

ABSTRACT PRINCIPLE VERSUS CONCRETE INTEREST: A STUDY OF EDUCATION AND POLITICAL OPINION IN HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the fundamental forces shaping people's political opinions. Past studies in the West have shown that education increases people's support for abstract democratic principles, but not necessarily for concrete policies implementing these principles. This article examines the impact of education in Hong Kong. Do people with different education levels hold different opinions regarding abstract social principles? How do people's support for principles and their self-interest affect their policy opinions? The right of abode controversy in 1999 provides a test case for these questions. Drawing on two surveys, we found that tertiary education (college) had an enlightening effect on people's support and application of social principles in Hong Kong, especially during the early stage of the controversy. Tertiary education was negatively related to people's concern for self-interest, and for people with a secondary level of education, the relationship between adherence to principles and opinion was weakest, and they show the strongest concern for their own interest. The findings can be explained by referring to both theoretical perspectives and situational factors such as the underdevelopment of democracy in Hong Kong and the shortcomings of civic education in its school system.

Education is one of the most important factors affecting people's political opinions. Also, people with different levels of education form their opinions in different processes and take different things into consideration as bases of opinions (Sniderman *et al.* 1991). Educational institutions are viewed by some scholars as an important agent of political socialization (Hyman and Wright 1979), while others criticize the effect of education as superficial (Jackman 1978), or simply supportive of the society's dominant ideology (Jackman and Muha 1984).

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In this study we provide an analysis of the impact of education on opinion formation in a political controversy in Hong Kong. Do people with different educational levels hold different opinions? If yes, is it because they take different things into consideration? Specifically, we are interested in the influences of education on whether, and to what extent, people accept and apply abstract principles and specific interest considerations in forming their opinions.

EDUCATION, PRINCIPLES, AND INTERESTS

Early research on the impact of education on political opinions was dominated by the enlightenment view, which treats education as a positive political socializing agent. In this view, education contributes to the acquisition of democratic values, participation in politics, respect for the nation and its tradition, support for the political system, and so on (Ichilov 1990, Dennis 1973). Formal civic education is one way to achieve these goals (Levin 1990). Besides, education increases one's awareness of political matters and current affairs, and one's cognitive ability in reasoning and abstract thinking in general. In short, education increases one's political sophistication (Fiske *et al.* 1990, Bobo and Licari 1989). Researchers have found that educated people more often possess sophistication traits such as attitude consistencies and higher levels of abstraction in political thinking (Converse 1964, 1975), and that they adhere more strongly to the dominant norms and values in a society (McClosky and Zaller 1984). Educated people also exhibit different reasoning processes when compared with the less educated (Sniderman *et al.* 1991). On the whole, the enlightenment view regards education as functional in maintaining the democratic system. A lot of research has provided evidence supporting this view (e.g., Hyman and Wright 1979, Westholm *et al.* 1990, Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

Nevertheless, critics have argued that the effect of education may not be as positive as the enlightenment view presumes. In her well-known article, Jackman (1978) finds that, in the USA, educated people are indeed more supportive of the principle of racial integration, but not of a policy that would achieve it. Also, educated people do not exhibit a stronger relationship between support for the abstract principle and support for the specific policy. Jackman argues that educated people's support for democratic principles is superficial: they do believe more in the principles, but they do not necessarily apply them in concrete situations.

Jackman and Muha (1984) push the criticism further. They find that educated people are not only similar to the less educated in terms of stances on specific policies, but that their support for abstract democratic principles is not necessarily stronger either. The exceptional cases are principles related to individualism. The authors argue that the main effect of education in US society is to promote

individualism. Educated people's responses to survey questions constitute an ideologically refined set of answers that justify inequality. The argument about the role of education in reproducing ideology, however, was not substantiated by other empirical studies. In contrast, the other view—that education enhances democratic commitment only superficially—received empirical support (McClosky and Zaller 1984, Kane 1995, Phelan *et al.* 1995).¹

While most of the research reviewed above was done in the USA, comparative analyses show that the effect of education depends on the social and political context, e.g. on the age of the liberal-democratic regime and the degree of religious heterogeneity, which affects the plurality of ideas in a society (Weil 1985).

