed to a single unidimensional scale, a key requirement of the Rasch model (Lincare, 2009).

Item statistics

Rasch analysis does not report raw scores. Rather, it reports transformed raw scores that take into account both the positive and negative responses to an item. These transformed scores are distributed on an interval level scale measured in logits. By convention, this is referred to as the distribution of 'item difficulties'. An 'easier' item, in Rasch terms, will have had a larger proportion of positive endorsements and a smaller proportion of negative endorsements. A 'difficult' item, on the other hand, will have had a smaller number of positive endorsements and a larger number of negative endorsements (see Bond, & Fox, 2007, p.45, 107-108). Table 1 is in Appendix A and

reports the estimates of 'item difficulties' (in the sense just described), along with their measurement errors, for both samples of students. "Easier" items are prefixed with a '-' sign, whereas 'difficult' items have no sign in front of them. Information concerning the reliability of the scale is also in Appendix A.

For the 1999 sample, item difficulties for the 25 democracy items ranged from -1.37 logits (the item that attracted the highest proportion of positive responses - A1 in Table 1: 'right to express opinions freely') to 1.22 logits (the item that attracted the highest proportion of negative responses - A10 in Table 1: 'forbidden from speaking in public'). For the 2009 sample, the item difficulties ranged from -1.88 logits (the item that attracted the highest proportion of positive responses - A11 in Table 1: 'right to elect political leaders') to 1.80 logits (the item that attracted the highest proportion of negative responses - A12 in Table 1 - courts and judges influenced by politicians). A display of the samples' distribution in relations to the item difficulties (1999 and 2009) is shown graphically in Figure 1 that is in Rasch terms traditionally known as a 'Wright map'

Wright maps

A Wright map provides a graphical display of the interval scale (see Wilson, 2005, p.90-98) with item difficulties on the right-hand side and the distribution of student by endorsement on the left hand side. This arrangement of the display of item difficulties and the distribution of student performance shows clearly the items that Rasch analysis classifies as 'easy' (those students endorsed largely positively; they move from'0' to the bottom of the map) and those regarded as 'difficult' (those they endorsed largely negatively; they move from '0' to the top of the map).

Figure 1 Wright maps for Samples of Students in 1999 and 2009

1999   2009
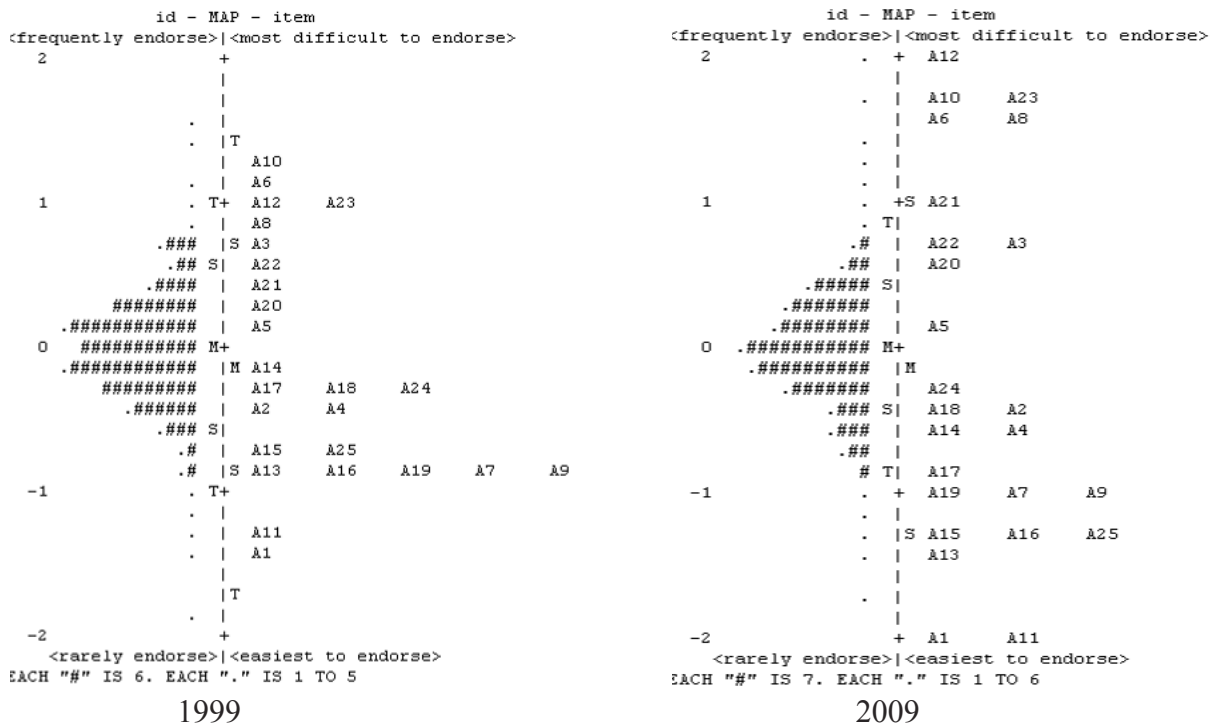
 For both the persons and items, letter "M", "S" and "T" indicate the mean of the measures, one standard deviation away from the mean, and two standard deviations away from the mean, respectively. The spread of items is more diverse in 2009 than in 1999 even though their student distributions (on the left-hand side) look very much the same. On the right of the maps, the most "difficult" items to endorse (i.e. those that were endorsed more negatively) are in the higher positions while the easiest items (i.e. those that were endorsed more positively) are in the lower positions. For 1999, the most difficult item was therefore A10 ('forbidden from speaking in public') whereas the easiest item was A1 (right to express opinions freely). For 2009, the most difficult item was A12 ('courts and judges influenced by politicians') whereas the easiest item was A11 ('right to elect political leaders').

