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**Title:** Principles and Practices of Buddhicized Education in Hong Kong:  
The case of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association

**Abstract:** Buddhism is a prosperous religion in Hong Kong, and a number of Buddhist bodies run schools with government subsidies. This article takes the Hong Kong Buddhist Association's current Buddhicized education programme as an example and reviews its principles and practices. The Association sees the local social environment as unhealthy and considers it urgently necessary to foster in students a proper philosophy of life and moral values by strengthening their life and spiritual education with a Buddhist orientation. While keeping Buddhist doctrines as the major source of values and resources in its programme, the Association has expanded its coverage to include current issues related to students' daily lives. It has also revamped its teaching materials and pedagogy and has sought to provide diverse learning experiences beyond regular lessons. Contemplative education and green education have also been given more emphasis. This article also discusses the problems and prospects of implementing the programme.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Buddhicized education, Hong Kong, Life education, Values Education

## Introduction

With Hong Kong's historical background as a British colony, religious schools and religious education continue to have a salient presence. In this special schooling system, religious education plays a crucial role in instilling students with the proper personal, moral, civic and spiritual values. Religious education exists under a variety of names, and it is conducted through various channels and formats in different religious schools. There has also been ongoing reform in these religious education programs. Most studies of religious education in Hong Kong are about Christianity (Chan 2015; Cheng 2004; Tse 2015), and we know little about non-Christian religious education. To fill the gaps in the literature, this article reviews the principles and practices of the current Buddhist religious education curriculum.

Over the last several decades, religious education has transformed a great deal in response to changing social, cultural and educational landscapes (Conroy and Davis 2010; De Souza et al. 2006; Franchi, Conroy, and McKinney 2015). Immigration and secularization undermined the influence of dominant religious beliefs that different from the mainstream. Many faith schools have a substantial population that is not part of their religious tradition or that has varying degrees of religious attachment. Significant cultural shifts around marriage, sexuality and technology in many places have resulted in conflicts over values, beliefs and lifestyle practices. Accordingly, school religious education must respond to these demographic and cultural changes.

Under the influence of educational studies and education reform at large, new ways of thinking about religion and new models of religious education have also been developed. An explicit 'faith-nurture' approach has gradually been replaced by 'learning from religion' or 'learning about religion', with a focus on encouraging students to understand the major religions. Schools today are burdened by many expectations, and religious education within the school is also an area with many varying demands. Religious education has had difficulty securing a legitimate place within a crowded curriculum despite claims of its overriding importance made by many bodies (Franchi, Conroy, and McKinney 2015).

As a highly secular and multi-cultural city, Hong Kong has a wide variety of vibrant religious beliefs. Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity (both Protestantism and Catholicism) are the mainstream religions in Hong Kong, with numerous followers and many different sects (Information Service Department of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019; Kwong 2002). Benefiting from Hong Kong's aided school system, religious groups are dominant sponsoring bodies for kindergartens and schools, and religious education has been allowed to develop with little government intervention.

Buddhism is a religion with a long history, and its first adherents in Hong Kong can be traced back 1600 years. For hundreds of years afterward, religious activities by Buddhist monks in Hong Kong were scattered and rare, and were mostly limited to self-meditation in the

countryside. It was after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the start of the Republic of China, when many monks from mainland China migrated to Hong Kong for shelter and settlement, that Buddhism began to prosper in Hong Kong (Tang 2015). Around 1949, political turmoil resulting from the Chinese Civil War led thousands of Buddhist monks fled to Hong Kong. Some of them stayed and built Buddhist temples in Hong Kong, the number of which increased drastically (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 1978). Buddhism in Hong Kong includes many schools, mainly of Mahayana Buddhism. Today, Hong Kong has more than a million Buddhists and several hundred Buddhist organizations (GovHK 2016), which illustrates that Buddhism in Hong Kong is quite prosperous.