Obviously, Hong Kong differs from Western democratic countries in its short and incomplete history of democratization. Its political system remains in many ways undemocratic. Most people support the abstract notion of democracy, but their conception of democracy may bear the marks of Chinese culture and Hong Kong's political history (Kuan and Lau 1997). Civic education in schools is deemed largely insufficient (Cheng 1996, Tse 1997). Thus, explanations of the effects of education have to refer to both theoretical arguments and specific contextual factors of Hong Kong society.

When people formulate opinions about an issue, there is no reason for them to take only abstract principles into account. Their concrete personal or social interest may as well be considered. Obviously, when people's interests are not affected, it will be easy for them to adhere to abstract principles. In other cases, however, principles and interest may clash. Such cases provide a stronger test of the role of principles in opinion formation. When principle and interest are in conflict, will educated people have their opinions shaped more by principle than by interest calculation? That is the major focus of this study.

THE RIGHT OF ABODE ISSUE

The right of abode issue in Hong Kong in 1999 provides a suitable test case as it involves two conflicting concerns—judiciary independence and economic interest. On January 29, 1999, Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal ruled that, according to the Basic Law (Hong Kong's mini-constitution), all children of its permanent residents who were still in China had the right of abode in the city.²

¹ Interpretations of the findings differ, though. McClosky and Zaller (1984) argue that even superficial commitment is a kind of progress, and that it would turn into actual support of policy implementation if the linkage is made clear. Kane (1995) does not differentiate the superficial commitment and ideological refinement perspectives but argues that producing superficial commitment is a way of reproducing the existing social structure. Phelan *et al.* (1995) group Jackman's (1978) argument in the socialization perspective and emphasize the acquaintance with dominant norms as a result of education.

² The verdict granted the right to all children regardless of their age, the time their parents moved to Hong Kong, whether they were born before or after their parents became permanent residents of Hong Kong, and whether they were children of a married couple or not.

The verdict was against the government's wish. It granted the right of abode to potentially hundreds of thousands of mainlanders. The verdict also involved the interpretation of the Basic Law, a politically sensitive matter. The controversy was destined to be highly complex and intense.

Two major frames emerged for people to make sense of the verdict. On the one hand, it was hailed as a demonstration of judiciary independence. On January 30, *Ming Pao*, a local elite newspaper, proclaimed that 'the verdict had reconfirmed people's confidence in the rule of law'. On the other hand, journalists and pundits were contemplating the strains that the verdict would bring to society. An article in *Apple Daily*, another local newspaper, on the same day expressed worries that the influx of immigrants may aggravate the economic problems the city faced.³

A week after the verdict, criticism surfaced from conservative politicians and legal authorities in China. The most important was that the court's verdict, by interpreting the Basic Law, had overridden the power of mainland China's National People's Congress. In principle, the Court of Final Appeal is the 'Supreme Court' in Hong Kong. But Hong Kong is not a sovereign country, and the ultimate power to interpret the Basic Law is in the hands of the Congress. The issue thus became a conflict between the Hong Kong and mainland legal systems and traditions, which further increased the concern for judiciary independence.

Due to pressure from China, the Hong Kong government, in late February, requested the Court of Final Appeal to 'clarify' its verdict. The Court then confirmed the Congress's ultimate authority in interpreting the Basic Law, but it did not change the original verdict. This means that the potential negative social consequences were still to be feared, and discussions about how to cope with the social impact of the verdict continued. On April 30, the Hong Kong government announced the results of its census conducted in the mainland, alleging that the verdict had given the right of abode to about 1.67 million mainlanders. If all of them came to the city, the government would need to spend 100 billion US dollars over the next ten years. Amid criticism of the validity of these figures, the government proposed to seek an interpretation of the Basic Law by the National People's Congress. Democrats and legal pundits strongly criticized the proposal, arguing that it would destroy Hong Kong's legal autonomy. However, various opinion polls showed that the majority of

³ Both frames should be understood with regard to the socioeconomic context of Hong Kong at that time. Since the end of 1997, Hong Kong has entered a period of economic recession due to the Asian financial crisis and the bursting of the bubbles in the local property and stock markets. Workers' salaries decreased and unemployment rose. The possible influx of a huge number of immigrants was thus perceived as a burden. At the same time, after the sovereignty change in 1997, the public was still waiting for evidence that the rule of law would continue. The Hong Kong government's handling of certain issues, however, eroded the public's confidence. Thus, the Court's ruling in the right of abode case, as it was against the administration's will, was interpreted as an indication of the rule of law.

respondents supported the government proposal. Finally, the Congress decided on an interpretation of the Basic Law in late June and reduced the number of mainlanders having the right of abode to around 200,000.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND METHODS

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the above discussions, we expect people's opinions on the original verdict in January and on the government's decision to seek interpretation of the Basic Law by the National People's Congress to be affected by their support for the principle of judiciary independence and their estimation of the impact of influx. Figure 1 shows the framework for the analysis.

