

Made in Macao¹: How History, Politics and Teachers Frame Curriculum Practice

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The mode of curriculum development in Macao is different from that in most Chinese societies where there is commonly the presence of a centralised or core curriculum. The long-standing non-intervention attitude from the Portuguese administration has left Macao a “big market, small government” regime in which the government had limited participation in overall social matters. In such a context, government policy was limited in actual practice and reduced to a visible symbol. Amongst different social matters, education is one of the most contested terrains prior to and following the handover of Macao to Chinese sovereignty in 1999. In Macao, the diversified “school-based curriculum” in all schools can be regarded as a prominent phenomenon in education. In the face of such curricular diversity, the government launched the first official curriculum in 1995 and the implementation of this curriculum was limited to government schools. A revised official curriculum was published in 1999 before the handover. With the shift of Macao’s sovereignty to China in 1999, the Special Administrative Region of Macao (the Macao SAR) made great efforts to re-participate in all social matters including education so as to assume and resume its *state* responsibilities and intended to switch its administration to one that would signify a “strong government” regime. However, this change for intervention and introduction of any possible reforms on the part of the government encountered much “resistance” from local schools. The main reason is that the major components in the education system in Macao are private schools, not government schools, and these private schools enjoy a lot of “self autonomy” according to the Macao SAR Basic Law. The principle of self autonomy in these schools allows them to resist change and the reforms that the government introduces. In the post-1999 era, instead of forcefully implementing curriculum reform, the Macao SAR adopts a money-driven policy to effect changes in schools. This article discusses how history, politics and front-line teachers’ perception can frame emerging curriculum practice in the territory. The discussion draws upon data from government policy documents

¹“Macao” is the official English translation for the Portuguese word “Macau”. However, the Portuguese spelling “Macau” is used in the English naming of the University of Macau, so the university retains this Portuguese spelling in its name.

and interviews with front-line teachers and unfolds the complexities involved in the negotiation for a “Made in Macao” curriculum.

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