When the welfare system in Hong Kong was immature, religious bodies were the pioneering social service providers of the city. They have provided services to the poor and vulnerable for a long time. Relying on donations from the general public and later support from the government, these bodies became non-profit social welfare organizations. In the era of colonial governance, Hong Kong's education relied on Christian groups, which merged education with missionary work. These faith schools developed rapidly from the 1870s onward. A salient characteristic of education in Hong Kong is that most schools are subsidized by the government but run by sponsoring bodies that are responsible for drawing up the school mission and for the administration of the schools. As the government and sponsoring bodies became working partners in public education, the main religious bodies in Hong Kong gradually joined the business of running schools, which helped to popularise education. Tung Lin Kok Yuen established the first Buddhist school in the 1930s. Since the 1960s, the Buddhist circle has put a great deal of effort into establishing and operating schools. There are now many Buddhist sponsoring bodies in Hong Kong, including The Hong Kong Buddhist Association (HKBA), The Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association, Chi Lin Nunnery, Tung Lin Kok Yuen, Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery, To Chi Fat She, Chi Hong Ching Yuen and the Hong Kong and Macau Regional Centre of The World Fellowship of Buddhists (Tang 2015). These sponsoring bodies operate 15 kindergartens, 16 primary schools, 20 secondary schools and 1 special school, serving around 4% of the total student population in Hong Kong in 2019.

### **Orientation of Buddhicized Education**

Schools run by these Buddhist bodies show their distinct religious culture. Students from the above-mentioned schools are exposed to Buddhist doctrines and practices. For example, the largest Buddhist sponsoring body, the HKBA, has 8 kindergartens, 7 primary schools and 13 secondary schools, all of which keep the Buddha's spirit as their school vision, with 'to illumine wisdom and manifest compassion' (*Mingzhixianbei*) as their common motto, representing a philosophy of cultivating morality with knowledge. These schools strive to merge the teaching of knowledge with morals to promote students' spiritual wellness and achieve whole-person

education through Buddhized education (*Fohuajiaoyu*). With Buddhist education and moral education with Buddhist doctrine as underlying principles, the schools value the cultivation of students' moral values and character, which includes telling right from wrong and understanding karmic relations and the wisdom of altruism that benefits oneself. This is to guide students towards positive thinking and moral values and to help them build a positive philosophy of life.

At an HKBA joint-school graduation ceremony in 2007, Ven. Kok Kwong stated that it is a common goal of human beings to build a harmonious society (*Wen Wei Po* 2007). Although material life has improved due to technological advancement, people suffer from spiritual emptiness. When people lose meaning in their lives, social unrest results. As 'the building of a harmonious world starts from the heart', Buddhized education is education for the heart. Ven. Kok Kwong hoped that teaching fellows could work to build a harmonious and happy society by means of compassion and benevolence. In 2013, Ven. Sik Yin-chi, the secretary-general and vice-chair of the school administration committee restated this idea (*Ta Kung Pao* 2013).

The running of Buddhist schools not only follows the curriculum set by the Education Bureau but also focuses on teaching Buddhist moral and ethical principles, the concepts of wisdom and compassion, and how to make these teachings widespread in society. Although it is important to promote students' knowledge and wisdom, it is essential to acknowledge the fact that the nurturing of moral values is the underlying principle of self-cultivation. As students now live in an era full of competition, in which society values materialistic enjoyment and utilitarianism, the promotion of moral education and caring for the heart have become more significant than ever (Ven. Sik Yin-chi 2015).

Ven. Sik Yin-chi (2015) also stated that the greatest and the most obvious drawbacks of modern education are ignorance of spiritual education, the lack of teaching of ethics and morals and the failure to cultivate character. Fundamentally, Buddhized education means education of the mind. Self-cultivation equals cultivation of the mind. Through Buddhist doctrines the confused and reckless mind settled and every hostile thought is purified. The cultivation of character is the core of Buddhized education. By passing on Buddhist doctrines to students and teaching them to apply those principles in their daily lives, Buddhized education teaches students to treat people with the spirit of 'compassion and selfless dedication' (*Cibeixishe*), and it thus promotes students' ability to self-reflect and reflect on the meaning of life, better enabling them to cope with the pressure and confusion of society.

