### The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project and basic education curriculum reform in mainland China

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#### **Abstract**

Youth education is the key to national education, and the future of a country is tied with the holistic development of youth. In mainland China, the reform of the basic education curriculum is rooted in the notion of "Li De Shu Ren" (establishing virtues and cultivating talents). In Hong Kong, the P.A.T.H.S. Project aims to foster youths' psychosocial competencies and holistic development through curriculabased programs utilizing experiential learning pedagogies. This project has been tested in Hong Kong for years and has proved effective in facilitating the positive development of participants. Based on the success of the P.A.T.H.S. Project in Hong Kong, we have transplanted the project to form the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China. The purpose of this paper is to explore the consistency between the P.A.T.H.S. Project and basic education curriculum reform in mainland China. We argue that the P.A.T.H.S. Project in Hong Kong and mainland China complements the basic principles of basic education reform in mainland China which aims at promoting the holistic development of Chinese youths.

*Keywords:* Basic education curriculum reform in mainland China, P.A.T.H.S. Project, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project, positive youth development, China

#### Introduction

In his writing entitled "Youths' China", Liang Qichao (1) pointed out that "If the youth are wise, the country will be wise. If the youth are wealthy, the country will be wealthy. If the youth are strong, the country will be strong. If the youth are independent, the country will be independent. If the youth are free, the country will be free. If the youth progress, the country will progress." The destiny of a nation is tied with the comprehensive quality of its youths. Therefore, youth education is also the key to national education. The Report on the Implementation of the Nine-Year Compulsory Education Curriculum issued in 1997

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revealed that the existing basic curriculum is not in line with the requirement of quality education and scientific laws, suggesting that curriculum reform is urgent (2). In the modern context, quality education requires a culture of dialogue, collaboration, and inquiry, with open, democratic, and scientific content. Therefore, after a large number of investigations and empirical studies, the Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Pilot) (the "New Education Reform") was promulgated in 2001, marking the beginning of the era of curriculum reform in mainland China (3).

### The New Education Reform and moral education

Based on the past curriculum and textbook reforms, the New Education Reform combined the development of modern society, as well as other factors such as information technology (4). There are six specific objectives of basic curriculum reform as follows (3):

- Objective 1: "To change the curriculum's tendency of focusing too much on knowledge transmission and to emphasize the formation of a proactive learning attitude, so that students can learn and form good values while acquiring basic knowledge and skills."
- Objective 2: "To change the curriculum structure that over-emphasizes disciplines and has excessive subjects that lack integration; to arrange consistent course categories and class time ratio throughout the nine years; and to provide a balanced and comprehensive curriculum structure, catering to different regions and students with comprehensive courses."
- Objective 3: "To change the curriculum content that is too 'difficult, complex, fringe, outdated' and focuses too much on textbook knowledge; to relate the content to students' life and the development of modern society and technology; to attach more importance to students' learning interests and experience and include the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong learning."

- Objective 4: "To change the over-emphasis on receptive learning and rote learning in the curriculum implementation; to encourage students' active participation in exploration, inquiry, and practice; to cultivate students' ability to collect and process information, acquire new knowledge, analyze and solve problems, communicate and cooperate."
- Objective 5: "To change the over-emphasis on screening and selection in assessment; to use assessment to facilitate students' development and improve teachers' performance."
- Objective 6: "To address the problem of over-centralization of program management by applying a three-tier management model at the national, regional, and school levels, hence enhancing the adaptability of the curriculum to regions, schools, and students."

These six objectives have guided the basic curriculum system, structure, content adjustment, and principles of the reform and laid a foundation for the subsequent implementation of the curriculum reform. The objectives of the New Education Reform also show the orientation of "student-centered" and the educational philosophy of "all-round development," which are clarified in the latest Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) (5). The Outline states that "putting people first and implementing quality education are the strategic cores of education reform and development, catering to all students and facilitating their all-round development," "efforts should be made to improve students' sense of social responsibility to serve the country and the people, their innovative spirit to explore and their practical ability to solve problems," and "to strive to develop students' morality and capability in a holistic manner."