We will examine the effects of education from two angles: (1) How is education related to where people stand on each of the concerns?; (2) How is education related to the strength of the *relationships* between the two general concerns and the specific opinions on the issue?

For the first question, following past studies, we expect a positive relationship between education and support for the principle of judiciary independence. We shall also examine whether people with different educational levels estimate the consequences of the expected influx differently. These two expectations are symbolized by arrows 1 and 2 in Figure 1. For the second question, past studies suggest different answers. If education makes people apply principles, we should find a stronger relationship between support for principle and opinions for educated people (arrow 3). But no such difference between people with different levels of education would exist if superficial commitment prevails. Similarly, we will also examine whether educated people are more or less likely to base their opinions on their estimation of the consequence of influx (arrow 4).

These four routes are central to the theoretical focus of this study. Of course, education may affect opinions in other ways. However, our aim is not to illustrate all routes through which education exerts its influence. Therefore, we will only incorporate the other possibilities into a direct effect hypothesis (arrow 5). Similarly, though people's opinions on the issue may be affected by other factors, this study focuses on the effects of education. Therefore only the basic demographic variables are included as control variables.

DATA

The data were derived from two surveys conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies under the auspices of the Faculty of Social Science, Chinese University of Hong Kong. The first survey was conducted between March 5 and 7, right after the Court of Final Appeal had 'clarified' its verdict.

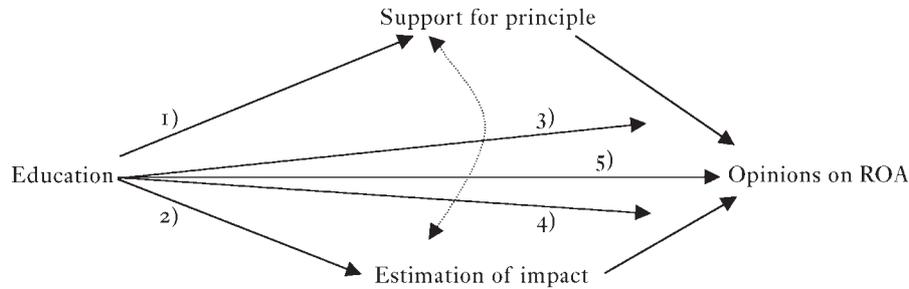


FIGURE 1 Frame of analysis

The second survey was conducted between May 31 and June 1, amid intense discussion over seeking interpretation of the Basic Law by the People's Congress. For both surveys, phone numbers were randomly drawn from the updated residential telephone directories. To include non-listed numbers, the last two digits of the numbers were removed and randomly re-assigned. The target population is Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong residents over 18. The most-recent-birthday method was employed to select individuals from households. A total of 954 interviews were completed for the first survey with a response rate of 49.1 percent, and 857 interviews were completed for the second with a response rate of 48.8 percent.⁴ We will refer to them as the March and June surveys respectively. The two samples do not differ significantly in age, sex, personal income, and education. Compared with the population, the samples contain more people aged 21–40, more people better educated and with higher levels of income. But the biases are small, and since multivariate analysis is used, the difference between sample and population should not be a problem.

OPERATIONALIZATION

Support for principle is measured by the question: 'If the development of Hong Kong society and economy is in conflict with maintaining judiciary independence, will you choose social and economic development or maintaining judiciary independence?' This question was repeated in both surveys. The wording does not refer to the right of abode issue. It is therefore a suitable indicator of the respondents' support for the principle of judiciary independence.⁵

Estimation of impact was measured by respondents' agreement with a set of statements. In March, respondents were asked, using a Likert scale, whether

⁴ The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of successful interviews by the total of successful interviews and refusals.