Due to humans' unwholesome behaviors the environment we rely on for survival is continuously deteriorating. Only by changing one's moral values can one's external behaviors be changed. Buddhist schools can use one of the functions of Buddhism, enlightening people's minds, to promote the protection of environment in terms of the mind and spiritual wellness. Under the positive influence of Buddhist doctrines such as karma and by appreciating, cherishing and cultivating blessings, students can learn how to better cherish the natural

resources of the earth, make good use of materials instead of wasting them, protect the environment at the domestic level and practice vegetarianism to cultivate compassion, thus helping to save the planet.

Moreover, in this era of information explosion, Buddhicized education can guide students in filtering massive amounts of information with Buddhist wisdom and to internalize useful and correct information after careful and sensible consideration.

The recent development and implementation of Buddhicized education has arisen from a number of factors. Since 2000, HKBA has focused on reinforcing ‘Buddhicized moral and value education’ and ‘life-wide learning’ to train students in problem-solving in daily life and to achieve whole-person development and life-long learning in their ever-changing society. Given the rampant trends of juvenile drug addiction and compensated dating, teenagers’ moral values are a subject of concern, and that their mental and spiritual wellness requires more care and attention. Social issues such as broken families and bullying are also worries. In addition, to act in concert with the government’s implementation of Moral and Values Education, HKBA has attempted to blend elements related to Buddhicized education, life education and values education into schools’ curriculum and activities to strengthen students’ sense of social responsibility, mutual respect and consideration for others, which help them develop a proper philosophy of life and moral values (Wen Wei Po 2010; Ven. Sik Yin-chi 2015).

To safeguard the time spent on religious education, HKBA has signed agreements with the incorporated management committees of individual associated schools so that the schools will adhere to their mission. HKBA believes that the subjects of Buddhism and moral education should be combined into one, called ‘Buddhicized Moral and Value Education’, and stipulates that the relevant curriculum should be no less than 120 minutes per week for primary schools, no less than 80 minutes per week for junior secondary classes and no less than 40 minutes per week for senior secondary classes (Ven. Sik, H.H. 2016).

### **Formal Curriculum**

Although the Education Bureau has never set up a curriculum guide for Buddhicized education in kindergartens and primary schools, Buddhist schools design activities and arrange lessons according to their schools’ circumstances to pass on knowledge of Buddhism to students. In general, kindergartens instil basic knowledge of Buddhism to children through interesting activities, and schools have weekly lessons on Buddhism at the primary and junior secondary levels. HKBA and The Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association have also published textbooks for Buddhist schools.

Concerning Buddhicized education for junior secondary school students, in 1999, the Curriculum Development Council (1999) compiled a curriculum guide for junior secondary school religious education, which includes a section on Buddhism subdivided into a section on Buddhist doctrine and another on basic knowledge, important figures and sects of Buddhism.

This curriculum guide can be regarded as an outline for Buddhized education in junior secondary schools. However, generally speaking, the learning of Buddhism is left to the Buddhist sponsoring bodies, which have their own school-based programs.

Buddhist Studies was also an independent school subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination between 1960 and 2011 that Form 5 students could take as an elective. The syllabus was revised in 2003, with a new section on the application of Buddhist teaching in daily life on top of the original three sections on Buddhist history, Buddhist teachings and related scriptures. The average number of day school candidates taking ‘Buddhist Studies’ was 1,791 between 1996 and 2007, less than 2% of all day school candidates (Wong and Lee 2012).

Under the new senior secondary 3-year curriculum introduced in 2009, students have to take four core subjects, with a new course, ‘Ethics and Religious Studies’, replacing Buddhist Studies as an elective. The new curriculum includes basic knowledge of ethics (such as utilitarianism, deontological ethics and virtue ethics) and ethical reflections on social issues such as human rights, demonstrations and protests, euthanasia and surrogate motherhood. With regard to the elective part of religious traditions, students may opt for Buddhism and study the history of Buddhism, basic Buddhist doctrines and Buddhist practices. However, it is uncommon for senior secondary students to take this course. Between 2012 and 2016, the numbers of day school candidates taking Ethics and Religious Studies (combining those taking Buddhism and Christianity) were 870, 797, 785, 693 and 649, merely 1% of the total student population. Only 152 students from the HKBA’s associated schools took the new course in 2012 (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2012).

