We are honoured to announce the first publication of our newly established English Press of Pui Ching Middle School. We are featuring three unique reports straight out of the oven, covering topics including ethnic minority in Hong Kong, whether Liberal Studies deserves to be a compulsory subject, and whether being a KOL can amount to anything substantial. They are all relevant topics discussed in public, and by interviewing professionals in the respective fields, we hope to provide a comprehensive overview for our readers regarding the above issues.

Each report is handcrafted and documented by our reporters with interviews consisting of professors, individuals from underprivileged backgrounds, and even KOLs. We hope that by providing perspectives from all walks of life, readers can gain an in-depth understanding on how different individuals respond to the same set of questions, which will allow them to highlight comparisons that would otherwise be missed by the lay public.

The stories shed a light towards the importance of perspectives. Providing insight from all angles is the aim of our reporters and editors. By doing so, we hope readers can draw conclusions, and improve their language proficiency along the way.

As such, it is a privilege for the Chief Editors to work alongside such competent reporters, editors and camera personnel, all of whom seek to share our work with Pui Ching students and hopefully provide them an enjoyable reading experience.

Happy reading!

Aldric Wong
Enoch So
Chief Editors
Debates over compulsory Liberal Studies subject

Core or Elective?
Liberal Studies (LS), a core subject in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) School Curriculum that was introduced to senior secondary school students in 2009, has been under mass controversy on whether it should be changed to an elective.

Currently, the subject covers six modules in total, including Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships, Hong Kong Today and Modern China. Official documents from the Education Bureau (EDB) states that the subject carries the aims of "enhancing students’ awareness of contemporary issues", "broadening the knowledge base and expanding the perspectives of students” and "strengthening students’ critical thinking skills”, namely 'the ABC of Liberal Studies'. It is a modification and extension of the old Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) LS which was implemented in 1992. Yet, whether the subject has successfully met its aims remains a hot debate.

Pui Ching English Press conducted a survey to collect Hong Kong students’ opinions on the controversial subject. Among the 135 respondents who have studied or are studying LS now, an alarming percentile (32%) wasn’t content with or even disliked the subject, describing it as difficult (33.8%) and boring (29.2%). Over one-third of them (36.2%) believed that LS should be an elective. One main reason suggested is that LS is not suitable for science students, as it requires students to write long paragraphs, making it a troublesome subject. Besides, some respondents think that LS is more suitable for students interested in social issues and current affairs, while the uninterested ones don’t need to study LS.

Dr. Victor Lau Kwok Chi, Professional Consultant from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, opposes LS being a core subject. He says that LS has failed to help students develop critical thinking skills. "LS is assessed with a formalised approach. Yet, critical thinking is not something you can formalise.” He points out that the exam-oriented nature of LS makes exam skills the focus of this subject, therefore students lack the opportunity to develop genuine critical thinking. Under the current implementation, the subject’s aims are actually unreachable.

Content-wise, Lau points out that the current LS curriculum is too vague since it doesn’t have a clear, fixed assessment scope. As a result, teachers want to avoid missing any possible topics that might show up in the exam and they try to figure out different teaching content and approaches on their own, which Lau describes as "backyard furnaces (土法煉鋼)". That results in a rushed teaching schedule lacking in-depth study of the topics. “For some very broad topics, such as Hong Kong’s medical reform, students merely read two or three newspapers in class, then jump into a conclusion. How can you come up with a conclusion in that way, when the discussion is so brief?”

Lau also points out that requiring teachers to teach six modules based on their own knowledge is too demanding, since not all modules are their expertise. Students’ understanding on each module may therefore remain shallow. He suggests that a better approach would be having different teachers with different expertise to teach different modules. Yet, ultimately, comparing to having one isolated subject touching upon each aspect of knowledge partially, the training of thinking should be integrated to different existing subjects which are based on profound, timeless knowledge consolidated over the history.

So, should LS be compulsory? “If it remains as how it is like now, it shouldn’t,” Lau says, “but if it’s to be kept, it must be reformed.” He says that an ideal LS curriculum should be focusing on thinking instead of exam skills. “I would enjoy LS lessons if everyone could discuss social issues in class, not just briefly, but to really explore and have a thorough discussion on the topic.” However, at the current state, he believes that changing it
into an elective is not feasible, as it would certainly die out as an unpopular subject.