As the Chinese economic reform and the development of the socialist market economy continue, social values in China are changing rapidly. Youths are facing many problems, such as having vague values and becoming morally confused and lost. There are also mental health and adjustment problems in young people in China (6, 7). In such a social context, China must urgently help young

people establish positive values and develop a sound personality so that they can grow in the right direction. Therefore, the 18th National Congress Report regards "Li De Shu Ren" (establishing virtues and cultivating talents) as the fundamental task of education to cultivate socialist builders and successors who are morally, intellectually, physically, and aesthetically well-developed (8). Moral education is the prerequisite of such all-round talents. On the basis of the original education reform, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Curriculum Reform and Cultivating Talents through Moral Education in 2014, which stated the role of curriculum reform in talent cultivation and put forward specific requirements for cultivating talents through moral education (9), including:

- "... Clarify the key characters and abilities that students should possess to adapt to lifelong development and social development; and to highlight personal virtues, social care, and patriotism, self-development, teamwork, and innovative practices."
- "To enhance the ideological focus by integrating the core values of socialism, passing down the fine traditional Chinese culture, promoting the spirit of the rule of law, reflecting national characteristics, and educating students to aim high and establish a positive outlook on the world and life, and proper values."
- "To enhance the scientific focus by objectively reflecting the pattern of human exploration of nature and social development and ensuring that the curriculum content is rigorous and accurate."
- "To keep up with times by reflecting advanced educational ideas and concepts and updating teaching content timely in accordance with new changes in social development and technological progress. To tailor each subject for students at different development stages and link it to their life experience."
- "To enhance operability by further clarifying development objectives and teaching content, improving the academic quality requirements, and giving specific advice for teaching and assessment."

- "To enhance integrity by strengthening the effectiveness of vertical transition and horizontal coordination of academic sections and related disciplines."
- "To integrate education content of related disciplines, improving students' ability to analyze and solve problems comprehensively. To make full use of modern information technology to improve teaching methods, meeting students' individual needs in learning."

The Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Pilot) (3) and the Outline of the National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) (5) further developed the new education reform, while the 18th National Congress Report (8) and the Opinions on Curriculum Reform and Cultivating Talents through Moral Education (9) took moral education as the key to help youths grow more positively and healthily in the modern context. As adolescents have to tackle many challenges on their way to adulthood, some would even encounter mental, moral, and behavioral issues. However, adolescents are the "resources to be cultivated" instead of "problems to be solved." With such a belief, the P.A.T.H.S. Project was developed based on a "positive youth development" (PYD) perspective and aims to facilitate the holistic development of youths. This mission aligns with the fundamental goals of the aforesaid New Education Reform and moral education.

# The P.A.T.H.S. Project in Hong Kong and Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China

With a grant of HK\$400 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the support of five universities in Hong Kong, the P.A.T.H.S. Project was implemented in Hong Kong from 2005 to 2019. In addition to the school-based P.A.T.H.S. Project, we also implemented community-based programs. Hundreds of secondary schools have joined the project, benefiting over 200,000 students. The outstanding results have been recognized by various sectors, and the project's influence has also expanded

to other Asian communities beyond Hong Kong (such as Macau and Singapore) and even other corners of the world. With the funding from the Tin Ka Ping Foundation, the research team has extended the project to mainland China based on the successful experience in Hong Kong. After three years of pilot promotion in four middle schools in East China (2011-2014) and the preparatory period of the school year 2014–2015, the P.A.T.H.S. Project entered the full-implementation stage in the school year 2015-2016. Over 30 middle schools across China have joined the program and methodically implemented the P.A.T.H.S. Curricula.

