

# RELIGION-SCIENCE DIALOGUE AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

## An Inter-Religious Perspective

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**T**HIS ESSAY attempts to take the secondary education of Hong Kong as an example to illustrate how the results of religion-science dialogue may benefit the enhancement of religious education.

To begin with, there are two clarifications to be made concerning the title of this essay. First, this essay discusses “Secondary Education” rather than “Religious Education.” In the education system of Hong Kong, religious education is optional. Usually only schools with certain religious background will offer religious education to students. However, religion is one of the options for projects in “Liberal Studies” which is one of the compulsory core subjects of the secondary school curriculum. This essay will cover both “Liberal Studies” and “Ethics and Religious Studies”, which are offered at the senior secondary level. In other words, this essay aims to suggest that the dialogue between religion and science will benefit not only “Ethics and Religious Studies”, but also “Liberal Studies” in the secondary education in Hong Kong.

Second, the word “inter-religious” in the sub-title indicates that this essay advocates for an “inter-religious” approach to both the religion-science dialogue as well as education. Regarding education, it will suggest that in a religiously pluralistic context such as Hong Kong and Japan, the most appropriate model of religious education is “inter-religious education,” rather than “mono-religious education” or “multi-religious education.” Regarding the religion-science dialogue, it will argue that the majority, if not most, of the academic books and articles published “internationally”, especially those published in English, are

dominated by the discussion about Christianity or the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition. The indigenous “Asian” religions, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shintoism, are rarely mentioned. However, in order to make more substantial contributions to the religious education in a religiously pluralistic context, the religion-science dialogue should adopt an inter-religious perspective and include more contents from various religions.

This essay consists of two main parts. The first part starts with a sketch of the three models of religious education briefly mentioned above. Based on an analysis of the “curriculum guide” for “Ethics and Religious Studies” and a handbook produced by the Education Bureau, this essay attempts to show that the curriculum belongs basically to the model of inter-religious education, emphasizes the ethical issues, and welcomes the contributions from religion-science dialogue, especially those involving the religious traditions flourishing in Hong Kong. The second part of this essay includes a review of the curriculum of “Liberal Studies” and a textbook of religion-science relationship co-authored by three Chinese Christian scholars in Hong Kong. It will show that the textbook assumes an inter-religious approach to religion-science dialogue and attempts to make the dialogue relevant to not only “Ethics and Religious Studies” but also “Liberal Studies” in the secondary education in Hong Kong.

## Inter-Religious Education

In 2007, I was invited to give a lecture on religious education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at a symposium organized by the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government and the Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education, Hong Kong Institute of Education. Since I am not an expert in Religious Education, in order to find out the most important issues for religious education in 21<sup>st</sup> century, I asked a research assistant to conduct a simple database survey on the articles published since 2000 in the international journals related to religious education.<sup>1</sup> It was found that other than the topics of media education, spiritual development, religion-science relation, and religious plurality, there are some key terms, including dialogue, identity and participation, appearing quite often in the relevant publications.<sup>2</sup> I thus decided to fix the title of my lecture as “Dialogue, Identity, and Participation: Religious Education of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

1. The journals include: *Christian Higher Education*, *Religious Education*, *British Journal of Religious Education*, *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, and *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion and Education*, *Christian Education Journal*.

2. See: H. -G. Heimbrock, C. Th. Scheilke and P. Schreiner (eds.), *Towards Religious Competence: Diversity as a Challenge for Education in Europe* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001); Carl Sterns, *Interreligious Learning: The Problem of Interreligious Dialogue in Primary Education* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Chris A. M. Hermans, *Participatory Learning: Religious Education in a Globalizing Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2003);

Based on a review of the development of religious education in the last few decades or so, I argued in the lecture that religious education underwent several important changes in terms of approaches. In the past, the most prominent model of religions education was mono-religious education, focusing on how to help the students to acquire the doctrine, history, or morality related to one particular religion only. Since the 1970s, due to the recognition of the increasingly pluralistic society, some scholars proposed a multi-religious education to replace the mono-religious education model. But since the 1990s, there was an emerging model of religious education called inter-religious education.<sup>3</sup>

The major differences among these three models can be briefly sketched below:

- ⊙ Mono-religious education aims at helping the students to participate in a particular religious tradition. It may study other religions, but only through the perspective of that particular religion.
- ⊙ Multi-religious education tends to take a neutral and detached position, and aims at helping the students to acquire some “objective” knowledge about various religions, and it does not assume or require that the students will participate in one religious tradition or many.
- ⊙ Inter-religious education tends to take religious education as a platform for inter-dialogue. It aims to help the students, through participating in the relevant religious practice and dialogue, to understand different religions, and to identify with them in various degrees and/or different ways. It allows the students to develop their own religious identities, and cultivates their openness to the religious traditions of other people.<sup>4</sup>