⁵ It is true that, though the question wording is couched in an abstract and general way, respondents could take into account the right of abode controversy when answering the question. However, it remains the best indicator for the support for the principle of judicial independence in the survey.

they agreed or disagreed with the following three statements: ‘My confidence in the future of Hong Kong will decrease’, ‘Hong Kong’s economy will be damaged because of [the expected influx]’, and ‘The development of various aspects of Hong Kong society will slow down’. Answers to these questions are averaged with higher values indicating a more negative estimation ($\alpha = 0.78$).⁶ In June, however, there was no question asking the respondents to estimate the impact of influx. Thus only part of the framework can be tested in the June survey.

Opinion was also measured by respondents’ agreement with statements using a Likert scale. In March we were interested in respondents’ evaluation of the verdict. Five statements were used, all beginning with ‘The Court of Final Appeal’s verdict on the right of abode . . .

1. represents the judiciary independence of Hong Kong’.
2. realizes the principle of “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong’.
3. destroys the harmonious relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China after the handover’ (reverse-coded).
4. is consistent with the principle of human rights’.
5. is wrong, since allowing a large number of mainlanders to come to Hong Kong will increase the burden on society and economy’ (reverse-coded).

Respondents’ answers were averaged to gain an index representing opinion on the verdict ($\alpha = 0.68$).

In the June survey we were interested in people’s opinion on the government proposal. Two statements are combined ($\alpha = 0.71$) to form an index:

1. ‘Do you agree or disagree with the Hong Kong government’s proposal to request the National People’s Congress to interpret the Basic Law in order to solve the right of abode issue?’
2. ‘There is the opinion that, even if it would harm the rule of law in Hong Kong, it is acceptable to request the People’s Congress to interpret the Basic Law, because the influx of a large number of mainlanders will have a severe negative impact on Hong Kong. Do you agree or disagree to this view?’

It should be noted that the content of some of the statements used to measure opinions overlap with the measures of support for principle and the estimation of impact. This may lead to an inflated relationship between opinions and the two concerns. However, our main concern is whether the relationships differ in strength for different groups of respondents. There is no particular reason to assume the overlap to have different effects for different groups. Thus it should not cause any problems for our study.

⁶ In averaging, the mean of the other statements was taken if a respondent did not give a valid answer to one of them. The same applies to other variables involving the averaging of a number of items.

RESULTS

EDUCATION, SUPPORT FOR PRINCIPLE, AND ESTIMATION OF IMPACT

The enlightenment view of the role of education leads to the expectation of a linear relationship between education and support for principle, but we also tested a curvilinear relationship because the different stages of education may be qualitatively different. In Hong Kong, one has to go through primary, secondary, and tertiary (college) education. These stages differ in their environment, method, and substance of teaching and learning. Thus, it is possible that the relationship between education and political opinion is not linear. Since only three stages are involved, it is sufficient to add education squared as the variable testing a curvilinear relationship between education and political opinions.

The analytical framework as depicted in Figure 1 includes a broken arrow linking people's support for principle to their estimation of impact. When examining the effect of education on support for principle, estimation of impact has to be controlled, and vice versa. However, our expectation is that education will have separate effects on support for principle and estimation of impact.

We computed multiple regressions with support for principle as the dependent variable, and education, education squared, age, sex, personal income, and estimation of impact included as independent variables. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, logistic regression is used.

The results as summarized in Table 1 partially support the enlightenment argument. In March, educated respondents were significantly more likely to choose judiciary independence rather than social development, even after controlling for estimation of impact. Besides, males and people with higher levels of income were also more likely to choose judiciary independence.

However, in the June survey, education was not significantly related to support for principle, though the logistic regression coefficient is in the expected direction. That a control for estimation of impact could not be included is not likely to be the reason behind the absence of education effects, since impact attenuates the effect of education only slightly in the March model. However, not only does education become insignificant in June, sex and income also cease to have effects, though the directions of coefficients remain the same as in March.