Standardized Differences between Samples: 1999 v. 2009

Table 1 showed the estimates of item difficulty for each of the 25 items for both samples. In order to compare these results, attention needs to be paid not only to the measures themselves but also to the potential measurement errors associated with them. Table 2 in Appendix B shows the estimated measures of item difficulty for each item by cohort along with the standard errors of measurement associated with each item and finally, the standardized difference between those measurements in 1999 and 2009 (see Bond & King, 2003 for another example of this analytic process). A graphic display of the standardized differences is shown in Figure 2 also in Appendix C. The calculations for deriving the standardized differences are outlined in a *Technical Report* (Kennedy & Chow, 2010).

Measurable differences

The first point to observe from Table 2 in Appendix B (shown graphically in Figure 2 in Appendix C) is that there were no observable changes to the scale mean from 1999 to 2009. This suggests some stability in students' attitudes to democracy across time. Yet the item analysis tells a somewhat different story. In Figure 2 the item difficulties were plotted so that the 'easy' items (those with a higher ratio of positive responses to negative responses) are towards the top of the graph and 'difficult' items (those with a higher ratio of negative responses to positives) are below. Of the 25 democracy items, 15 items showed measurable differences between 1999 and 2009. Of these, eight items (A1, A11, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17 and A25) were rated more positively by students in 2009 than by students in 1999, i.e., the points for 2009 are located *above* those for 1999). Conversely, seven items (A6, A8, A10, A12, A20, A21 and A23) were rated

more negatively by students in 2009 than by students in 1999, i.e., the points for 2009 are located *below* those for 1999). The remaining 10 item remained measurably invariant (identical within error) from 1999 to 2009 (i.e., the error bars for the two points overlap). This item analysis helps to explain why there was no observable change of the scale means across 1999 and 2009: the changes to positive and negative endorsements cancelled themselves out.

To provide greater precision for these results an effect size was computed to make a judgment about the size of the changes that have been reported. For Rasch measurement, Lincare (2008) defined a substantive difference as a difference of >0.5 logits. Newmann et al., (2001) argued that 0.6 logits corresponds to about one-year of educational growth. Such a difference in an achievement test could well influence administrative decisions about students including grade retention. It seems a useful indicator, therefore, for effect size, therefore, when considering substantive change as opposed to measurable change. Of the above mentioned 15 items showing measurable differences, only four items showed a substantive difference, namely item A8 ('disagreement with the pressure on immigrants to give up their culture'), A11 ('agreement with free elections'), A12 ('disagreement with political influence on the rule of law') and A23 ('disagreement with influence of the rich on the government'). The meaning of the different levels of endorsement by the two cohorts of students will be discussed below.