The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project aims to facilitate the holistic and healthy development of adolescents through comprehensive, school-based classroom training activities. The P.A.T.H.S. Curricula are designed to integrate the 15 PYD constructs, including healthy connections with adults and good friends, resilience, sociability, emotional control and expression, cognitive ability, ability to take actions, ability to distinguish right from wrong,

self-determination, spiritual quality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, ability to establish goals and choices, positive behavior approval, participation in prosocial activities, and pro-social norms (10). The curricula consist of 76 units in junior middle school years, all of which are adapted versions of the P.A.T.H.S. Project Tier 1 Program in Hong Kong. At the same time, in order to meet the learning and growth needs of senior secondary school students in mainland China, the research team has specially designed and compiled senior secondary P.A.T.H.S. curricula according to the development characteristics of senior secondary students, including 60 units for the three years.

Talent cultivation is the fundamental strategy of national development. In the context of economic globalization, it is a global consensus that the talents of the new generation should have excellent characters and knowledge. The New Education Reform, moral education and the P.A.T.H.S. Project have much in common in both theory and practice, and they closely connect to one another.

Table 1. Consistency of the P.A.T.H.S. Project and the objectives of the "New Education Reform"

	Objectives of the "New Education Reform"	Theoretical Structure and Setting of the P.A.T.H.S. Project
Project Focuses	Actively learning basic knowledge and basic skills, forming positive values	Cultivating and recognizing the capability of adolescents, strengthening their connections with others, helping them establish healthy beliefs and clear standards, and facilitating their holistic development
Project Structure	Balance, comprehensiveness, and selectivity of the curriculum structure	Teaching units of different grades have different focuses, developing the comprehensive capability of adolescents in a sequential way
Project Content	Connecting to students' life and modern social development, and focusing on their interest and experience	The teaching tool kit is developed based on 15 positive youth development constructs, following the nature of youth development, and relating to students' life and social development
Teaching Objectives	Developing students' ability to process information, acquire new knowledge, analyses and solve problems, and communicate and collaborate	Utilizing modern information technology, experiential teaching, and role-playing to guide students to conduct autonomous and cooperative learning, developing their ability to discover, analyze and solve problems
Assessment	Changing the assessment method to facilitate students' development	Adopting comprehensive assessment instead of using academic results as the only standard
Management	Changing the program management method to improve adaptability	Adjusting and combining teaching contents according to the needs of different schools and students

## Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project and the New Education Reform in mainland China

The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project is consistent with the six specific objectives of the New Education Reform in many aspects (see table 1), such as theoretical structure and implementation design. The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. curricula aim at facilitating the whole-person development of adolescents. In terms of curriculum structure, the P.A.T.H.S. curricula are based on the 15 PYD constructs mentioned above. Teaching units of different grades have different focuses, so as to gradually cultivate adolescents' abilities in various aspects. In terms of course content, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. curricula align with the developmental stages of youth development and are closely related to the actual needs of students and social development. The teaching materials are based on life education and serve a higher purpose than mere living. In terms of teaching objectives, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project puts forward 15 ability development objectives corresponding to the constructs. Unlike the traditional exam-oriented education model, the P.A.T.H.S. Project emphasizes educational enjoyment. It combines multimedia with experiential teaching and encourages students to study independently and as a team. In terms of assessment, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project adheres to the principle of comprehensive evaluation and does not screen students based on their academic performance. Assessment is actually a feedback tool to facilitate students' progress and teachers' teaching practice. In terms of program management, the P.A.T.H.S. Project emphasizes "localization." Schools can choose which units to cover based on their conditions and students' features and integrate the P.A.T.H.S. curricula with their own school moral education, mental health programs, class meetings, or even academic subjects in order to maximize the positive impacts of the P.A.T.H.S. Project.

Student-centeredness in the education philosophy as the common vision

Students should adapt to education, and education should adapt to knowledge (11). The traditional

teaching model employs old, outdated, and monotonous means in the classroom, resulting in receptive and rote learning. Assessment of the traditional teaching model over-emphasizes academic achievement and corresponds to the screening function. Thus, students suffer from memorizing textbooks and practicing exam questions. To overturn the traditional beliefs and inertial thinking on education, the New Educational Reform focuses on the growth and development of every individual in every school and attends to students' interests, encouraging them to take the initiative to learn rather than being spoon-fed passively. "To be student-centered" is the main direction of the New Education Reform, Schools shall become living organizations; classrooms shall be a platform for teacher-student dialogue and practice; teachers shall be their students' partners on the journey to adulthood. Accordingly, the New Education Reform also establishes the "studentcentered" philosophy: education must adapt to the needs of students, and students should be cultured individuals who can adapt to the uncertain changes and needs of society.