The samples are similar in demographics. The dependent variable is exactly the same in the two surveys. For all demographic variables, the regression coefficients are consistent in signs. And the difference between the two surveys is 'all or nothing'—in March three demographic variables had significant effects, while in June none of them was significant. These considerations lead us to believe that the two models reflect some genuine differences in reality. That is to say, in early March people's support for the abstract principle of judicial independence was affected by education as well as a number of demographic

TABLE 1 Regression on the relationship between education and support for the principle of judiciary independence (Standardized regression coefficients)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Effect on dependent variable: Preference of judiciary independence over social and economic development</i>	
	<i>March survey</i>	<i>June survey</i>
Education	.27**	.11
Education squared	.08	.04
Age	.10	.02
Sex	-.38***	-.12
Income	.17*	.01
Estimation of impact of influx Percent of cases correctly classified	-.39***	-
Chi-square	64.92	53.54
<i>N</i>	91.36***	4.16
	781	678

Note: For the dependent variable, preference for judiciary independence was coded = 2, for social and economic interest = 1. Sex: male = 1, female = 2.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

variables. Coming into June, however, people's support for the principle was no longer determined by demographics. We will discuss the possible explanations for this pattern later.

Now we can turn to the relationship between education and people's estimation of the impact of mainlanders' influx. Multiple regression was again used with the same five demographic variables as independent variables. Support for principle was also added. Since the June survey did not contain measures of people's estimation of impact, analysis is only conducted for March.

Table 2 shows that education is negatively related to people's estimation of impact, that is, people with higher levels of education tend to assess the impact of mainlanders' influx less negatively. At the same time, the curvilinear relationship between education and estimation of impact is very close to statistical significance ($p < .055$). The negative coefficient suggests that people with mid-levels of education estimate the impact to be more negative than a simple linear relationship would suggest.

EDUCATION AND OPINION ON THE RIGHT OF ABODE ISSUE

The above analysis shows that people with higher levels of education are more supportive of the principle of judiciary independence and estimate the impact of mainlanders' influx less negatively. Thus people with higher levels of education are more likely to support the original court verdict and oppose the government

TABLE 2 Regression on the relationship between education and estimation of impact of mainlanders' influx (Standardized regression coefficients)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Effect on dependent variable: Estimation of impact, March survey</i>
Education	-.10*
Education squared	-.07
Age	.17***
Sex	.17***
Income	.01
Adherence to principle of judicial independence	-.18***
R-square in percent	12.2 ***
N	781

Note: Coding of adherence to principle and sex are the same as in Table 1.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

proposal. However, accepting a principle does not necessarily mean applying the principle. Therefore, we postulate that education may also moderate the strength of the correlations between support for principle and opinion on the one hand, and estimation of impact and opinion on the other. The enlightenment perspective suggests that educated people should be more principle-oriented. However, a number of studies (Jackman 1978, Jackman and Muha 1984, etc.) show this need not be true. As the abstract principle of judiciary independence and the concern for socioeconomic interests are directly in conflict, we expect a more principle-oriented person to be less interest-oriented.

The analysis here provides the test for arrows 3–5 in the framework simultaneously. Independent variables are entered in three blocks. The first contains the five demographics. The second includes support for principle and estimation of impact (the latter only in March). The third includes the interaction variables aimed at testing the effect of education on the *relationships* of opinion with adherence to principle and estimation of impact.

Again, there is the possibility of curvilinear relations. Therefore, four interaction variables were constructed. Two are linear interactions: education \times principle, and education \times impact. If these two variables are significant in the regression, it means that the relationship between adherence to principle and opinion (respectively between estimation of impact and opinion) becomes stronger as education increases (or, depending on the sign, decreases). The other two interactions are curvilinear: education squared \times principle (or impact). If these two are significant, it shows that the relationship between adherence to principle and opinion (respectively between estimation of impact and opinion) is actually strongest (or, depending on the sign, weakest) for people with mid-level education.

Further, education may have direct effects on opinion that have nothing to do with adherence to principle or interest. Such effects can be seen from the coefficients for education when all the other variables are added to the regression equation.

Table 3 shows that, in the March survey, when only demographic variables are added, education does affect people's opinions on the verdict positively and significantly. When adherence to principle and estimation of consequences are added, the relationship of education and opinion is no longer significant. This means that all significant effects of education on opinion are mediated by the support for principle and the estimation of impact. People with higher levels of education are more supportive towards the verdict because they are more supportive of judiciary independence and less pessimistic about the impact of mainlanders' influx.

The subsequent addition of four interaction variables increases the explanatory power of the regression model significantly (the change in R^2 is significant at the .05 level). Two interaction variables are significantly related to opinion. The first one, the interaction between education and support for the legal principle, means that people with higher levels of education tend to base their opinions on their support for the principle to a larger extent.