The public examination data show the learning of Buddhism at the senior secondary level was impeded by the new senior secondary curriculum reform because students now have more core subjects than previously. Most students also took electives helpful for their further studies. The replacement of Buddhist Studies with Ethics and Religious Studies in the new senior secondary curriculum actually led to a drastic drop in the number of students taking the course.

To implement the recent Buddhized education program, the HKBA entrusted the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong with compiling teaching materials and has provided supplementary teaching materials to its associated schools since the academic year of 2010/11. Since 2010, its junior secondary school curriculum has changed in accordance with changes in the curriculums of Buddhized education and value education. For secondary 1 students, the textbook *The Road to Enlightenment (zhengjue de daolu)* was adopted, and the senior forms have gradually adopted new textbooks in response to curricular changes (Hong Kong Buddhist Association, Reform and Policies, n.d.). The HKBA has extended the enrichment course of *The Road to Enlightenment* (compiled by the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong) for life education based on the concept of dependent origination to senior primary and junior secondary school students (see Table 1 for the themes across years).

Table 1: New Curriculum

Level	Unit/Theme
Primary 4 Vehicles of men and gods	Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha
Primary 5 Vehicle of liberation	The Four Noble Truths
Primary 6 Bodhisattva vehicle	Four All-embracing (Bodhisattva) Virtues
Secondary 1 Vehicles of men and gods	Comprehension of Life: Three Jewels, Dependent Origination of Life, Five Aggregates, Impermanence and no-self. How Life Operates: Karma, Observing the Five Commandments
Secondary 2 Vehicle of liberation	Two Paths in Life: The Four Noble Truths, Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, The Eightfold Path
Secondary 3 Bodhisattva vehicle	Compassion and Wisdom: Four All-embracing Virtues and the Spirit of Bodhisattva

The feature of Buddhicized life education is that the course is based on dependent origination, a fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. Things appear and exist in the world because of a coalescence of causation and conditions. The rule of origination explains how matter changes because of formations and extinctions, including the formation and operation of human life and sentient beings (Ven. Sik H.H. 2005, Yu, 2008). Life education based on the concept of dependent origination is a philosophy of life, values and conduct. It is also a way of thinking and learning that guides students to learn about the world, life and how to deal with problems and the meanings of life. The course focuses on comprehending life, managing life and finding meaning in life (Anotonovsky 1987). Comprehending life means to learn about the dependent origination of life, to understand that there is no fixed ‘real me’ and to envision endless possibilities. Another important concept of dependent origination is causation. According to Buddhist doctrines, dependent origination is not led by randomness, but by the mind, and it thus emphasizes the importance of the mind. That is, a person’s mind determines his future and leads and directs his life. After learning about life, students learn to use commandments, meditation and wisdom to deal with problems. Observing commandments is part of a disciplined life that creates favorable conditions for achieving auspicious outcomes and eliminates hostile factors to eliminate suffering. Meditation is the power of focus arising from determination and perseverance, which is crucial for achieving goals. Wisdom is the right direction and way to deal with affairs: to stay aware, to keep learning, to keep reflecting on oneself and to actively put thoughts into practice.

The course also requires students to learn about the meaning of life and to establish a right direction for their lives. Meaningfulness also arises from dependent origination: to appreciate the power and wonder of life; to feel grateful for people and events after witnessing the importance of the many favorable factors that facilitate and support our existence; to be willing to cooperate with others, perform charity and share after witnessing the interdependent

relationships between causes and conditions; and to learn to cherish and let go after witnessing impermanence based on dependent origination.

The course structure includes three levels: vehicles of men and gods (Primary 4 and Secondary 1), vehicle of liberation (Primary 5 and Secondary 2) and Bodhisattva vehicle (Primary 6 and Secondary 3), making it a spiral of development from primary to secondary years. In terms of pedagogical principles, the course incorporates ‘three kinds of knowing’ (*wensixiu*): 1. wisdom consisting of learning, 2. wisdom produced by thinking and 3. wisdom realized by practice.