Discussion

Previous analyses of the 25 democracy items have focused on either item level

responses using classical test theory (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p.71-76) or structural equation modeling (Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003). The study reported here has used Rasch analysis to compare democratic attitudes of two samples of Hong Kong students ten years apart. For both samples, the twenty-five democracy items can be regarded as a unidimensional scale with psychometric properties acceptable for demonstrating its construct validity. It can be inferred from the analyses provided here that the scale represents an unobservable latent trait that has been tapped by the items that make up the scale. As Bond and Fox (2007, p. 311) pointed out the observations or items themselves may not define the entire trait. Yet the items are indicative of the trait and their placement on the interval level scale serves to delineate or define as much of the unobservable latent trait as possible. The first issue to be discussed is the nature of the latent trait under discussion followed by a suggested explanation of the patterns of student endorsement.

It is important to understand the underlying meaning of the latent trait. Conceptually, the common characteristic of the 25 items represents 'democratic values'. There are positive values ('good for democracy') and negative values ('bad for democracy'). Thus, it seems reasonable to define the twenty-five democracy items as the 'Democratic Values Scale' measuring an underlying latent trait. Over the ten-year period, the pattern of item endorsement along the latent trait by the two cohorts of students was similar in some ways and different in others.

First, for some items seen as 'good for democracy' the item locations remained constant for both cohorts with no measurable change (see items A2, A4, A7, A9, A18, A19, A24 in Table 1). Other similar items (A1, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A25 in Table 1) however, were located at positions further along the end of the scale for the 2009 cohort

suggesting that these students endorsed these items more positively.

Second, for some items seen as 'bad for democracy' the item endorsements remained constant across cohorts (see items A3, A5, A22 in Table 1). Other similar items seen as 'bad for democracy' were endorsed more negatively by the 2009 cohort. This placed the items further along the scale. (see items A6, A8, A10, A12, A20, A21, A23). There was a lack of change overall in the latent trait for the two cohorts of students: the mean estimate in 1999 was -0.12 ± 0.07 logits and in 2009 -0.13 ± 0.07 logits (see Table 1). Yet the detail of the changes in the item locations referred to above revealed nuanced differences between the two cohorts. The remainder of this section will discuss these differences.

Seven items that were endorsed positively by students in 1999 and remained invariant in 2009 may represent a range of the basic democratic values. Most of these seem obvious: 'elimination of wealth disparities' (A2), 'freedom of press' (A4), 'demanding political and social rights' (A7), 'gender equity' (A19 and A9) and 'political participation' (A18). For both cohorts, these items were in general endorsed positively with only few students endorsing them less favorably. One of the items concerns 'trust in political leaders' (A24) and it may not be immediately apparent why this item should be endorsed positively and therefore seen as a good thing for democracy. In the original study, the item was classified as a democratic value on which there was not a great deal of consensus (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p.74). In more traditional versions of liberal democracy trust in leaders is not always seen as a positive value and this view is often exacerbated by the confrontational nature of politics within such democracies. Yet in the Hong Kong context, and similar sociopolitical contexts in Asia, leaders tend to be more respected than they are in the West. Confucian values require that hierarchy is

acknowledged and that leaders are respected. The stability of this item across time suggests that this value perhaps has a special meaning that Hong Kong students have internalized in this Asian context. It demonstrates the importance of considering cultural issues when interpreting these results.

The three invariant items that were endorsed less favorably by a majority of students in both cohorts also require some analysis. These items are concerned with the role of government and each case suggests some negative context - 'nepotism' (A3), 'no restrictions on business' (A5), 'limits on free press for minorities' (A22). When students endorse these items less favorably, marking them as 'bad for democracy', they were highlighting various democratic values: in the case of A3 and A5, the negatives are obvious and point to a role for government in regulating political and business behaviour. Yet A22 is different in that it contains a dilemma of freedom of press and protection of minority rights ("When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend ethnic groups [immigrant groups, racial groups, national groups] that is…"). In this case students typically indicated that it was 'bad for democracy' if governments limited freedom of press, even if the purpose was to protect minorities. Summarized, some of the roles of government are more obvious (regulation of enterprises, nepotism) than others and values also differ in their weight (e.g., freedom and protection of minorities).

These invariant items, that were either 'good' or 'bad' for democracy, were endorsed or rejected similarly in both 1999 and 2009, may represent core democratic values of Hong Kong students in this study. This suggests democracy is by no means a foreign concept to Hong Kong students even though neither cohort has actually experienced a democratic system under either British colonialism or Chinese sovereignty. (This is an

important issue and will be discussed further towards the end of the article.)