The school’s LS teacher Mr. Wong Ming Fai holds different views towards the subject. He firmly states that LS has its own unique purpose and meaning. He depicts it as a social science subject which links up the knowledge students have learnt from other subjects, in order to have a better understanding of the current world. “It is an interdisciplinary subject which is related to various other subjects,” Wong says. “For instance, economic principles are introduced to explain how globalisation works, while knowledge in biology can also enrich students’ understanding of public health controversies.” Wong adds that LS can also help students establish a positive mindset, which can be seen in the Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships module in LS.

Being asked whether the aims of LS have been achieved, Wong agrees wholeheartedly. He realised that students nowadays are getting more conscious about social issues, including the recent social movements. LS can actually inspire students to interpret these issues using different perspectives, which is exactly what the exam system has been teaching students to do. However, whilst on the topic about critical thinking, Wong says it basically depends on the teacher’s teaching method -- whether it is interactive or not. He also adds that the six modules in LS are actually well-related to one’s life which can help students build correct values. LS transforms students’ mode of thinking and encourages discussion and understanding of different views, which are essential for life-long learning and problem-solving.

Some voices in the society criticise that LS depends on drilling and it allows students to give inconsistent and subjective arguments, but Wong disagrees. He admits that the culture of drilling is deep-rooted, but the nature of LS is not necessarily bad. He says that in fact, students need to master all the knowledge in the modules in a comprehensive manner in order to get good grade in LS. For instance, Independent Inquiry Study (IES) and the extended-response questions in Paper 2 are good examples showing that LS requires comprehensive knowledge but not mere mentioning of concept words. Thirdly, current exam papers were circulated and checked by numerous professionals before the exam. After their discussion on the answers, the marking should not be subjective. If students’ essays are comprehensive and rich in content, rarely would they receive a poor grade.

Wong adds that LS can complement the inadequacy of the other three core subjects including Chinese, English and Mathematics, as it is the only social-science-like subject which is crucial in this globalised world. LS carries its significance in this era.

Yet, Wong agrees that teachers may indeed lack a comprehensive understanding on all of the six modules, and they are too busy. He suggests putting more resources in LS education rather than removing the subject. “Maybe hiring more teaching assistants can help, as they can not only help share the workload of teaching but also utilise their expertise in different academic areas to broaden students’ horizon.”

Dr Kenneth Li Ming, lecturer of CUHK’s General Education Foundation (GEF) programme, agrees that LS should be kept compulsory.
so that students’ horizon can be broadened.

Yet Li reflects that under the current system, the subject is divided into six individual areas which are taught almost entirely separately. While this has contributed to the efficiency of students’ learning, the areas simply don’t connect with each other, and thus do not help students develop soft skills at all.

Despite the relative ineffectiveness of LS, Li is against the proposal of removing the subject or changing it into an elective. He says that secondary school students have to be prepared for their life ahead, and that would require them to develop skills and acquire knowledge. “Not everyone gets into university,” he says, and therefore the responsibility of ensuring students get these skills naturally falls into secondary education.

But under the effects of the current examination system, the emphasis of secondary education has shifted to achieving marks. This impedes students’ learning progress in LS, as the drive for their learning is inappropriate.

Li himself, when guiding students to tackle problems, often engages students into thinking for themselves instead of giving them the solution directly. Additionally, he frequently encourages students to debate with each other, as it forces them to listen and understand others’ logic flow instead of barraging people with their own arguments in a witless manner.

If secondary students just struggle to produce mainstream, framed answers instead of original ones, it actually deviated from the initial intention of LS. A rigid right or wrong answer is not something the subject originally aimed.

“There is never an answer (for LS questions), but only a conclusion,” Li says, “and that conclusion should be a product of logical thought.”
The City Call Home
Outside a local school, a foreign girl is walking side by side with a native Hong Kong student. Holding in her hand a Chinese Language paper and discussing the content with her classmate, 15-year-old Pakistani Nayab is going to sit for the Chinese Language exam two years later in her DSE.

