

Revisiting Project Yi Jin

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Abstract

The Hong Kong government has administered new public management in the public sector to address the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Under the dogma of efficiency, effectiveness, and economy, the government re-examined its expenditures in various areas. Higher education encountered financial strain after the government adjusted its funding for education. Meanwhile, many young people were unemployed or failed to pursue further studies. The government thus launched Project Yi Jin in 2000, authorizing qualified higher education providers to offer an unprecedented and self-financed study path for young people to meet their educational needs. Although the project has been implemented for over two decades, studies focused on the project were dated and inadequate. Therefore, a study to revisit the project in the aforementioned context was proposed to narrow the academic gaps. This article argued that by offering young people hope for their futures, the project has enhanced society, especially young people, to respect law and order. The project has also assisted higher education to survive and exercise its function by alleviating the financial stress attributed to new public management in the public sector. This article will become one of the significant references for higher education and education policymakers, particularly regarding sustainability and governance.

Keywords

Project Yi Jin; traditional public administration; new public management; Hong Kong.

Introduction

Before the 1990s, the Hong Kong government practised traditional public administration. One of its features was the large establishment of the government. For instance, the number of civil servants expanded from 136,200 in December 1980 to 189,287 in December 1998 (Census and Statistics Department "Number of Civil Servants and Civil Service Vacancies"). Personnel-related expenditure amplified from HK\$808.6 million in 1982/1983 to HK\$4,708 million in 1998/1999 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition" 197; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1992 Edition" 120). Total expenditure and equity investments in 1982/1983 and 1998/1999 further rocketed from HK\$33,060.2 million to HK\$239,356 million respectively (Census and

Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition" 197; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1992 Edition" 120). Despite the huge expenditure, the government managed to have budget surpluses before the late 1990s.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis exerted global economic tension, and Hong Kong could not be exempted as her economy was well connected to the international community. For instance, Hong Kong's gross domestic product lessened by 4.9% from 1997 to 1998 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition" 368). Because of the crisis, the Hong Kong government encountered financial stress as it had to maintain increasing expenditure under diminishing revenue (Efficiency Unit 1). Her fiscal revenue decreased from HK\$228,676 million in 1997/1998 to HK\$162,104 million in 1999/2000. However, her expenditure in 1997/1998 and 1999/2000 elevated from HK\$165,180 million to HK\$191,278 million respectively (Census and Statistics Department "Government Revenue and Expenditure under the General Revenue Account"). The Hong Kong government even recorded budget deficits in 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 (Census and Statistics Department "Government Revenue and Expenditure under the General Revenue Account"). Meanwhile, due to the downturn in the economy, the overall unemployment rate jumped from 1.9% in 1994 to 6.2% in 1999 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2005 Edition" 19). Young people, especially those Form Five school leavers after sitting for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) at ages fifteen to nineteen, with inadequate training and relevant experience were even less competitive in economic distress. While Form Five school leavers accounted for around 30% of the population aged fifteen or over, the unemployment rate for ages between fifteen and nineteen escalated from 8.5% in 1994 to 26.8% in 1999 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2005 Edition" 19, 266). Against this backdrop, the Hong Kong government needed to remedy the situation.

In the 1990s, the Hong Kong government recognized that the previous practice of traditional public administration was inapplicable, and government expenditure needed to be re-examined (Sankey 3-4; Tsang 4-5). To tackle the difficulty, the Hong Kong government has adopted an approach to new public management to administer the public sector. Targeted at the demerits of traditional public administration such as huge expense, poor performance, and low responsiveness due to the large establishment of the public sector, new public management stresses efficiency, effectiveness, and economy (Hughes 64-68; Pollitt 474). Besides, government expenditure, including in higher education, has to be reallocated basically based on the principle of value for money (Mok and Lee 370). Guided by the

mindset, the government reduced her expenditure on universities and polytechnics from HK\$13,189 million in 1998/1999 to HK\$11,240 million in 2006/2007 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition" 197; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2007 Edition" 228).

The Hong Kong government has launched Project Yi Jin (PYJ), which was originally named Project Springboard and later as the Diploma Yi Jin. It has been replaced by the Diploma of Applied Education from 2023 (Education and Manpower Bureau "The 2000-01 Budget – Measures to Promote Employment, Training, Retraining and Continuing Education" 4; Legislative Council Secretariat 10-11). Despite the PYJ having been put into effect for more than twenty years, studies that drew attention to the project were deficient and obsolete. To bridge the academic disparity, this theoretical article on re-exploring the project was thus initiated. Analysis was made mainly based on official data and documentation, and then further informed by literature.