In addition, there were some items that more students endorsed positively in 2009 than 1999. These were democratic values such as: 'freedom of expression' (A1), 'election of political leaders' (A11), 'freedom of association' (A13), 'separation of church and state' (A14), 'young people's obligation to contribute to the community' (A15), 'existence of a minimum wage' (A16), 'political parties with different views' (A17) and 'the right to protest peacefully (A25). At the same time, other items received more negative endorsement in 2009 than in 1999. These were concerned with concentration of media ownership (A6), 'forced assimilation of migrants' (A8), 'limitations on freedom of speech' (A10), 'political influence on the judiciary' (A12), 'single political voice in television stations' (A20), 'refusal to obey a law that violates human rights' (A21) and 'business influence on government (A23). Taken together, these changes suggest that more students in 2009 were committed to democratic values than their peers in 1999.

This generalization, however, needs to be tempered somewhat by the consideration of the size of the change that has been reported for different items. We identified only four items in which there was substantive change (i.e. ±0.5 logits) rather than just measurable or statistically significant change. One of these items reflected what was 'good' for democracy: the right to elect political leaders freely (A11). There was a higher consensus in 2009 about what was 'bad' for democracy – 'forced assimilation of migrants '(A 8), 'political influence on the judiciary' (A12) and 'business influence on the government' (A23). These substantive changes suggest there are aspects of democracy taking deeper hold among more students in Hong Kong. The other measurable changes are important to note, but their size moderates their importance.

What we see in these results is support for democracy by 15 year olds and overtime that support seems to have grown so that ten years after Hong Kong's return to China, the trend appears to be a growing support for democracy and its institutions. Skip ahead three years and many of these students from the 2009 cohort may well have been involved in protesting against the government's proposals for national education (Morris & Vickers, 2015) and two years further on they may have been involved in the "Umbrella Movement" (Ortman, 2015). If these specific students were not involved in such protests, then certainly their friends and many in their age cohort were. This view is supported by resource mobilization theory as described by Warkotsch (2014, p. 20):

Resource mobilization posited movement actors as *strategic actors* poorly positioned within the political system… The main thrust of resource mobilization arguments was that mobilization into social movements is immensely facilitated by pre-existing social networks. Thus, the better the integration into social networks, the higher the chances of mobilization….

This suggests that students who know other students will act as conduits to broaden the base of any social movement. With today's social media world this process of cohort conscription is a likely explanation of the way in which the students in this study not only represented their age cohort but communicated with them. That is to say, the trajectory that was identified in this study whereby students' support for democracy increased from 1999 to 2009 is likely to have continued as time went on and broadened through contact and communication. What is more there were more and more opportunities for engagement after 2009 – the anti- railways protests (2010), the national education protests (2012) and the "Umbrella Movement" (2014). As Warkotsch (2014) explained, political opportunities were seen to be a support for resource

mobilization theory even though there has been a debate about whether such opportunities are purely structural and objective (seen by everyone in the same way), or whether they may be subjective and dependent on individual perceptions. Nevertheless, it seems the conditions were right in Hong Kong for students' commitments to democracy to continue and for more and more students to be involved.

The Chinese political system also provides a context for extended student involvement: supporting democracy in Hong Kong is opposing authoritarianism in Mainland China. A key issue is to try and account for the views of Hong Kong students about democracy, and in particular its increasing radicalization, following the city's return to China. Gimple, Lay and Schuknecht (2003) have highlighted the importance of civic environments for young people as an important part of the political socialization process. Warkotsch (2014, p.17) pointed to the structural conditions of the environment "that sometimes left … little alternative to rebellion". Torney-Purta et al. (2001) developed a model of political socialization that identified both micro and macro elements within the civic environment that potentially influenced young people. In the context of Hong Kong there is an emerging body of research that is investigating these agents of political socialization (Fairbrother, 2003; Leung, 2006). At the present time, however, a likely explanation for Hong Kong students' understanding of democratic values is in the macro process identified by Torney-Purta et al. (2001 p. 21): "public discourse about goals and values." Ironically, this suggests that the results of this study may be explained by the very lack of democracy both in Hong Kong's political life as well as in its absence from the school curriculum.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, democracy is a topic for public debate and media attention in Hong Kong. Political parties with democratic agendas are

represented in the Legislative Council as are parties aligned with Beijing. Regular elections at district and territory levels give rise to real electoral campaigns where different political views are aired. Even the election of the Chief Executive (equivalent to a state Governor), while currently stigmatized as a 'small circle election' on account of the small number of electors, is conducted like a regular election in a liberal democracy. Candidates are classified as 'government' (meaning the national government in Beijing) and 'opposition' (meaning supporters of democracy).