Nayab was born in Hong Kong and brought up in a non-Chinese-speaking family. Assumed to have a low Chinese proficiency, the Form 4 girl however demonstrated excellence in her grade for Chinese. Having attended local kindergarten and a Chinese Medium-of-Instructions (CMI) primary school, the many years of exposure to a Chinese-speaking environment at school makes it easier for Nayab to get along with local students, as she can speak fluent Cantonese.

Her good academic performance in Chinese is the fruit of her labour. Over the years, Nayab has put much effort into studying Chinese. As both her Pakistani parents cannot communicate in Chinese, they cannot help much with her Chinese assignments. Yet, she is grateful to have met a lot of helpful people. “I seek help from my teachers and classmates or even self-learn when I encounter difficulties in studying Chinese,” says Nayab, smiling. She also mentions that her school has provided much support for ethnic minority students.

Despite the fact that a classmate once made fun of her distinct appearance, saying that she was a “Middle Eastern terrorist”, Nayab thinks most Hong Kong people are willing to accept ethnic minorities.

“Although we come from different backgrounds, we can all be friends with mutual acceptance,” says Nimsing, Nayab’s Nepalese schoolmate who is also a Form 4 girl.

“One time I had a Nepalese festival celebration with my family. We wore traditional folk clothes and danced in front of Nepalese stores,” Nimsing recalls, “but some of the locals gave us unfriendly look and I was a bit scared.”

That does not shake Nimsing’s belief that most Hongkongers welcome people from other countries with diversified cultural backgrounds, though. It is partly because she met many kind-hearted and supportive local friends at her school.

Nimsing came to Hong Kong with her family when she was five years old because of her father’s job. Communicating in an unfamiliar language in an unfamiliar city was for sure
Kung Kit Ling is the founder of Ultimate United (UU), an organisation that aims to connect people with all ethnicity and age groups. a challenge for five-year-old Nimsing, especially when both her Nepalese parents could not speak Cantonese. Yet as she keeps practicing the language in her day-to-day conversation with teachers and friends at school, she can now speak Cantonese as fluently as a local. Just as Nayab, Nimsing is going to take the Chinese Language exam in the DSE. She even studies Chinese History containing a lot of Classical Chinese elements, in which she strives for improvement of language skills by going through the passages again and again.

Having been in Hong Kong for around a decade, Nimsing treats Hong Kong as her second home. While it seems to present a beautiful picture of the situation, not many ethnic minorities can integrate into the local community as successfully as Nimsing and Nayab do. In fact, there are rising concerns in society about a lack of support for ethnic minority students in the education system. Many of them are South Asians.

According to the 2016 Population by-census statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department, there are 254,700 ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, accounting for 3.8% of Hong Kong population. The number of South Asians has been increasing, exceeding the original majority, Filipinos, Indonesians and the whites. It now stands out as the largest ethnic group of the ethnic minority population.

Kung Kit Ling, founder of Ultimate United (UU), an organisation that aims to connect people with all ethnicity and age groups, says South Asian children often face troubles socialising with others due to the language barrier. They lack opportunities to practice the language at home, and their non-Chinese speaking parents can hardly offer help with their Chinese homework. Many South Asian students drop out in high school as the language issue hinders their academic performance. Students who can learn as effectively as Nayab and Nimsing are the fortunate few.

The UU believes that one’s self-worth is not defined by his or her nationality, race or others’ perception, but his or her true-self. By passing on such a belief, South Asian children that UU approaches identify themselves as ‘masterpiece’. Kung says giving love and care to ethnic minorities is important in strengthening their sense of belonging. Together with more support on learning and the provision of more opportunities, ethnic children can grow up with more self-confidence.

Kung points out that in a multi-racial society, everybody has a role to play in strengthening social cohesion. It is important to accept one another and recognise the strengths and contribution of other ethnic groups in order to make Hong Kong a more harmonious place. At the same time, ethnic minorities can also be more committed to contribute to the society.