The course package contains 24 interactive and activity-based lesson plans, which involve video clips, news footages, scripts for role-playing, worksheets, information from the Internet and related newspaper clippings (Yu 2008).

To prepare Secondary 3 students for the new senior secondary curriculum Ethics and Religious Studies, Introduction to Ethical Studies was incorporated into the Secondary 3 second-term Buddhized education curriculum, and weekly lessons were increased from 2 sessions to 2.5 sessions. In tandem with the new curriculum, there has been a weekly Buddhized education lesson for Secondary 4 and 5 students, with teaching materials are excerpted from the textbook *The Road to Enlightenment* and from movies, songs and articles related to Buddhism. There are also classroom activities such as discussions and worksheets that incorporate extra topics like caring for others and perseverance.

### **Informal Curriculum**

Beyond regular lessons, Buddha’s birthday is warmly celebrated every year with rituals of prayers, chanting and bathing of the Buddha statue. Schools under the HKBA actively promote Buddhized education through inter-disciplinary classroom activities beyond merely teaching knowledge from textbooks, such as visits to Buddhist monasteries, experiential learning at Buddhist monasteries, visiting the elderly, introductory courses on Buddhism, meditation classes for teachers and students, vegetarian fun days and interest classes related to Buddhism.

To enrich students’ knowledge of Buddhism, they are brought to various Buddhist institutes to learn more about the architectural style, rituals and process of traditional offerings. Led by masters at traditional temples, students have lunch in a Buddhist temple and learn about the daily running of a temple as and about the lives of monks and nuns. Students also visit Buddhist organizations and participate in day camps, which help them experience the true meaning of Buddhism (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2002).

Many Buddhist groups provide opportunities for young people to come into contact with and participate in various good deeds such as relief, poverty alleviation and care for the aged, sick and disabled. For instance, releasing captive animals could help students learn to love and protect lives and to nurture kindness and care within themselves. Students can learn to treasure the present by experiencing the destitute lives of villagers in the remote villages of China



through poverty relief activities. They also learn to show mercy and lift others' lives from hardship by offering alms to the needy. These actions cultivate young people's positive beliefs, philanthropy and good thoughts.

Since 2000, subsidized by the Quality Education Fund, a government fund established in 1998 to finance projects for the promotion of quality education in Hong Kong, several Buddhist schools jointly organized 'An Exploration of Life – A Scheme to Rebuild Personal Values', in which meditation and volunteer work are promoted at the schools. Students experienced the influence of religion on their internal life, which soothes their anxiety and helps them establish a positive philosophy of life. Also subsidized by the Quality Education Fund, 600 Form 4 students from various Buddhist schools joined the Orientation to Life Enhancement Project, which was conducted between September 2004 and December 2005. They participated in various interactive activities, such as meditation practice, mini-lectures, videos, games and dramas. It was shown that contemplative education based on Buddhist teaching could enhance students' self-esteem and ability to handle stress (Sik and Wu 2015). This school-based life education programme was built on the work of the sense of coherence developed by Aaron Antonovsky (1987) and the concept of dependent origination developed by Ven. Sik Hin Hung (2005). Antonovsky proposed that a global orientation to view life situations as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful may influence a person's ability to handle stress and health. In addition, the concept of dependent origination is used for comprehending life, finding meaning in life and managing life.

The HKBA also founded an inter-school society, The Association's Buddhist Youth Fellowship, in 1973 to encourage teenagers to take part in Buddhist religious activities. Today, more than 30 schools belong to this society, which now has over 20,000 members. The joint-school activities held include Buddha's Birthday Card Design Competition, Buddha's Birthday Writing Competition, the Buddhist Youth Association Volunteer and Ambassador Scheme and singing contests.

To act in concert with the implementation of Buddhicized moral and value education, in 2011, the HKBA Primary Schools Headmasters Association established a Committee for the Promotion of Spiritual Education, which is responsible for examining the practicability of curriculum and activities. The Committee organizes various activities for education of the heart all year round so that students can apply Buddhist doctrines to real life.