Thus the lack of democracy creates an environment where democratic discourse is rarely absent from the public arena. The existence of the rule of law and basic liberal values such as freedom of the press ensure that different views on political development are never far from the public domain. This reflects the lack of consensus about democracy in Hong Kong. Yet it is the lack of consensus between pro-Beijing and democratic political parties that give rise to the ongoing public discourse. Students hear both sides of the political debate – both for and against the Western-style democracy. China's recent proposals for the universal suffrage have shown how far its political elite are from the democratic yearnings of many Hong Kong people. Students are exposed constantly to the growing power and influence of China where democracy is not valued but economic growth is valorized. The response of Hong Kong students, it seems, has been to support democracy even more and, since 2009 at least, to be prepared to engage in radical political action.

Conclusion

Our main concern in this article has been to investigate Hong Kong students' attitudes

to democracy and democratic values. In particular we have been concerned with any changes to these values over a ten year period and whether such changes might be regarded as the basis of a longer term trajectory for democratic support beyond 2009.

We deliberately chose a well-respected tool and methodology that would provide accurate empirical results enabling us to make valid and reliable conclusions. We have been able to demonstrate an underlying latent trait reflecting democratic values in both student cohorts as well as the subtle change this latent trait underwent within a decade. This change was reflected in the movement of items along the latent trait. We have demonstrated the core democratic values for both samples of students as they were reflected in the invariant items along the latent trait. In addition, we have shown shifts toward more support for democratic values which are perceived as good for democracy as well as an increased consensus about what can harm democracy. We have argued that these changes have been brought about by the democratic discourses that characterize non-democratic Hong Kong. In other words, the lack of democracy in Hong Kong has been a powerful and pervasive circumstance that both highlights and obscures significant democratic values. Our further argument has been that the trajectory identified over the significant decade from 1999-2009 has in all likelihood continued as evidenced by the engagement of more and more students in radical protests designed in each case to sure democratic ends.   The cause maybe the media, it may be parents and discussions they have with their children, it may be peer interaction, the availability of new technology-enhanced social networks, or the impetus from global civilization: all of these can give students access to opportunities for learning about different aspects of democracy. What we do know is that eighteen years after the return of Hong Kong to China Hong Kong students had stronger commitments to democracy shown empirically

in our study and then by the action of students themselves. What we are less certain about is how this situation developed. Perhaps more importantly, in the light of the results of this study, how can this trajectory of commitment to democracy be sustained? We need to know more about the political socialization of young adults in Hong Kong, how they build on their initial commitments to democracy and how they decide to commit further to radical action. Hong Kong's future political development may well depend on answers to these questions – answers that will be as important to the Beijing rulers of Hong a Kong as to the local pro-democracy movement.

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Appendix A

Table 1
Item Difficulties for Both Samples of Students, 1999 and 2009

Item No.	Item name	Estimates of Item Difficulty			
		1999		2009	
		Estimate	Standard Error	Estimate	Standard Error
A1	When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, that is	-1.37	0.07	-1.81	0.08
A2	When differences in income wealth between the rich poor are small, that is	-0.40	0.06	-0.43	0.06
A3	When political leaders in power give jobs in the government [public sector] to members of their family, that is	0.65	0.06	0.71	0.06
A4	When newspapers are free of all government [state, political] control, that is	-0.39	0.06	-0.55	0.06
A5	When private businesses have no restrictions from government, that is	0.10	0.06	0.20	0.06
A6	When one company owns all the newspapers, that is	1.10	0.06	1.47	0.07
A7	When people demand their political and social rights, that is	-0.81	0.07	-0.96	0.07
A8	When immigrants are expected to give up the language and customs of their former countries, that is	0.83	0.06	1.48	0.07
A9	When political parties have rules that support women to become political leaders, that is	-0.87	0.07	-0.85	0.07
A10	When people who are critical of the government are forbidden from speaking at public meetings that is	1.22	0.06	1.53	0.07
A11	When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely, that is	-1.23	0.07	-1.88	0.08
A12	When courts and judges are influenced by politicians, that is	0.98	0.06	1.80	0.07
A13	When many different organizations [associations] are available [exist] for people who wish to belong to them, that is	-0.90	0.07	-1.26	0.07
A14	When there is a separation [segregation] between the church [institutional church] and the state [government], that is	-0.07	0.07	-0.47	0.07
A15	When young people have an obligation [are obliged] to participate in activities to benefit [help] the community [society], that is	-0.77	0.07	-1.20	0.08
A16	When a minimum income [living standard] is assured for everyone, that is	-0.83	0.07	-1.24	0.07
A17	When political parties have different opinions [positions] on important issues, that is	-0.34	0.07	-0.75	0.07
A18	When people participate in political parties in order to influence government, that is	-0.27	0.06	-0.41	0.06
A19	When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed, that is	-0.88	0.07	-0.90	0.07
A20	When all the television stations present the same opinion about politics, that is	0.25	0.06	0.52	0.06
A21	When people refuse to obey a law which violates human rights, that is	0.48	0.06	0.88	0.06