Loraine, a domestic helper from the Philippines who has been working in Hong Kong for 4 years, says she is willing to contribute to the society, such as engaging in voluntary work. Coming abroad alone to earn a living because the salary in the Philippines is relatively low, the 34-year-old misses her family members and friends very much. Having worked in Kuwait, an Arab country in the Middle East where she took care of an elderly, then in Hong Kong, Loraine perceives Hong Kong merely as a place she passes by to earn a living. She does not consider herself a Hongkonger.

In spite of her contribution to the city and willingness to do more, Loraine says she experiences racial discrimination often even though foreign domestic helpers are common here. For instance, some elders avoid touching her. When
someone accidentally bumps into her on the street, they show a disgusted look and sometimes she is blamed even though it is not her fault. Some salesmen simply won’t approach her when she goes shopping as if she cannot afford the goods. She says these make her feel frustrated and the government’s failure in eliminating racial discrimination in the society is disappointing.

The society does have an expectation on the government in tackling problems encountered by ethnic minorities, including the mentioned discrimination and inequality in education and employment, so as to promote equality.

One notable thing is, ethnic minorities are not only barred from equal opportunities in terms of employment, but also their participation in community affairs.

“In fact, ethnic minorities seldom engage in community affairs, but having a low sense of belonging to Hong Kong is not the definite reason,” says Chan Mei Shan, a registered social worker nicknamed Ms. Pizza, "Some district councilors neither introduce themselves to the ethnic minorities nor translate their political platforms into English, leading to a low awareness for the ethnic minorities to vote.”

Regarding employment, Chan says the current government measures are supposed to be set in order to help ethnic minorities to integrate and have higher upward social mobility, but they are not effective enough. She has been working at an employment centre supported by the government which provides job matching services for ethnic minorities. Yet, Chan says some employers are not willing to employ ethnic minorities.

According to a study done in 2018 by Junior Chamber International (Harbour), a non-profit youth organisation, over half of the 150 non-Chinese employees surveyed said they encountered difficulties seeking job mainly due to language issues. 54 per cent reflected that their inability to speak Cantonese is a barrier to securing employment. Among the 50 companies polled, up to 63 per cent responded that Chinese ability was the top concern in hiring a non-Chinese employee. To many ethnic minority groups, inability to speak Cantonese is the biggest barrier for them to look for a job.

Chan says there is very little the centre can do when employers are reluctant to hire ethnic minorities. It can merely make phone calls to different companies to ask for positions. She hopes the government can do more to support employment of ethnic minorities, especially when many of them feel they are a part of Hong Kong.

“Their [ethnic minorities’] generation won’t go back to their origins,” Chan says, “They already treat Hong Kong as their home.”

One of Chan’s Pakistani colleagues calls himself a “Pakistani-Hongkonger”, saying that even though he cannot change his race, he is a Hongkonger because he has been living in Hong Kong since his birth.

“There are a lot of obstacles they [ethnic minorities] have to face, like discrimination and challenges in education. Be that as it may, these don’t affect their sense of belonging to Hong Kong,” Chan adds.
As social media rose to new heights in popularity, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) emerged as a new breed of influencers online. Brands are shifting their marketing strategies from relying on traditional media to utilising the influence of KOLs in order to better reach their target customers online and fuel sales.

According to online definitions, KOLs are experts in a respective field trusted by relevant interest groups, ranging from beauty, fashion, gaming to food, travelling and many other different hobbies. They can easily attract attention from the...
online communities and have considerable influence over consumers, thus are usually approached by brands and businesses to produce digital commercials on social media.

The myriad of such group of influencers provide sources of inspiration for many adolescents who are active on social media. Some often make reference to product reviews produced by KOLs before making their purchase decision. In fact, most KOLs are young people, some being current university students, which explains why it is easier for adolescents to follow them. Some teenagers even desire to join the industry for their future career because the benefits can be enticing – fame, earnings and sense of accomplishment, just to name a few. Fat Aunt, a full-time youtuber and a recent university graduate, is a KOL passionate in producing videos. He mainly produces humorous videos surrounding everyday life topics, characterised by the use of a funny photo effect which enlarges his mouth and eyes. Such hilarious style earned him up to 74 thousands followers on Instagram and more than 60 thousands subscribers on his Youtube channel. Just as many other KOLs, Fat Aunt is often approached by various companies to help promote their products. Working under an agency has netted him a five-digit earning, which is his main source of income.
Fat Aunt says he feels very pleased when viewers find his videos humorous and show admiration towards them. Such positive feedbacks bring him a great sense of achievement and become an important driving force behind him.