In the following, this article briefly introduces new public management first before revisiting the PYJ. Before drawing a conclusive remark, the implications of this article will be discussed.

New Public Management

Before the 1990s, traditional public administration was widely practised in most of the Western democratic countries. It highlighted the responsibility of the government for providing services to society. However, the public's incessant demands for services require the government to administer the public sector attentively. Wilson asserted that by "(s)eeing every day new things which the state ought to do" lead to "the idea of the state [being] the conscience of administration" (201). Because of the need to offer services, a large establishment with an inefficient and costly bureaucracy usually accompanies the public sector. As aforementioned, the administration of the public sector under traditional public administration further erects financial difficulties for the government, especially after the Asian financial crisis. To address the issue, a new perspective particularly towards bureaucracy was generated. Instead of focusing on administration, government officials under new public management emphasize management of the public sector (Hughes 86). Originating in Britain, new public management thus provided the government with new approaches to operate the public sector through reducing its size and adjusting its role as a services provider (Lane 3-4). Some approaches include the government encouraging the private sector to replace some of its roles in the public sector by offering various services and satisfying demands through market mechanisms (Gray and Jenkins 80, 84). One of the policies

devised by the Hong Kong government under the mindset of new public management is the PYJ.

Project Yi Jin

As mentioned, the policy of the PYJ was announced in March 2000 which targeted both Form Five school leavers after sitting for the HKCEE and those lifelong learners. Around 4,200, 3,300, and 3,400 students enrolled in the PYJ in 2000/2001, 2001/2002, and 2002/2003 respectively (Education and Manpower Bureau "Review of Project Yi Jin" 2). No entrance examination was required. Courses would be mainly on English and Chinese languages (including Putonghua), information technology, and other practical courses. In order to complete the PYJ, students had to study at least ten subjects, of which seven of them were core subjects while the remaining three subjects would be elective. The content of the core subjects would be the same among all the PYJ suppliers whilst the content of the elective subjects would be designed by the particular PYJ suppliers. All the PYJ courses were running on a self-finance basis, and each subject costs around \$2,600 to \$3,400 (Education and Manpower Bureau "Review of Project Yi Jin" 3). Full-time and part-time PYJ students could complete the course in one year and two years respectively. The Hong Kong government would provide 30% financial support to PYJ students once they satisfactorily complete the course (Education Bureau "Tuition Fee and Financial Assistance Arrangement"). From 2000/2001 to 2001/2002, 5,556 PYJ students graduated (Education and Manpower Bureau "Review of Project Yi Jin" 6). The government further recognized the PYJ qualification as the fulfilment of the basic academic requirements for at least thirty grades in the public sector (Education Bureau "Item for Finance Committee" 7; Education Bureau "Recognition of Qualification"). With the official recognition of the PYJ qualification, the PYJ suppliers began to design various programmes for the PYJ graduates so that they could follow a particular designated path and pursue their undergraduate study through Pre-Associate Degree and Associate Degree programmes. As shown in Appendix One, there were ten, nine, and seven PYJ providers in 2000, 2010, and 2021 respectively (Education Bureau "Item for Finance Committee" 17; Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education; The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "Project Springboard a New Avenue for Continuing Education").

On the one hand, as revealed in Appendix Two, the PYJ furnishes an aspiration of pursuing academic qualifications for those students who failed to fulfill university admission criteria under a conventional study path. On the other hand, implementing the PYJ not only represents a reform of Hong Kong's education system but also

symbolizes a soft strategy to ensure smooth operation and effective governance of a Hong Kong government reacting to the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. As mentioned above, Hong Kong experienced enormous challenges due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Higher education encountered financial unsustainability. The unemployment rate went up, and negative emotions penetrated society, especially among those Form Five school leavers. The introduction of the PYJ can be regarded as an innovative measure to partially address the issues via higher education.