The second is between education squared and estimation of impact, with a positive coefficient. The curvilinear interaction can be illustrated more clearly if regression analysis is conducted separately for the different educational groups (not shown). When that is done, it is the people with secondary education who stand out. For them, the relation between adherence to principle and opinion is weakest ($beta = .15$, *vs* .20 for the primary, and .36 for the tertiary group) and the relation between the estimation of impact and opinion is strongest ($beta = -.36$, *vs* $-.19$ for the primary and $-.17$ for the tertiary group).

The results for the June survey differ from the March results in some aspects. People with higher levels of education were, in general, less supportive of the government proposal, which is consistent with the findings in March. But there is also a non-linear effect between education and opinion on the government's proposed solution. The negative sign of the coefficient suggests that people with mid-level education are more supportive of the government solution than a linear relationship between educational level and opinion would predict. At the same time, in the June survey the effects of education are not explained away by the addition of the three variables in the second and third columns of Table 3. Of course, we have already shown that in June education was not significantly related to support for principle (Table 1). However, in the regression we see that even the interaction variables are not significant, though further regression analysis on separate education groups shows a pattern similar to the one found in the March survey, with people of secondary school education having the weakest relationship between adherence to principle and opinion

TABLE 3 Regression analysis on education effects on opinions to the right of abode issue (Standardized regression coefficients)

<i>March survey</i>	<i>Dependent variable: Opinion on the court verdict</i>		
	<i>Demographics only</i>	<i>Principle and estimation of impact added</i>	<i>Full model</i>
Education	.13**	.07	.07
Education squared	.06	.03	.01
Age	.04	.08*	.08*
Sex	-.21***	-.11***	-.11***
Income	.10*	.08*	.08*
Adherence to principle of judicial independence		.22***	.18***
Estimation of impact of influx		-.26***	-.33***
Interaction education × principle			.08*
Interaction education squared × principle			.06
Interaction education × impact			.01
Interaction: education squared × impact			.11*
<i>R</i> -square percent	8.8 ***	21.1 ***	22.2 ***
Change in <i>R</i> -square percent	8.8 ***	12.3 ***	1.0*
<i>N</i>	780	780	780

<i>June survey</i>	<i>Dependent variable: Opinion on the court verdict</i>		
	<i>Demographics only</i>	<i>Principle added</i>	<i>Full model</i>
Education	-.11*	-.10*	-.09*
Education squared	-.15***	-.15***	-.14***
Age	.10*	.11**	.11**
Sex	.16***	.14***	.13***
Income	-.01	-.01	-.01
Adherence to principle of judicial independence		-.34***	-.29***
Interaction education × principle			-.06
Interaction: education squared × principle			-.08
<i>R</i> -square percent	5.1***	16.3***	16.7***
Change in <i>R</i> -square percent	5.1***	11.2***	0.4
<i>N</i>	675	675	675

Note: Interaction terms are calculated by: (variable A—mean of variable A) × (variable B—mean of variable B). The calculation methods adopted are aimed at reducing multicollinearity.
 *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

(*beta* = $-.29$, *vs* $-.37$ for the primary group and $-.44$ for the tertiary group). In sum, the results showed that, in June, people's opinions on the government solution were affected by their educational levels, but the effects were not mediated by support for judiciary independence.

DISCUSSION

The results as a whole may not perfectly fit to any single view of the effect of education on people's democratic values as derived from research in the West. In the March survey we see that educated people are more supportive of the principle of judiciary independence. They are also more likely to apply the principle when they form their opinions about the Court of Final Appeal's verdict, but the real difference is between people with and those without college education. Although people with secondary education are more supportive of the principle of judiciary independence than those with primary education, the difference between the two groups is smaller than that between the secondary and tertiary groups. Moreover, people with secondary education are actually the least principle-oriented. In sum, we would argue that the findings from the March survey do lend support to the enlightenment view of the effects of education, with college making the real difference.

Drawing this conclusion from the March survey is to argue that educated people do not voice more support for judiciary independence simply due to a heightened awareness of the socially desirable answer. Although educated people may be prone to give socially desirable answers when asked about principles, they also show a stronger relationship between the support for the principle and their opinion on the issue of the right of abode. Could this then simply be a matter of educated people's better ability to give coherent answers to survey questions? If this is the case, there may be no real application of the abstract principle in thinking about the issue. However, this consistency explanation is implausible since, if it is only a matter of consistency, better educated people should also demonstrate a stronger relationship between estimation of impact (that is to say their interest) and opinion. This they did not. It was rather the people with secondary education who showed the strongest relationship in this regard.