The major argument of my lecture is that from the perspective of globalization of culture, the most appropriate model for the religious education in Hong Kong in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is inter-religious education. Though the lecture was supposed to address the religious education in the secondary schools of Hong Kong, it is my belief that the inter-religious education model suits also the teaching of Religious Studies in the secular universities in China.<sup>5</sup>

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Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Falmer, 2004); Judith A. Berling, *Understanding other World Religions: A Guide for Interreligious Education* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004); D. Pollefeyt (ed.), *Interreligious Learning* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

3. The emphasis or basic character of inter-religious education is quite similar to inter-cultural education, excepting that the latter takes religion as one of the elements of culture. See: Eleanor Nesbitt, *Intercultural Education: Ethnographic and Religious Approaches* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

4. See further: Carl Sterns, *Interreligious Learning*, 47–74; Chris A. M. Hermans, *Participatory Learning*, 336–49; D. Pollefeyt (ed.), *Interreligious Learning*.

5. See Lai Pinchao 賴品超 (= Pan-chiu Lai), “Zong jiao yan jiu dui ren wen jiao yu de yi yi” 宗教研究對人文教育的意義 [Significance of religious studies for humanistic education], in: Zhuo Xinping 卓新平 (ed.), *Zong jiao yu Dang dai Zhongguo she hui* 宗教與當代中國社會 [Religion and society in contemporary China] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press [China] 社會科學文獻出版社, 2013), 211–25.

## Religious Education in Hong Kong

When preparing my lecture, I had not studied the relevant documents prepared by the government. But I found out later that the curriculum guide for “Ethics and Religious Studies” prepared by the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government was quite compatible with the model of inter-religious education.<sup>6</sup>

In the secondary school education of Hong Kong, what is conventionally called “Religious Education” is named “Ethics and Religious Studies” (ERS), which is one of the key learning areas of the “Personal, Social and Humanities Education” of the new senior secondary school curriculum implemented in 2009. According to the “curriculum and assessment guide” of ERS provided by the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government, it is stated:

ERS is one of the electives in the senior secondary curriculum. It is built on the *Religious Studies (Christianity) Curriculum for Secondary 4–5* (implemented in 1998), *Buddhist Studies* (HKCE Examination Syllabus) and the *Advanced Supplementary Level Ethics and Religious Studies Curriculum* (implemented in 2001). It also follows the general direction set out in the *Personal, Social and Humanities Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1–Secondary 3)* (CDC, 2002) and extends the prior knowledge, skills and values and attitudes students developed through the Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) curriculum in basic education.<sup>7</sup>

According to this introduction, the curriculum was genealogically or historically evolved from the religious education provided by the secondary schools with either Christian or Buddhist background, and in terms of contents or curriculum. This sort of religious education is focused on the religious tradition associated with the school concern. In other words, this sort of religious education belongs primarily to the model of mono-religious education. The 2001 curriculum had already attempted to break away from this model, and combined Ethics with Religious Studies, which might include objective study of various religions rather than being restricted to one particular religion. The proposed new curriculum aims to address more explicitly the pluralistic context of Hong Kong and focuses more on the spiritual, moral and personal development of the

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6. An earlier draft of the curriculum guide indicates similar direction. See: [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/ERS\\_C&A%20Guide\\_updated\\_e\\_20140212.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/ERS_C&A%20Guide_updated_e_20140212.pdf).

7. The document is available on-line: [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/nss-curriculum/ethics-and-religious-studies/ers\\_e.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/nss-curriculum/ethics-and-religious-studies/ers_e.pdf).

students, rather than their academic knowledge of a particular religion or many. The document reads,

As an elective PSHE subject in the three-year senior secondary curriculum, ERS encourages students to explore questions of meaning, value and purpose in life. It seeks to help students develop insights, a capacity for moral and spiritual life and personal autonomy. These qualities make life meaningful individually and in the social, cultural and political contexts of pluralistic Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on the ethical and/or moral aspect of religious education is highlighted by the joining of Religious Studies with Ethics in the curriculum.