Consolidating Social Stability

The PYJ has ensured the smooth operation of society by re-constructing social stability. One of the main reasons for introducing the PYJ is to reduce the unemployment rate, especially among young people. It is said that Hong Kong experienced an economic downturn after 1997. The unemployment rate was so high that it affected almost everyone in Hong Kong. Although the Hong Kong government tried its best to reduce the unemployment rate, the result was not encouraging. Dissatisfaction directed at the government became so huge that it turned out to be one of the threats to social stability, questioning the credibility of the ruling government. One of the source of discontentment stemmed from the youth. Around 14,500 secondary school students can be admitted to the university annually (Y. L. Wong "Community College Policy in Hong Kong: Intention, Practices, and Consequence" 757). Because of the keen competition, many Form Five students cannot be promoted to Form Six and join the potential labour force and look for a job. As illustrated in Appendix Two, on average, there were over 103,453 students who failed to be promoted from Form Five to Form Six in the period between 1990 and 2003 (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority "1980-2012 Hkale Number of Participating Schools and Candidate Entries" 73; Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority "1978-2010 Hkcee Number of Participating Schools and Candidate Entries" 76). These school leavers contributed to the unemployment rate. As reported by official statistics, the unemployment rate for the age group fifteen to nineteen was only 10% in 1997. The figure rose to 20.4% and 26.8% in 1998 and 1999 respectively (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition" 21). In other words, some of these Form Five school leavers became disengaged youth, neither studying nor working.

Partly attributed to the poor economy, some of these disengaged youth formed negative sentiments toward society, which transformed into one of the threats to the social solidarity. One of the reasons was that these disengaged youth did not share the promise and the vision of

the future as others do in the same society. Durkheim in *The Division of Labor in Society* ascertained that “there can be no solidarity between others and us unless the image of others unites itself with ours” (*The Division of Labor in Society* 62). As these Form Five school leavers did not engage in studying or working, their hopes for the future faded and their images failed to integrate with others as well. In this regard, a kind of conflict or detachment arose between these Form Five school leavers and society (Miller 40-41). Researchers like Fougère, Kramarz and Pouget, Kim, Rosenfeld et al., and Wang et al. pointed out that adolescents were inclined to commit more crimes in undesirable economic environments especially when they were unemployed. In Hong Kong, for the age group sixteen to twenty, the number of persons arrested increased from 6,613 in 1998 to 7,038 in 1999 (Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2001 Edition” 319). In particular, they are inclined to commit more violent crimes than before. For instance, for the age group sixteen to twenty, the number of persons arrested because of violent crimes abated from 2,012 in 1996 to 1,766 in 1998 (Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1999 Edition” 304; Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1997 Edition” 264). However, because of the negative sentiments, the downward trend ceased when the figure grew to 2,078 in 1999 (Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2000 Edition” 314). In other words, more young people were unwilling to comply with social norms like laws and orders.

The above figures not only confirmed the assertions on mismatching and disconnection of bonding from Karstedt, Smith, and Zhao and Cao but also alarmed the Hong Kong government that society would be posed a risk if remedy action was not to be done accurately and promptly. One of the factors that contributed to the phenomenon was the inflexible and rigid study path which greatly restricted the opportunity for acquiring higher educational attainment. Between 1993 and 2012, after sitting for the HKCEE, students had to sit for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) before finally being admitted to higher education. Education Commission “Review of Academic System: Aims of Education” cast doubt on the suitability of the rigid examination mechanism and the narrowness of the study path in Hong Kong (“Review of Academic System: Aims of Education” 23). Education Commission “Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong” further figured out that “(w)hat Hong Kong needs is a diversified education system which provides more learning opportunities at senior secondary level and beyond through different modes and system of learning” (“Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong” 47). Education Commission “Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the

Education System in Hong Kong" thus proposed to polish the unaccommodating study path and ameliorate learning opportunities for students who have completed their secondary education ("Learning for Life Learning through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong" 138). Education Commission Review of Education System Reform Proposal: Excel and Grow also suggested "(t)o establish a diversified, multi-channel, flexible and interlinked system of higher education; to increase post-secondary learning opportunities" (Review of Education System Reform Proposal: Excel and Grow 8). Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa further articulated that "(w)e need to build a flexible higher education system that offers various channels and different modes of learning, so that everyone can pursue continuing education at different stages of life" (Tung 23). To offer a more diversified study path, the Hong Kong government eventually, in 2000, introduced the PYJ which is mainly targeted at these unengaged youth. The PYJ enabled these unengaged youth to study. By studying the PYJ, these young people would theoretically delay their job seeking for at least a year, and would not compete with other candidates for jobs. The PYJ therefore fulfilled its mission of lowering the high unemployment rate in Hong Kong (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "Heavy Investment in Continuing Education and Promoting Employment"; The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "Initiatives to Ease Unemployment and Encourage Learning").