Between 2011/12 to 2012/13, activities for 'Education for the Heart' included Buddhist Primary Schools (*Dizigui*, standards for being good students and children written in the Qing period), the Speech Festival, lectures on 'Environmental Protection for the Heart' for teachers (*Jiaoshi xinling huanbao jiangzuo*), day camps for students' spiritual growth (*Xuesheng xinling chengchang riyang*), other seminars for teachers and the Heart Sutra Stiff Pen Calligraphy Competition cum Seminars (*Xinjing yingbi shufa bisai ji 'xinjing' mantan*). A recent initiative was 'Visiting and Exploring Program of Hong Kong Buddhist Temples' (*Xianggang fosi zhi*

*canfang yu tanjiu jihua*) between 2017 and 2018, which featured the participation of 400 students and 35 teachers from primary schools (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2018).

The green campus is another feature of HKBA schools, as every primary school has a garden for farming and takes part in the Green Monday scheme to teach students about the importance of a balanced diet. The Vegetarian Luncheon is held to enable students to experience and appreciate the value of mercy and enjoy a vegetarian diet. In concert with the concepts of environmental protection, health regimens and vegetarianism, these Green Education activities promote the idea of respect for life to students.

Every HKBA school has a prayer room, a tranquil environment with statues of the Buddha, mats and talismans. Dharma masters come to the schools from time to time to teach Buddhist etiquette. The schools care about students' emotional control and resilience. Through meditation and contemplation, students learn to be grateful and reflective, which helps them cope with pressure from their studies and examinations. Between the school years 2016 and 2019, the HKBA also carried out a project called 'Bringing Awareness Meditation into Secondary Schools' under the sponsorship of the D.H. Chen Foundation. The HKBA aims to introduce contemplative practices to secondary school students to cultivate their ability to handle the pressure and stress life presents. Students can learn the art of staying in touch with their emotions and strengthening their mental capacity to find inner peace. Recognizing the benefits of mindfulness practices and based on Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the program serves to develop a holistic meditation curriculum for HKBA secondary schools with the support of hardware enhancement, regular teacher training and the provision of teaching materials over three years. It is anticipated that mindfulness practices will be brought into the wider education and the youth sector in Hong Kong in the future.

Moreover, for the effective implementation of 'Buddhicized moral and value education', the HKBA introduced an on-campus Buddhicized education platform called Bodhi360, on which there is a database for Buddhicized education teaching and examinations, the latest news of activities related to Buddhism and value education, epigrams from Dharma masters, tips on how to turn risks into opportunities and interesting multimedia animations and comics (*Sing Pao* 2017). The website promotes the implementation and development of Buddhicized moral education, which can inspire students and instil positive values in them, thus cultivating resilience. The website also enables teachers from different schools to share resources and experiences on school-based and inter-school activities (Leung and Hung 2018).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Many people still misunderstand Buddhism as an ancient, old-fashioned and superstitious religion. They regard the teachings of the Buddha as difficult, abstract and detached from daily life. However, religious education provided by Buddhist schools aims not only at preaching but at addressing individual and social problems: to implement moral, life and spiritual

education by means of the religion. The changes in the Buddhized education curriculum show that teaching focuses have shifted from merely passing on Buddhist doctrine to addressing contemporary social problems, as elements of individual and social problems have been incorporated into the curriculum. Today, Buddhized education involves education for the heart, environmental protection and values education. Buddhized education treats Buddhism not as ordinary knowledge, but as a philosophy of life that is applicable, inspirational and helpful in dealing with challenges arising from religious and social problems, including the meaning of life, identity, sex and marriage, suffering and afterlife. The HKBA expects Buddhized education to play a positive role in cultivating positive values and good morality in students.