Normative Ethics and Personal and Social Issues are compulsory components of the curriculum. The study of ethics lays the foundation of values formation and judgement, while the discussion on current and controversial issues prepares students to face related challenges and struggles in the future, and contributes to their social, moral and spiritual development. Choices are provided in the elective parts on “Religious Traditions” and “Faiths in Action”. Experiential learning activities are organized so that students have practical experience of how the teachings of religious traditions are manifested in daily life.<sup>9</sup>

To summarize, the new curriculum of religious education has two basic and related tendencies or characteristics. First, it moves from the model of mono-religious education to the model of inter-religious education. Second, it emphasizes the connection between religions and ethics.

These two tendencies are clearly shown in the “Rationales” and “Curriculum Aims” articulated in the curriculum guide. Regarding the “Rationale”, the document reads:

The ERS curriculum attempts to make a major contribution to the social, moral and spiritual development of students. Young people are frequently challenged by many religious and moral issues such as the origin and purpose of life, identity, sex and marriage, suffering, and life after death. This curriculum, comprising “Religious Traditions”, “Ethics” and “Faiths in Action”, helps students respond to these issues through a process of enquiry. Students are expected to reflect critically upon their own experience, develop confidence in their religious understanding, and develop an ability to articulate their own beliefs.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

This curriculum enables students to examine ways in which religious and moral questions have been formulated and reflected upon throughout history and across the globe. Students are encouraged to articulate their own beliefs and engage in dialogue with others. Students study and apply what they have learnt from religious traditions to ethical issues confronting them in



their daily lives, and reflect upon their faiths in action when they are engaged in learning activities in social services and religious practices.

The curriculum has a particularly important contribution in helping students appreciate diversity in pluralistic Hong Kong. The richness in the religious traditions of our society provides many opportunities for the students to compare different religions and study their significance.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning the “Curriculum Aims,” it reads:

The aims of the ERS curriculum are to enable students to:

1. acquire knowledge of the religion they study and of other major religions in Hong Kong;
2. make rational and informed judgements about religious and moral issues;
3. enhance their spiritual, moral, and social development; and
4. develop a positive attitude towards people and respect for their beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

Based on description of the curriculum, one may find that the religion-science dialogue, especially those with an inter-religious perspective, can be very relevant and will be welcome. This can be seen in a book published by the “Personal, Social and Humanities Education Section” of the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government for the purpose of providing useful references to

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

the relevant teachers.<sup>12</sup> The book includes my lecture concerning inter-religious education presented at the symposium mentioned before as the first and leading chapter,<sup>13</sup> and 9 other chapters derived from the other lectures presented at the same symposium. It is interesting to note that Chapters 2 to 4 address the issues concerning life, living and death; Chapters 5 to 7 concern ecological ethics/environmental protection and climate change; and, Chapters 8 to 10 relate to family and marriage. Furthermore, some of the chapters approach their respective issues from religious perspectives, including Buddhist, Daoist, Protestant and Catholic, but some other chapters are mainly contributions from the relevant scientific perspectives, including medical science and meteorology. The involvement of the scientific perspectives in religious education may look odd at first glance, but it is entirely justifiable because the stated rationale and aims of the curriculum include encouraging students to “explore questions of meaning, value and purpose in life” and enabling students to “make rational and informed judgements about religious and moral issues.”

Admittedly, the book itself does not show concretely the interactions among the religious perspectives or the dialogue between science and religion. It is because the contributors presented their lectures and wrote their essays primarily from their own religious perspectives or scientific perspectives without any significant cross-reference or dialogue. However, some of the features of the book, including the inter-religious approach adopted, emphasis on ethics, and the involvement of the scientific perspectives, do not only affirm the relevance or potential contributions of the results of religion-science dialogue, but also give us some clues about the ways how the religion-science dialogue may contribute to the practice and development of religious education in Hong Kong. First, the religion-science dialogue may better adopt an inter-religious approach. Second, among the issues for the dialogue between religion and science, those directly related to ethical issues may have a higher chance to contribute in a more direct way to religious education.

12. Education Bureau 教育局 and Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education, Hong Kong Institute of Education 香港教育學院宗教教育與心靈教育中心 (eds.), *Tan jiu zong jiao tao zao xin ling* 探究宗教陶造心靈 [Inquiring religion, shaping spirituality] (Hong Kong: Education Bureau, 2008).

13. Lai Pinchao 賴品超, “Dui hua, ren tong, can yu: 21 shi ji de zong jiao jiao yu” 對話·認同·參與：二十一世紀的宗教教育 [Dialogue, identity, and participation: Religious education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century], in: *Inquiring Religion, Shaping Spirituality*, 4–19; reprinted in: Lai Pinchao 賴品超, *Duo yuan, fen qi yu ren tong: shen xue yu wen hua de tan suo* “多元、分歧與認同：神學與文化的探索 [Plurality, diversity and identity: Explorations of theology and culture] (Xin Bei, Taiwan: Graduate School of Religion, Chung Yuan Christian University 中原大學宗教研究所 / Taiwan Christian Literature Council 臺灣基督教文藝出版社, 2011).