What is more, in addition to offering an alternative path for further study, the PYJ reinforces aspiration among the youth. Scholars such as Chui and Chan and Gleditsch, Rivera and Zárate-Tenorio pushed forward that education is an effective way to combat crime rate. Durkheim *The Division of Labor in Society* further affirmed that "when individuals who are found to have common interests associate, that is, not to feel lost among adversaries, to have the pleasure of communing, to make one out of many, which is to say, finally, to lead the same moral life together" (*The Division of Labor in Society* 15). In this regard, the PYJ removes the barrier and re-establishes the connection with society by offering an alternative path for the unengaged youth relying on their abilities to prepare for their futures and integrate with others. Having qualifications equivalent to the Form Five standard, the PYJ graduates were in a better position to plan for their futures. 94.4%, 87%, and 87% of the PYJ graduates in 2002, 2008, and 2009 respectively chose to either study or work (A. Wong 2; Education and Manpower Bureau "Review of Project Yi Jin" 6). At least 1,925 PYJ graduates were employed by the Hong Kong government between 2001/02 and 2010/11 (The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "Lcq20: Project Yi Jin"). In other words, despite suffering from economic hardship, the PYJ has installed possibility and predictability among young people, particularly the disappointed and frustrated

unengaged youth, and thus restored their hope for better futures. For instance, partly due to the introduction of the PYJ, the unemployment rate for ages between fifteen and nineteen eased from 26.8% in 1999 to 16.2% in 2008 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2010 Edition" 24). With the rebuilding of the prospects and anticipations towards better futures, fewer young people were disaffected. For the age group sixteen to twenty, the number of arrested persons dropped from 7,038 in 1999 to 4,684 in 2009 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2010 Edition" 357). For the age group sixteen to twenty, the number of persons arrested because of violent crimes declined from 2,078 in 1999 to 1,105 in 2009 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2010 Edition" 356; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2000 Edition" 314). Since more young people are willing to follow laws and regulations, the PYJ is a stabilizing force for society.

Consolidating Higher Education

In addition, the PYJ also consolidates the role of higher education in Hong Kong society by enhancing its financial sustainability. Durkheim Education and Sociology perceived education as "a collection of practices and institutions that have been organized slowly in the course of time, which are comparable with all the other social institutions and which express them, and which, therefore, can no more be changed at will than the structure of the society itself" (Education and Sociology 65). Scholars such as Braun, Roos et al., and Sibhensana and Maistry also regard higher education as an important social institution. Being one of the key components of education, the role of higher education in society is significant and inevitable since it is associated with the everyday workings of society (Descouings 25; Marginson 21). In particular, higher education enhances stability through socialization to convey knowledge, instilling socially acceptable values, and channel sentiment among young people (Francois 9-10; Clark 13). Therefore, Schofer, Ramirez and Meyer promulgated that higher education nurtures people (2). The proposition from Schofer, Ramirez and Meyer is relevant to Hong Kong as the government of Hong Kong has utilized higher education as one of the strategies to strengthen the competitiveness of the territory. By recognizing the need to consolidate the knowledge economy of Hong Kong, the government in 2000 aspired to massify higher education by expanding the proportion of Form Five or Form Seven school leavers studying territory education from 18% to 60% (Sutherland 23-24; Tung 22; Lo 761). In this regard, higher education not only satisfies social needs but also contributes to the smooth operation of society (Bleiklie 302).

The smooth operation of society can be assured when pivotal organizations demonstrate their functions (Burelli and Camboni 2). Nonetheless, higher education has to be sustained first before effectively and efficiently performing its role. Apart from the legal status of awarding credentials, the financial situation is another crucial element in determining the sustainability of higher education. Compared with the economic condition of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the financial condition of higher education today could be regarded as sustainable. The Hong Kong government offered considerable financial support to higher education. For instance, among total government expenditure on education in 1983, 28% was spent on higher education (The World Bank). The figure increased to 32%, 35%, and 40% in 1990, 1992, and 1996 respectively (The World Bank). However, the 1997 Asian financial crisis endangered the financial sustainability of higher education in Hong Kong since the figure shrank to 30% and 28% in 2004 and 2005 respectively (The World Bank). Particularly, recurrent government expenditure on higher education dropped from HK\$14,812 million in 1999/2000 to HK\$12,535 million in 2006/2007 (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2010 Edition" 306). Owing to the revision, almost all higher education in Hong Kong encountered different magnitudes of financial difficulties.