The teaching of Buddhist doctrines is still an important element of Buddhized education. The challenges of teaching arise from the question of how to apply abstract Buddhist theories to daily life. The cultivation of morality and values is based on theory alone and, more importantly, the assimilation and internalization of the knowledge in students' minds. Changes in teaching methods are therefore necessary. 'Daily life application' and 'moral reflection' are means of inquiry learning that help students think about religious and moral questions, critically reflect on their life experiences, build understanding of and confidence about their own religious beliefs and cultivate ideal morality and character. Experiential learning is also important, as it helps to transform theory into a part of life with practice and experience. This teaching mode combines both the theoretical and the practical with religious experience. Teachers try to help students purify their spirits and release pressure through Buddhist doctrine using methods such as meditation and reflection on life, which are becoming increasingly diversified (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2011). Learning activities include activity-based learning, field trips and topics related to daily life such as reflection on news; extra-curricular activities such as seminars, Buddhist storytelling competitions, wall decorations, journal writing, visiting the elderly and exchanges in mainland China, conducting rational and logical analyses and discussions on current affairs with students; playing songs and music, chanting the name of Buddha and reading Buddhist sutras, meditation, movie viewing related to spirituality and discussions on Buddhist doctrines with students; field trips to cemeteries; and video clip or movie viewing on poverty to inspire students' compassion and teach them to cherish food.

Over the years, religious education in Buddhist schools has been hindered by a shortage of suitable teaching personnel and a lack of continuous professional development and support. Teachers who teach Buddhism in schools are often non-specialists. The teaching load is usually shared by two to three teachers. Many ordinary teachers who have little knowledge of Buddhism or who are non-Buddhist teach the course as moral education. There is no systematic training requirement to teach Buddhism.

Fortunately, in recent years, school-based programs and the HKBA's Buddhized Education programs have benefited from various kinds of support from the Quality Education Fund, charitable trusts and university centres such as the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong (established in 2002) and the Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education of the Education University of Hong Kong (established in 2006). This external support aids teacher professional development, curriculum development and research through various events and activities. Joint-school efforts in Buddhized education, including the website Bodhi360 and other initiatives, could also increase synergy and facilitate the sharing, interchange and dissemination of experiences and resources across schools and teachers. In addition, the Hong Kong Buddhist Ambassador (*Hongfa shizhe jihua*) program established in 1998 under the HKBA rewards college students who are Buddhists or who would like to study Buddhism. In the last 20 years, it has attracted many college students to study Buddhism. Some ambassadors also became school teachers after graduation and have helped promote the Dharma. Taken together, the measures above are conducive to building a community of religious education educators in Buddhist schools.

In a utilitarian society such as Hong Kong, the preaching of Buddhism cannot be detached from reality, and Buddhist sponsoring bodies constantly face various expectations that may be mutually exclusive. Amid fierce competition in society, it is significant to enhance students' competitiveness while instilling positive values and philosophies of life and nurturing their healthy mindsets to prepare them for future life and social challenges by means of Buddhized education (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2012, 12-13). However, it is not easy to strike a balance in achieving these various goals.

The biggest problem in implementing religious or value education is class time. The school timetable is tightly packed with major academic subjects, and it is difficult to accommodate other subjects. Therefore, religious and ethics subjects need to work with the major subjects through integration with them. The HKBA tried to merge the Buddhist course with the new junior secondary course 'Life and Society' so that Buddhist content can be incorporated into the formal curriculum. However, this attempt was unsuccessful because the teachers were resistant to further integration. This also reflects the problem of school timetables.

Furthermore, as religious schools are subsidized by the government, most students at religious schools are not followers of a particular religion, nor are the principals and teachers. Therefore, Buddhist schools must strive to enhance the religious atmosphere on campus to strengthen teachers' understanding of Buddhist doctrines and to raise students' motivation and interest in learning Buddhism. In addition, Buddhized life education is only one of the environmental factors that affect teenagers' growth. Parenting and family factors may have more significant impacts on students beyond of the scope of schools. Moreover, in recent years, the population of schoolchildren has been shrinking. Some schools run by Buddhist groups

have been closed or had classes reduced, which means that they have lost students and cannot impart a unified Buddhist education to the younger generation in Hong Kong.

It is thus important to determine how the HKBA and its associated schools can sustain their Buddhized education programs in the future. Specific concerns include the delivery of projects at the school and classroom levels and their reception by teachers and students. The effects of adopting innovation and the success of these projects also deserve extra attention.

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