## Religion-Science Dialogue and Religious Education

Given these two clues, one may find that many of the existing textbooks concerning the dialogue between religion and science translated from English into Chinese may not be entirely adequate. Many of these textbooks emphasize more the intellectual or theoretical rather than the ethical issues. But the most glaring limitation remains that most of these introductory textbooks are mainly about “Monotheism and science” or even “Christianity and Science” rather than “Religions and Science.”<sup>14</sup> The omission or neglect of non-Christian or non-Abrahamic religions might have partially due to the interests of the authors as well as the intended readers, but it might also due to the historical fact that Christianity’s engagements with modern sciences were more comprehensive and intensive than those of other religions. Anyway, if one aims to make the religion-science dialogue more relevant and beneficial to the development of religious education in East Asia, including Hong Kong, one has to incorporate more materials from the dialogue between sciences and Asian religions.

As a scholar interested primarily in inter-religious dialogue, especially Buddhist-Christian dialogue and Christian-Confucian dialogue, I came across some inter-religious issues which are related to natural sciences, and found that sometimes Buddhism and/or Confucianism can be relevant to the dialogue between Christianity and science. My relevant studies, which involve Christianity, science and Buddhism/Confucianism, cover three different kinds of issues: conceptual,<sup>15</sup> historical,<sup>16</sup> and ethical. Regarding the ethical issues, I was previously more interested in ecological / environmental ethics, which is related to ecology and/ or environmental science.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, I became

14. For example: Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2000), which has two Chinese versions available: Yi’an Babo 伊安·巴伯, *Dang Ke xue yu dao zong jiao* 當科學遇到宗教, translated by Zhang Ming Yi 章明儀 (Taipei: Business Weekly Publications 商周出版社, 2001); Yi’an Babo 伊安·巴伯, *Dang Ke xue yu dao zong jiao* 當科學遇到宗教, translated by Su Xiangui 蘇賢貴 (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company 三聯書店, 2004); also: Alister E. McGrath, *Science & Religion: an introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), which is translated as: Maigefu 麥格夫, *Ke xue yu zong jiao yin lun* 科學與宗教引論, translated by Wang Yi 王毅 (Hong Kong: Logos Publishers 基道出版社, 2006).

15. For example: Pan-chiu Lai, “Buddhist-Christian Complementarity in the Perspective of Quantum Physics,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 12.2 (2002): 148–64; Pan-chiu Lai, “Christian-Confucian Dialogue on Humanity: An Ecological Perspective,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14.2 (2004): 202–15.

16. For example: Pan-chiu Lai, “Buddhist-Christian Studies in Scientific Age: A Case Study of Burnett Hillman Streeter (1874–1937),” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 19.1 (2009): 34–49; Pan-chiu Lai and Tao Wang, “Buddhist-Christian Encounter in the Age of Science: A Case Study of Modern Chinese Buddhism,” *Ching Feng, n.s.* 10, No.1–2 (2010–2011): 45–66.

17. For example: Pan-chiu Lai, “Inter-religious dialogue on Environmental Ethics,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21.1 (2011): 5–19; Pan-chiu Lai, “Inter-religious Dialogue on Ecology: a View from China,” *Religions / Adyān* 7 (22 October 2012): 83–97, available on-line: <http://www.qscience.com/doi/abs/10.5339/rels.2012.environment.7>.



more interested in the science-religion dialogue on the ethical issues concerning altruism / origin of morality, including the evolutionary approaches to altruism, forgiveness, and patriotism.<sup>18</sup> Based on these studies, I believe that in comparison with Christianity, the traditional religions of East Asia are less involved in the development of and dialogue with modern sciences, but they may be more directly relevant to the ethical concerns or issues in East Asia.