To cope with the diminishing financial support, higher education had to reduce its expenditure while exploring new income. In the early 2000s, higher education adjusted remuneration scales as one of the techniques to cut institutional spending (Education and Manpower Bureau "Remuneration Systems in University Grants Committee-Funded Institutions after Deregulation of Salary Scales"). However, the measure alone was inadequate to financially support higher education to accomplish the government's aspiration of massification of higher education. Meanwhile, there was a market for alternative academic qualifications and study paths in society. As revealed in Appendix Two, undergraduate enrollment in publicly funded programmes at higher education never met the demand, especially for those Form Five school leavers (Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2004 Edition" 267; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1998 Edition" 202; Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1995 Edition" 196). Higher education could take further actions to satisfy the situation by offering different programmes and credentials only with the consent of the government. In this regard, the government had to "facilitate tertiary institutions ... to provide options other than the traditional sixth form education, such as professional diploma courses and sub-degree courses" so that higher education enjoys the autonomy of exploring certain financial and administrative flexibility without solely and rigidly relying on the government (Tung 23).

One of the options that higher education can adopt is through a market mechanism (Lo and Ng 521). Complying with the idea of the Education Commission Review of Education System Reform Proposal: Excel and Grow “(t)o promote the development of different types of higher education institutions (such as community colleges and private universities) providing students with more opportunities and choices for pursuing higher education”, the introduction of the self-financed PYJ in 2000 could be regarded as one of the rescue policies for higher education during the difficult time of the budget reduction period (Review of Education System Reform Proposal: Excel and Grow 8). The PYJ could also be translated as a policy to achieve the government’s desire to expand tertiary education without loading additional financial burden on a strained budget (Sutherland 9). While the Hong Kong government reduced its funding to higher education, the enactment of the PYJ could be interpreted as assigning the role of service provider and delegating certain autonomy and flexibility to higher education which allowed them to compete for financial resources under the mindset of market mechanism advocated by new public management. As demonstrated in Appendix One, as of June 2010, there were nine PYJ suppliers with tuition fees ranging from \$27,500 to \$29,500 (Education Bureau “Item for Finance Committee” 17). The number of PYJ student enrollment rose from 4,293 in 2001 to 16,732 in 2009 (Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2010 Edition” 287; Census and Statistics Department “Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2007 Edition” 273). As aforesaid, all the PYJ programmes operated on a self-financed basis, and the tuition fees were usually higher than those of government-subsidized programmes. The high student enrollment rate thus represented a new source of handsome revenue which enhanced the financial sustainability of higher education. In return, the role of higher education was sustained and empowered contributing to the stability of society.

Improvement in the financial situation enables higher education to exercise its functions in society. Functions of higher education include nurturing and maintaining the division of labour so as to promote smooth operation in society (Collins 174, 262; Dahlström 134). Through setting up a variety of programmes and awarding different credentials, higher education can prepare the next generation in society with various necessary disciplinary training and academic qualifications. For instance, higher education can establish a business department and award students with a Master of Business Administration. In the same vein, higher education can also prepare society for kindergarten teachers after awarding students with a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education. Each of them has to be interdependent with other professions so as to survive in society. As earlier elucidation, by doing

so, social stability can be ensured since the division of labour in society can be sustained and people have to rely on each other.