A22	When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend ethnic groups [immigrant groups, racial groups, national groups], that is	0.56	0.06	0.61	0.06
A23	When wealthy business people have more influence on government than others, that is	1.06	0.06	1.59	0.07
A24	When government leaders are trusted without question, that is	-0.22	0.06	-0.30	0.06
A25	When people peacefully protest against a law they believe to be unjust, that is	-0.77	0.07	-1.16	0.07

In Rasch methodology the reliability of both item difficulty and respondent ability are estimated by what Linacre (2008) calls "separation reliability" indices – one for items and one for respondents. In the above analysis, the "item separation reliability" was high: 0.99 for both samples. This suggests that besides the large sample size (n=500 in each sample), the range of item difficulties (-1.37 to 1.22 logits for 1999 and -1.88 to 1.80 logits for 2009) was adequate in reflecting a latent trait continuum as shown in Figure 1. The "person separation reliability" indices for both samples, however, were much lower: 0.57 and 0.38 for the respective sample in 1999 and 2009. This suggests that the range of attitudes to democracy in both samples was not large. This view is supported by the fact that 94% of the respondent measures fell within the range of -1.00 to +1.00 logits. While this does not reflect on the reliability of the results of this study it does suggest that a sample with a more diverse range of abilities may not respond in the same way to these questions.

Appendix B

Table 2
Standardized differences between item estimates for students in 1999 and 2009

Item	1999		2009		Estimated Differences (2009-1999)	Combined Error	Standardized Difference (*t*)
	Estimate of Item Difficulty	Standard Error	Estimate of Item Difficulty	Standard Error			
A1	-1.37	0.07	-1.81	0.08	-0.44	0.11	-4.14
A2	-0.40	0.06	-0.43	0.06	-0.03	0.08	-0.35
A3	0.65	0.06	0.71	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.71
A4	-0.39	0.06	-0.55	0.06	-0.16	0.08	-1.89
A5	0.10	0.06	0.20	0.06	0.10	0.08	1.18
A6	1.10	0.06	1.47	0.07	0.37	0.09	4.01
A7	-0.81	0.07	-0.96	0.07	-0.15	0.10	-1.52
A8	0.83	0.06	1.48	0.07	0.65	0.09	7.05
A9	-0.87	0.07	-0.85	0.07	0.02	0.10	0.20
A10	1.22	0.06	1.53	0.07	0.31	0.09	3.36
A11	-1.23	0.07	-1.88	0.08	-0.65	0.11	-6.11
A12	0.98	0.06	1.80	0.07	0.82	0.09	8.89
A13	-0.90	0.07	-1.26	0.07	-0.36	0.10	-3.64
A14	-0.07	0.07	-0.47	0.07	-0.40	0.10	-4.04
A15	-0.77	0.07	-1.20	0.08	-0.43	0.11	-4.05
A16	-0.83	0.07	-1.24	0.07	-0.41	0.10	-4.14
A17	-0.34	0.07	-0.75	0.07	-0.41	0.10	-4.14
A18	-0.27	0.06	-0.41	0.06	-0.14	0.08	-1.65
A19	-0.88	0.07	-0.90	0.07	-0.02	0.10	-0.20
A20	0.25	0.06	0.52	0.06	0.27	0.08	3.18
A21	0.48	0.06	0.88	0.06	0.40	0.08	4.71
A22	0.56	0.06	0.61	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.59
A23	1.06	0.06	1.59	0.07	0.53	0.09	5.75
A24	-0.22	0.06	-0.30	0.06	-0.08	0.08	-0.94
A25	-0.77	0.07	-1.16	0.07	-0.39	0.10	-3.94
Mean	-0.12		-0.13		-0.02		

Appendix C

Figure 2
Standardized differences between students' responses to democracy items
plotted as t distribution (i.e. *p*<.05)