

Promoting all-round education for girls: a history of Heep Yunn School, Hong Kong

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Patricia Chiu's *Promoting All-Round Education for Girls* presents the institutional history of a long-standing girls' school – Heep Yunn (meaning “united in grace”) – in Hong Kong across the timespan from the 1880s to 2016. Founded in 1936 through the amalgamation of two Anglican girls' schools, namely, Fairlea (founded by the Female Education Society in 1886) and the Victoria Home and Orphanage (founded by the Church Missionary Society in 1887), Heep Yunn as a Christian school underwent dramatic changes in its curriculum, medium of instruction, and admission through the past century. These changes, Chiu points out, were shaped by the social conditions, economy transitions, and political climate both in Hong Kong and China, as they had bearings on the shifting gender roles. While the focus of the book was on institutional practices – particularly the policies enacted under different principals, Chiu tied these schooling practices to a few important themes in girls' education in Hong Kong. These included: the shift of girls' schooling as run predominantly by Victorian missionary endeavors to local professional efforts; “the construction of cultural and religious ideals of girlhood through curriculum and activities; language and social mobility in a colonial context; and the transnational ideas of leisure and cultural practices as exhibited through all-round education across distinctive contexts and periods” (p. 11). What is noteworthy is that Chiu examined these themes against the broader landscape of girls' education as it moved through European missionary work in the 19th century to the pre-war modernization process, to the post-war introduction of mass education and the search for an international outlook in the 21st century.

To illustrate how the notion of “all-round” education at Heep Yunn took on different meanings across different historical periods, Chiu offered six chronologically structured chapters. Chapter 1 begins with the arrival of the founder of Fairlea – Miss Margaret Johnstone – and ends with the appointment of Mrs. Cheung Chinn Yee Ching (1936–1958) as the first Chinese principal and the establishment of Heep Yunn School as a “much-anticipated response to the rising demand for quality Chinese education for girls in Hong Kong” (p. 37). Chapter 2 documents the building of Heep Yunn and the struggles it encountered in merging the distinct cohorts of Fairlea and Victoria Home and Orphanage before the Japanese occupation. Chapter 3 discusses the changes in curriculum, school buildings, and career prospects for girls in the postwar reconstruction period. Chapter 4 traces the expansion of Heep Yunn with regard to facilities, admission, and buildings under the second principal, Mrs. Cheung Lo Pok Hing (1958–1978). Religious education, character training, and the extension of the English stream were among the priorities of the school in this period. Chapter 5 considers the transition of Heep Yunn from a Chinese-medium school to an English-medium school under the third principal, Mrs. Minnie Lai (1978–2002). This change from Chinese to English as the primary language both in classroom instruction and daily communication is



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examined against social and cultural tensions underlying the contested issues of “medium of instruction” in the history of Hong Kong education. The last chapter, Chapter 6, examines the reforms of Heep Yunn in a post-colonial context as it switched from a grant school to a Direct Subsidy School so as to retain a larger degree of autonomy.

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In sum, this book is a welcome contribution to the history of educational policies and practices as they related to girls’ education in Hong Kong. The detailed discussions on school architecture, collaborations between the Grant Council and the state in shaping girls’ schooling, and the reminiscences of former teachers and students are particularly valuable to readers in the fields of mission and women’s education. As a focused study on the history of one Christian girls’ school, this book shows the entwined enterprises of missionary endeavors and colonial expansions, but more importantly, it illuminates how these entangled histories shaped the school life of ordinary Chinese girls. The reforms of Heep Yunn in the post-colonial context also offer an interesting read on the new challenges presented to former mission girls’ schools as Hong Kong moved into a new era.

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