Higher education utilizes the PYJ to help attain its function of fostering and retaining the division of labour in society (Collins 174, 262; Dahlström 134). Basically, this function can be achieved in at least two ways. First, the PYJ offers students a wide range of training in specific fields that cater to the various needs of society. For instance, the PYJ provides fundamental and necessary training in many areas such as business, disciplinary forces, social care and services, information technology, design and creativity, catering, languages, and the like (Education Bureau "Diploma Yi Jin Programme 2022 / 2023"). By offering basic training in different areas, higher education has laid a crucial foundation for students' academic and career advancement. In this regard, the PYJ constitutes one of the important pillars supporting the division of labour in Hong Kong. Second, with the introduction of the PYJ, higher education is in a better position to award people with more credentials at different academic levels. The PYJ facilitates higher education by designing unconventional and unprecedented study pathways to advance students' academic attainment from certificates to Pre-Associate Degrees, Associate Degrees, Bachelor Degrees, and so on. In the case of Hong Kong, different qualifications portray corresponding unique characteristics of the training programme at a particular level and competencies of the credential holders (Qualifications Framework Secretariat 19-21). For instance, it is expected that holders of diplomas can produce a simple judgement after locating, arranging, and analyzing materials without seeking assistance from others (Qualifications Framework Secretariat 4). In a sense, the PYJ accelerates higher education, making employers, and even society much easier to identify and distinguish people with different levels of academic qualification. In return, especially in a knowledge society like Hong Kong, the difference in credentials may represent the suitability and even employability of a person for a particular position (Zhang, Law and Lin 79-80; Loh and Tam 769; Kember 177). In this regard, the PYJ not only perpetuates the division of labour but also associates it with stability. When people are interdependent with each other based on the division of labour and exercise their contributions according to their hierarchical positions, smooth operation of society can be further fortified.

In short, the PYJ mitigated the huge impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. On the one hand, through the re-installation of hope among the unengaged youth, the PYJ, as a pathway to gainful employment stabilises society. On the other hand, through enhancing financial sustainability, the PYJ consolidates higher education to perform its functions of nourishing the division of labour. Partially ascribed to the PYJ, the atmosphere of society improves. For instance, society tended to be surrounded by a pessimistic feeling toward the

future as 24.8% of informants in 1998 predicted experiencing negative personal development in the following year (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute). After enacting the PYJ for a decade, society in 2010 was inclined to embrace it with an optimistic attitude since only 11.9% of respondents forecasted worse self-advancement in subsequent times (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute).

Implications

This article forms vital implications for higher education and education policymakers. Higher education is recommended to constantly review its programmes. Higher education carries an important role in maintaining the stability of a society. Nevertheless, higher education can hardly achieve its mission without adequate financial support. As aforementioned, the PYJ has consolidated the financial sustainability of higher education. On the contrary, by acting as the PYJ supplier, higher education contributed to the stability and effective governance of Hong Kong under the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. It evinces that higher education and society can mutually benefit when higher education timely launches suitable programmes to cater to social needs. In this regard, higher education is advised to constantly review how to satisfy the different educational needs of learners, strike a balance between limited resources, and nurture graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to empower the sustainable development of society. By doing so, both higher education and society can be mutually benefited.

In addition, education policymakers are reminded to proactively and sufficiently consult and cooperate with various stakeholders in the sector and formulate education policies that can be devotedly adapted to dynamic environments. Before the late 1990s, the Hong Kong government practised traditional public administration to administer the public sector. Especially, the public sector is inclined to prepare many social services almost by its effort alone. While such practice requires a lot of resources, the social services provided by the government may not be able to really satisfy various social demands. One of the reasons is due to the constraint of governance since the private sector, hybrid organizations, or even the local communities may be in a better position than the public sector to comprehend the problems and the concerns of different parties. In a sense, the 1997 Asian financial crisis offered a new insight to the government. While practising new public management to administer the public sector, the government also recognized the limitation of her governance. Once the private sector, hybrid organizations, and the local communities are equipped with authority and resources, they can develop a distinctive explication and a better approach to addressing an issue. The public

sector is thus advised to assume a minimal role in society and not to provide all social services through its efforts. By revisiting the PYJ, this article envisioned higher education as a hybrid organization that led to social stability. This kind of cooperation between the public sector and a hybrid organization could enhance the governance of the Hong Kong government. In this regard, instead of financing almost all study paths by the public sector, education policymakers can consult with all identifiable stakeholders, formulate general policy direction, and launch numerous programmes through cooperation with desirable organizations from different backgrounds. By doing so, various educational needs can be addressed in a more efficient, effective, and economical manner. The whole society can be availed as well.