We have to explain these findings with regard to the context of Hong Kong, where civic education has only recently started to develop. Once a British colony, primary and secondary schools did not have formal civic education before the mid-1980s. The curriculum in secondary schools had very limited political content. It was only during the political transition beginning in the 1980s that the idea of a democratic education was proposed (Lee and Bray 1997). But at the practical level, implementation of civic education remained a matter within schools' discretion. Not every school formally offered civic

education (Cheng 1996). Further, civic education in Hong Kong's primary and secondary schools is deficient in many ways, including the lack of planning at school level, the focus on moral values rather than political values in civic education, and the lack of infrastructural support for teachers (Tse 1997).

With these backgrounds of civic education and the school system, it is not surprising that people with secondary school education are not noticeably more supportive of abstract democratic principles. At the same time, people with secondary education are particularly interest-oriented. This suggests that secondary education may have increased both people's awareness of personal interest and their ability to relate matters of social or personal interests to opinions on public affairs. Therefore, while people with secondary school education remain less supportive of abstract principles, they become even more realistic in their political thinking. Of course, this is a post hoc explanation. The observed impact of education on people's concern for concrete interests should be further tested.

Then, why does tertiary education seem to have the effect described in spite of the fact that college graduates also have little formal civic education? The enlightening effects of tertiary education on political attitudes in Hong Kong are not a new-found phenomenon. Cheung and Leung (1994) have found that tertiary students hold more democratic attitudes than secondary school students. Although there may not be any formal political education curriculum in college, college students are exposed to a large number of political and social theories and viewpoints, especially in the social science or general education curriculum. Also, while secondary schools in Hong Kong are dominated by a submissive culture and a transmission approach to learning (Tse 1997), tertiary education certainly encourages more independent and critical thinking. As tertiary education provides students with the opportunity to encounter a diversity of ideas and encourages them to think, discuss and criticize, students can come to recognize the importance of democratic values such as toleration, respect for others' freedom, etc., resulting in the enlightening effects described.

Another major result is that, as educational level increases, one's estimation of the impact of mainlanders' influx becomes less negative. However, looking at the differences between three educational groups, our survey data show that the difference between primary and secondary groups is not substantial. Again, people with tertiary education stand out as a specific group.

There are several possible explanations for this. First, consistent with the enlightening effect, people with tertiary education may be less affected by the negative stereotypes of mainlanders and new immigrants. Also, people with tertiary education may be more confident of the Hong Kong economy and society. Moreover, when compared with the less educated people, people with high levels of education are economically less vulnerable. The influx of mainlanders, who are perceived to be mostly unskilled laborers, mainly provide

direct competition to the less educated people in the job market. People with tertiary education are thus less likely to think that their personal interest is going to be affected, and less likely to project personal well-being onto the estimation of that effect on society.

In June, largely the same pattern was found as in March. People with higher levels of education were still more likely to support the principle of judiciary independence, and the secondary group remained the least principle-oriented in opinion formation. The effects were not statistically significant, though. Thus we need to explain why the effects of education on the support and application of principles were diminished in June.

A possible reason is related to the heated debate during the controversy. Ginsberg (1986) argues that education and the media serve as idea markets. As people are exposed to such markets, they tend to hold less varied values and attitudes, which were originally affected largely by primary group affiliations. In other words, as educational level and people's media exposure increase, their opinions will be less likely to differ according to class, gender, and ethnicity. In the case of the right of abode, a similar argument can be made. In March we see people with different levels of education treat the principle of judiciary independence differently. This difference is likely to be based on the differential access and recognition of the legal principles as a result of education. However, access and acquaintance with the principle may have spread in the months of continued debate and discourse about the principle, smoothing out differences between different demographic groups.