Regarding the concept of "to be studentcentered," the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project and the New Education Reform share common objectives. First of all, the setting of the P.A.T.H.S. Curricula units follows the natural development pattern of adolescents, and the design of the program content accords with the needs of their growth. As stated above, the P.A.T.H.S. Project aims to help adolescents develop 15 abilities as "developmental assets", including cognitive, psychological, spiritual, and social interaction skills. Adolescents who possess these assets can better adapt to changes in personal development, peer relationship, school life, family relationship, community engagement, and many other aspects, and overcome difficulties and challenges to grow into all-round talents that society needs. In addition, the senior secondary school curricula specifically incorporate these 15 skills into eight areas of student development, including school learning, stress management, career planning, civic responsibility, family connection, friendship and romance, use of the Internet, and positive growth, addressing the environmental challenges and growing needs of senior secondary school students.

Secondly, Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project embraces "experiential teaching and learning," which represents the student-centered teaching method. Experiential learning attaches great importance to students' independent learning. It delivers them a deep understanding of the learned knowledge and the purpose of applying it via a variety of classroom activities and personal reflection. The P.A.T.H.S. Project emphasizes the teachers' role as a guide rather than a knowledge-transmitter. At the same time, a P.A.T.H.S. lesson should be collaborative and interactive (including teacher-student and studentstudent interactions). Therefore, in a P.A.T.H.S. lesson, knowledge acquisition is achieved through active and collaborative learning. Thus, the teaching philosophy of the P.A.T.H.S. Project matches the idea of the New Education Reform, which endorses that "classrooms shall be a platform for teacher-student dialogue and practice; teachers shall be their students' partners on the journey to adulthood."

### Matching education objectives: Establishing moral standards, serving others and contributing to society

Education is a social activity that cultivates people and is the fundamental way to facilitate whole-person development. There are two layers of education, namely teaching and cultivating: "teaching" means passing on knowledge and skills to students, focusing on training them to become "talents"; "cultivating" means nurturing students' moral virtues and characters, focusing on instructing them to become "humans" (12). From ancient times, China has attached great importance to "moral education" and "cultivation of talents." The Chinese saying, "Li De Shu Ren," means establishing virtues and cultivating talents with decency (13). The idea of "Li De" (establishing virtues) originates from Duke Xiang's Twenty-Fourth Year, Zuo Zhuan: "I have heard that the highest meaning of it is when there is established [an example of] virtue; the second, when there is established [an example of] successful service; and the third, when there is established [an example of wise] speech. When these examples

are not forgotten with the length of time, this is what is meant by the saying — They do not decay." "Establishing virtues" is considered of utmost importance. The idea of "Shu Ren" (cultivating talents) comes from Quan Xiu, Guanzi: "When planning for a year, there is nothing better than growing grains; when planning for a decade, there is nothing better than planting trees; when planning for a lifetime, there is nothing better than cultivating talents." "De" (virtue) refers to the behavioral norm of a certain socio-economic environment, the socialist morality based on traditional Chinese virtues, and the ethical system that serves people and obeys collectivism. Obviously, "Li De Shu Ren" emphasizes more than personal development and extends to a moral approach to serving others and contributing to society through personal development.