Conclusion

To sum up, after carrying out for more than two decades, the PYJ has demonstrated itself as an innovative and feasible measure to help the Hong Kong government cope with the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The PYJ has empowered laws and orders by re-assembling and consolidating social stability and also strengthened the role of higher education by underpinning its financial sustainability. Whilst the PYJ has assisted the Hong Kong government in enhancing its effective governance intangibly and inventively, it has also been considered too expensive and needs to bear at least partial responsibility for promoting the phenomenon of the commodification of education and academic inflation in Hong Kong (Waters 372; Y. L. Wong "Student Alienation in Higher Education under Neoliberalism and Global Capitalism: A Case of Community College Students' Instrumentalism in Hong Kong" 111). Even though the PYJ has been phased out and replaced by the Diploma of Applied Education, scholars are encouraged to conduct more research on various dimensions of educational policy including its merits and demerits (Legislative Council Secretariat 10-11). In return, the research will empower academia and other relevant practitioners not only to revisit previous practices of the PYJ from different perspectives but also to foresee and appraise the future performance and impacts of the Diploma of Applied Education for the sake of the next generations and the whole society. In addition, the research findings on launching educational policies in Hong Kong, including the PYJ, can further inform global educators as the international communities are excited to digest and exchange various approaches and experiences of nurturing youth with different educational needs. In this regard, more research into the PYJ and its successive educational policies is much recommended.

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Appendix One

Provider \ Year	2000 ¹	2010 ²	2021 ³
Caritas Adult and Higher Education Service / Caritas Community and Higher Education Service / Caritas Institute of Community Education	Y ⁴	Y	Y
Division of Continuing Professional Education, The Hong Kong Institute of Education	Y	Y	N ⁵
Hong Kong College of Technology	N	Y	Y
Hong Kong Institute of Technology	N	Y	Y
Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education, Open University of Hong Kong / Hong Kong Metropolitan University	Y	Y	Y
Lingnan Institute of Further Education, Lingnan University	Y	Y	Y
School of Business and Information Systems, Vocational Training Council	Y	Y	Y
School of Continuing and Professional Education, City University of Hong Kong	Y	Y	N
School of Continuing Education, Hong Kong Baptist University	Y	Y	Y
School of Continuing Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Y	N	N
School of Professional and Continuing Education, The University of Hong Kong	Y	N	N
School of Professional Education & Executive Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Y	N	N
Sub-total	10	9	7

Table One. Providers of Project Yi Jin (including Project Springboard and Diploma Yi Jin) in year 2000, 2010, and 2021.

Notes:

1. Source: The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region "Project Springboard a New Avenue for Continuing Education".
2. Source: Education Bureau "Item for Finance Committee" (17).

3. Source: Federation for Self-financing Tertiary Education.
 4. Y: The institute is the provider of Project Yi Jin.
 5. N: The institute is not the provider of Project Yi Jin.

Appendix Two

Year	Number of the candidates		Estimated number of Form Five students who could not be promoted to Form Six ³	Total enrollment in subsidized full-time degree programmes
	HKCEE ¹	HKALE ²		
1988	146,245	N/A ⁴	N/A	N/A
1989	139,978	N/A	N/A	N/A
1990	136,463	17,851	128,394	24,795 ⁵
1991	135,937	16,545	123,433	28,201 ⁵
1992	128,457	16,879	119,584	32,019 ⁵
1993	118,516	22,075	113,862	36,295 ⁶
1994	120,555	26,088	102,369	39,705 ⁶
1995	123,945	28,787	89,729	42,824 ⁶
1996	121,810	30,094	90,461	44,302 ⁶
1997	131,038	30,863	93,082	44,225 ⁶
1998	134,630	32,167	89,643	43,885 ⁷
1999	140,589	34,085	96,953	44,031 ⁷
2000	140,303	35,549	99,081	44,241 ⁷
2001	130,612	36,099	104,490	44,796 ⁷
2002	N/A	36,999	103,304	45,669 ⁷
2003	N/A	36,660	93,952	46,602 ⁷

Table Two. Estimated number of students who could not be promoted to Form Six and total enrollment in subsidized full-time degree programmes from 1990 to 2003.

Notes:

1. Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority "1978-

- 2010 Hkcee Number of Participating Schools and Candidate Entries" (76).
2. Source: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority "1980-2012 Hkale Number of Participating Schools and Candidate Entries" (73).
3. The figures were calculated based on the number of the HKALE candidates in that year subtracted by the number of the HKCEE candidates two years before.
4. N/A: Inapplicable.
5. Source: Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1995 Edition" (196).
6. Source: Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 1998 Edition" (202).
7. Source: Census and Statistics Department "Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics 2004 Edition" (267).

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