As shown by research on learning from news (Zaller 1992, Price and Zaller 1993), heavy media coverage leads to a diffusion of ideas among the public. If the coverage is very salient, then the diffusion will happen in such a way that even the least educated group will learn about the messages through exposure to mass media, discussions with friends and family, or other sources of interpersonal or impersonal social information (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Thus the difference between people with different educational levels will diminish. It does not mean that all people will come to support or oppose judiciary independence. The point is that people who support the legal principles and those who do not cease to be distinguishable simply by demographics. Although this is a post hoc account, it can explain not only the changes in the effects of education, but also the lack of effect of other demographic factors on the support for judiciary independence in June.

The explanation, of course, requires further evidence. Most notably, the validity of the explanation is dependent on the kind of media discourse existing during the period under study, requiring that discussions of judiciary independence were highly salient then.

At the same time, education still has an effect on opinions about the

government's solution in June. Except for the fact that people's estimation of impact could not be controlled for in June, the effects found are also likely to be due to the influences of education on other factors. Actually, as the issue evolved into the later stages, and when the government proposed to seek the National People's Congress' interpretation of the Basic Law, the issue had become ever more complicated and involved more aspects. For instance, confidence and trust in the Chinese government became more prominent in the later stages of the controversy.⁷

Moreover, the relationship between education and opinion is not only linear but also curvilinear. Consistent with our discussion, the curvilinear relationship is due to the fact that the largest difference lies between people with and without tertiary education. The difference between people with primary education or below and people with secondary education is minimal. Actually, people with primary education or below have a mean score of 3.51 (on a scale from 1 to 5) for their opinion on the right of abode, the secondary education group has a mean of 3.49, while the tertiary group has a mean of 3.17.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether people with different levels of education held different opinions on the right of abode issue due to different reasons. Our findings provide some support for the enlightening effect of education regarding people's support for and application of democratic principles. However, the effect is restricted largely to the March survey, which was conducted at an early stage of the controversy. Furthermore, the most important differences are between people with and without college education.

It should be mentioned that Hong Kong has never been, and is not yet, a fully developed democracy. The short histories of democracy and democratic education make the effects of education on political opinion formation different from those in the West. Jackman's (1978) argument about the superficial democratic commitment, which was well documented by other studies in the USA, is not found in the present case. Ironically, it is the lack of formal civic education that appears to have 'prevented' a superficial commitment to democracy. However, the results point to the need for an improvement of democratic education in Hong Kong's secondary and primary schools. Of course, proponents of civic education in Hong Kong have to think about how to induce support for democratic principles this is substantive rather than superficial.

Besides demonstrating the effects of education on political opinions, this

⁷ It should be noted that the argument about the idea market and the finding that education continued to have effects on opinions are not contradictory. Education may have effects on attitudes and opinions about matters that are not the subject of salient coverage and heated debate during the period. And there is no guarantee that the mainstreaming effect of the idea market works for every single idea.

study also has important implications for understanding the public opinion process in Hong Kong. During the right of abode controversy, polls consistently showed that the majority of the Hong Kong public was supporting the government's action to seek an interpretation by the mainland National People's Congress. Many commentators thus lamented the failure of public opinion to stand by judiciary independence. However, this paper shows that an attack on the Hong Kong public as a whole may miss the differences between different groups of people. Theorists of public opinion have discussed the notion of enlightened opinion (Zaller 1994), which is defined as what people would want if they were fully informed. The basic idea is that common people's opinions do not necessarily form a reliable basis for policy formulation. The question about opinion quality is an age-old problem. It underlies current empirical research efforts on the differences between informed and un-informed opinions (Bartels 1996, Althaus 1998), and theoretical discussions and empirical research on public deliberation (Price 1992, Fishkin 1991), among others. Certainly, the concept of enlightened opinion carries with it an elitist flavor. In the right of abode issue, it also depends on one's political standpoint to decide which opinion is the right one. Therefore, we cannot simply regard the educated people's opinions as right or better. But opinion quality remains an important concern as, with democratization continuing, public opinion plays an ever more important role in the political process in Hong Kong.

It has to be admitted that this study has various limitations, and the explanations of the findings given are at times only suggestive. Further empirical studies are needed. For instance, future research can focus on the effects of education on people's estimation of socioeconomic developments to see if different people have different estimations of the well-being of the economy and society in general, and if such differences can be explained by other social and psychological factors. The relationship between education, opinions, and reception of media discourse also deserve attention. Last but not least, the findings that tertiary education has an enlightening effect on people's support for application of democratic principles need to be tested on other political issues.

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