In terms of cultivating talents and decency, the P.A.T.H.S. Project shares the same objectives of the basic education reform. In particular, the P.A.T.H.S. Project is closely linked with the "7C" model that expects to strengthen the friendly "connection" between adolescents and healthy adults; improving their "competence" in social and emotional management, cognition, ability to take action, and spiritual quality; helping them to establish a clear and positive "character," facilitating their development in self-determination, self-efficacy, resilience and "confidence" in the future; and teaching them to be "caring" and show "compassion" to others, and to make a "contribution" to society. Essentially, the P.A.T.H.S. Project and the idea of "Li De Shu Ren" share many similarities (see Table 2). In particular, we argue that "establishing virtues" is the premise of "cultivating talents." The said "virtues" emphasize the communication connections among people and are highly related to social ability, emotion management, cognitive ability, ability to take action, and ability to tell right from wrong. The goal of "establishing virtues" is to cultivate healthy, all-around, and confident talents for the future. "Serving others" and "contributing to society" also match the ideas of "caring," "compassion" and "contribution" in the 7C model.

"Li De Shu Ren"	The P.A.T.H.S. Conceptual Model (7C Model)	
Establishing virtues and cultivating talents	Connection; Competence; Character; Confidence	
Serving others	Caring; Compassion	
Contributing to society	Contribution	

Table 2. "Li De Shu Ren" (establishing virtues and cultivating talents) and the P.A.T.H.S. conceptual model

### Achieving moral education through curriculabased classroom education

Classroom teaching is an essential means of moral education, and along with theoretical education methods, can deliver knowledge of ideology, politics, morality, and more. Only when we know what "virtue" is and what kind of "virtue" society needs, can we "establish virtue" and put it into practice. The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project focuses on developing students' "moral concepts" and the ability to tell right from wrong (moral competence and spirituality). In the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. courses, students are regarded as creative and unique individuals instead of containers that passively receive information. In particular, the P.A.T.H.S. Project brings moral-related concepts and different conduct norms into specific scenarios (such as school and workplace), helps students to discuss and think about the factors that can affect the "moral concepts" and the negative impact caused by immoral thoughts and behaviors, and further reflects on their own beliefs and conducts. In class, students can freely express their opinions and exchange constructive ideas with teachers through different activities. Such exploration and reflection enable students to master moral concepts through active learning and encourage them to cultivate good characters and put them into action. The positive influence of the P.A.T.H.S. Project on cultivating students' "moral concepts" has been fully verified and supported in the evaluation of the project's effectiveness (14-18).

The focus of talent training lies in "deepening education and teaching reform, innovating education and teaching methods, paying attention to integrating learning and reflection, aligning knowledge and actions, and teaching students according to their aptitude" (5). "Integrating learning and reflection" means cultivating adolescent students' ability to make

ideological and moral choices, cognitive ability, practical ability, and self-construction ability. "Learning in reflection" is one of the main features of Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project. "Aligning knowledge and actions" means guiding students to combine theory with practice, and apply the combination to their own lives, learning it through experience. This is also a focus of Tin ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project. "Teaching students according to their aptitudes" means paying attention to students' personalities and developing their advantageous potential based on their overall generality (19). The design of Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project itself is based on the natural development pattern of adolescents. In addition, the implementation of the P.A.T.H.S. Project is highly flexible. Schools and teachers can teach selected units that best meet students' needs according to the specific conditions of schools and students. They can also adjust the materials to be used in discussions, such as cases and stories. Therefore, the P.A.T.H.S. Project is an ideal means to achieve the goal of "cultivating talents through moral education". At the same time, the P.A.T.H.S. Project encourages teachers to further consolidate teaching effects through extended activities, such as after-school activities, community services, etc., helping students apply learned knowledge to their daily study and life.

One condition to foster classroom learning is to train teachers who are passionate about student holistic development, adopt the philosophies of the Project P.A.T.H.S., and utilize experiential learning pedagogies to nurture students, particularly in their ability to differentiate right from wrong. For example, through role-play, students can experience the feelings of being cheated; therefore, they learn the importance of honesty. Through group reflections, students learn about the importance of doing the right things in public places, such as not talking loudly. Through debates, students can understand the two

sides of different ethical issues and understand the problems of engaging in unethical issues. Therefore, we spent the whole academic year of 2014-15 training teachers before the full implementation phase. It is also the reason why we conducted evaluation studies of the training programs to ensure that the potential program implementers could be properly trained (20, 21).