Seems to be an ideal job? While the life as a KOL can be fruitful, Fat Aunt says there are always two sides to a coin. Achieving a good work-life balance is never an easy task for him. He is often stressed because he has to work under tight deadlines constantly. It can take him up to 10 to 12 hours to produce each video.

Balancing between the style and quality of his work and the expectation of brands is another difficulty Fat Aunt often encounters. He is careful when making decisions on which job offer to accept because some jobs may not fit his image. In fact, for him, expressing his true self in front of his audience is of utmost importance. He always attempts to stay true and frank and is not afraid to express his feelings and thoughts directly in front of the camera. Dedicated to his own style, he says he has declined his agency’s offer to hire him a video editor, as he believes that his ideas are best presented by his own style of editing.

He also reflects that family support has been lacking because KOL as an occupation is still a new trend and has only been gaining prevalence recently. In fact, he had been pressured to choose nurse as his career instead of the relatively high and stable income. Yet he still insisted that he would rather be a Youtuber as it is his passion and at the end of the day, a job that he is really happy about.

Pui Ching English Press conducted a survey on young people’s general opinions on KOL. Among the 118 responses collected, surprisingly, only 16.9 per cent said they are keen to become a KOL. While the opportunity to share personal opinions publicly and make influence are the main reasons why KOL as a career is appealing to these respondents, the remaining 83.1 per cent, the majority of respondents, said they do not want to be a KOL because of peer pressure and unstable income that KOLs are likely to face.

Indeed, success may not be guaranteed. Two-thirds of the respondents commented that KOL as a career can be either lucrative or unprofitable, with its prospect depending on a basket of factors such as appearances, fame and talents. 14.4 per cent believe that the career prospect of KOL is bleak. Irregular schedule of KOLs, for instance, greatly lowers the attractiveness of this career. Furthermore, as KOL culture goes viral on social media, some respondents believe that this industry is getting saturated, which turn many KOLs with very few followers into one-hit wonders. Many still fear to take the risks of being a KOL because they value job stability over fame.

“The aim of being a KOL is the greatest

Fat Aunt, a full-time youtuber and a recent university graduate, is a KOL passionate in producing videos.
factor to be considered when deciding whether or not to join the industry,” says Eagle Chan (陳天翱), Pui Ching Middle School’s alumni from the House of Chun, “If you just want to gain fame or a considerable income within a short period of time, you should not join it as it is just short-term. In the contrary, if you join the industry because of your own interests, I guess you are suitable.”

Chan is a singer and songwriter, meanwhile participant of a local televised talent show competition called “Good Night Show – King Maker II”. He does not regard himself a KOL but instead focuses on developing his music talents. Being a graduate from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University majored in BBA in Management and Human Resources, Chan nevertheless decided to join the music industry because he realised his greatest pleasure came from music.

It is quite difficult for Chan to be a breadwinner working as a musician though, because his income depends very much on the number of shows he performs. Yet Chan still strives to improve himself, which is the reason why he joined the televised talent show competition. He wanted to expand his social circle, and through meeting many other like-minded professionals in music, he gained insights on how to make progress.

Similar to Fat Aunt, despite the fact that they are exploring different fields, Chan realised in his pursuit of dream that staying true is always important, “There will always be someone who appreciate your own speciality if you stay true to everyone,” he says.

Chan adds that if he becomes a KOL, he will only promote products that he really uses instead of giving sugar-coated comments just for money. Indeed, there have been voices in the society criticising that many KOLs are slowly turning commercial.

Chan encourages those who want to join the industry to put in their effort, as it is an uphill battle when first starting out as a KOL. Believing in one’s own talent is crucial in the pursuit of dream, but there is something more important.

“You should never lose yourself for other people,” Chan says, “as such you should stay true to yourself.”
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