## Learning from the experience of the P.A.T.H.S. Project in Hong Kong and Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project in mainland China

The New Education Reform has been implemented for over a decade and played an important role in the development of basic education in mainland China. However, the implementation has also encountered many problems (22, 23). The Ministry of Education surveyed teachers and students in the experimental zones of the National Curriculum Reform. The findings showed that the New Education Reform had achieved a certain level of success, specifically in improving teachers' mindset, students' learning behaviors, schools' assessment methods, and teaching cooperation, etc. (2). Problems mainly lie in regional differences and a lack of supportive resources, qualified teachers and training, etc. (24-26). In particular, the implementation of the New Education Reform faces severe challenges in rural areas. As such, we are now collaborating with colleagues at Southwestern University of Finance and Economics to develop a rural version of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Curricula.

As a well-developed and effective education program, the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project can provide valuable experience for those practicing the New Education Reform. Firstly, the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project includes a comprehensive and systematic teacher training program (with online training) that helps teachers learn the key points of different units and teaching skills for better implementation. Also, the P.A.T.H.S. Project provides a sharing network to facilitate communication and mutual assistance of teachers from all over the country. Teachers can obtain course resources from the platform while learning from and helping one another. The New Education Reform can make

use of these experiences to ease the stress of insufficient resources and qualified teachers in some regions. Moreover, the teaching materials of the P.A.T.H.S. Project have been revamped and updated many times to secure timeliness and practicality.

In terms of teaching practice, the P.A.T.H.S. Project employs modern information technology to encourage and guide students to collect, analyze, process and make use of relevant data, develop their abilities to inquire voluntarily, think independently, and work as a team. The project also adopts experiential teaching to stimulate students' interests and lift the classroom atmosphere by incorporating entertainment into teaching. At the same time, the P.A.T.H.S. Project also focuses on developing students' practical ability by giving them space to act of their own will. The actual practice of classroom teaching under the New Education Reform can benefit from these experiences in implementing the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project.

Finally, the systematic and comprehensive assessment with multiple evaluation strategies is one of the keys of the P.A.T.H.S. Project. The assessment aims to learn about the program's effectiveness and the subjective feelings of students and teachers on the implementation, providing a reference for further improvement. Actually, we used different evaluation methods in the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project. In the early phase involving four schools in East China, we used a quasi-experimental design to examine changes in the program participants. Results revealed that compared with the control students, students in the experimental schools showed better positive youth development attributes after joining the project (27). In another objective outcome evaluation study based on a quasi-experimental design, we also found that students joining Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project displayed better outcomes relative to the students in the control group (28). Apart from findings based on quasi-experimental studies, we also collected feedback from students and teachers on their perceptions of the program. For example, based on a large sample of program participants, we found that students generally possessed positive perceptions of the program, teachers, and benefits. Most important of all, students felt that the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project could help them develop in a holistic manner (29). Finally, qualitative findings also underscored the value of the project. Based on an analysis of 859 diaries written by the students, the findings support the claim that the program is able to promote the individual, social, family, and community well-being of students (30).

Obviously, the evaluation initiatives surrounding the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project strongly suggest that it is also necessary to conduct a systematic assessment of the New Education Evaluation to review and improve different policies and measures. However, this is not yet a popular topic among scholars or researchers. Thus, the assessment experience of the Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project can be a valuable reference for the evaluation practice of the New Education Reform.

#### Conclusion

To sum up, the P.A.T.H.S. Project is highly connected to the New Education Reform and moral education at the theoretical level. They share many similarities in philosophical structure and implementation design, giving a favorable premise for a better combination of the two. On the practical level, the implementation approach of the P.A.T.H.S. Project also offers great help to solve the existing problems of the New Education Reform and moral education and to facilitate integration.

### Acknowledgments

The Tin Ka Ping P.A.T.H.S. Project and the preparation for this article are financially supported by the Tin Ka Ping Foundation. An earlier Chinese version of this paper was published in *Review on Child, Youth and Family Social Work, 5*, 21-32 [in Chinese].

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Submitted: April 04, 2022. Revised: April 12, 2022. Accepted: April 16, 2022.