A few years ago, I was invited by Dr. Lam Tsz-shun, Jason 林子淳 and Dr. So Yuen-tai 蘇遠泰 to co-author a textbook on religion and science.<sup>19</sup> As it is indicated in the preface, the book was written in response to not only the education reform, especially the introduction and development of “Liberal Studies” in the secondary education of Hong Kong, but also the inadequacy of the prevalent textbooks in the area of religion-science dialogue.<sup>20</sup>

The whole book consists of 9 chapters, divided into two main parts, with an introduction and a conclusion. The first part concerns history and method, including:

Chapter 1: The Method and Structure of Science and Religion

Chapter 2: Science and Religion in Pre-modern Cultures

Chapter 3: Religion and the Rise of Science in Modern West

Chapter 4: Science and Religion in China

The second part concerns contemporary issues, including:

Chapter 5: Cosmology and Views of Creation

Chapter 6: Thinking of Models derived from New Physics

Chapter 7: Love-Hate Relationship between Evolution and Religion

Chapter 8: Human Future: From morality and humanity to genetic engineering

Chapter 9: Ecology, Religion, and Environmental Protection

18. For example: Lai Pinchao 賴品超 and Wang Tao 王濤, “Altruism in Christian, Confucian and Evolutionary Perspectives 從基督宗教、儒家及演化論看利他主義,” *Sino-Christian Studies* 漢語基督教學術論評 15 (2013.06): 183–214 (in Chinese with abstract in English); “Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Peace-Building: A Sino-Christian Perspective,” paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Peace and Reconciliation, organized by and held at York St John University, York, England, 22–4 June 2015; and, “Christianity and Patriotism: An Inter-disciplinary and Contextual Perspective,” paper presented at the International Symposium on Religion and Social Justice, co-organized by Institute of Christian Culture, Academy of European Cultures, Tongji University (China) / Centre for Religion in Society, York St John University (UK) / Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (Hong Kong), held in Shanghai, 29–31 October 2015. Both papers will be published in the respective conference volumes.

19. Lin Zichun 林子淳 (=Lam Tsz-shun, Jason), Lai Pinchao 賴品超, Su Yuantai 蘇遠泰 (=So Yuen-tai), *Shi di? shi you? : ke xue yu zong jiao de duo yuan guan xi* 是敵? 是友? 科學與宗教的多元關係 [Friends or Foes? The pluralistic relationship between science and religion] (Hong Kong: Ming-feng Press 明風出版, 2012).

20. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

The titles of these chapters look rather common. However, different from many other books concerning religion and science, this book deliberately adopts an inter-religious approach to the dialogue and incorporates many elements from Chinese culture and religions. For example, in Chapter 3, when talking about religion and the rise of modern science in the western world, it includes how the Catholic missionaries brought western science and technology to China during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17 centuries, and the Needham puzzle raised by Joseph Needham (1900–1995), the famous historian of science, concerning the question why modern science was developed from the western world instead of the Chinese and Islamic (or Arabic) science.<sup>21</sup> The question is further discussed in Chapter 4, which gives a more detailed account concerning the historical relationships between science and Chinese religions, including Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Mohism, and Christianity in China.<sup>22</sup> When discussing cosmology and creation, Chapter 5 includes not only the cosmology implied in the recent scientific developments and the Biblical/Christian understanding(s) of creation, but also the traditional Chinese religious understandings of cosmos and the genesis of the world. In chapter 6, when discussing new physics and its implications for our understanding of models, it mentions the comparable cases in Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most illustrative case is Chapter 8, which concerns the future of humanity.<sup>24</sup> The chapter starts with the movie *The 6<sup>th</sup> Day* (2000) which relates to the question of human cloning. In the movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger plays both the cloned as well as the original man named Adam. At the end of the movie, the cloned Adam raised the question whether a cloned man, who is supposed to be without a human soul, is a real human being. The original Adam replied that the cloned Adam can risk his life in order to save other human beings, and this indicates clearly that he is a real human being. The movie is employed to introduce two different views of human nature. Whereas the former view is often associated with Christianity, the latter is supported by Confucianism. The chapter then introduces the understandings of soul and/or human nature in the ancient civilizations (including Greek, Egyptian, Indian and Chinese) and major religious traditions (including the Buddhist doctrine of non-self/no-self), before introducing the evolutionary understanding of humankind and its implications for the understanding of the origin(s) of human morality, including the controversial “metaphor” of “selfish genes” and the theories concerning altruism as well as the comparable Confucian theories of moral origins.

21. *Ibid.*, 91–8.

22. *Ibid.*, 99–131.

23. *Ibid.*, 182–3.

24. *Ibid.*, 213–42.

In terms of contents, the book is by no means sophisticated, especially with regard to the scientific aspect. The authors are actually the former or current teachers of an undergraduate course titled “Religion and Science” offered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The course is targeted at two different groups of students: students majoring in Religious Studies, and those majoring in some other subjects but taking the course as part of their general education. However, the co-authors are all Chinese Christian theologians, and none of them received any doctorate in a discipline in natural sciences. While So Yuen-tai received a master degree in computer science and a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, Jason Lam got a bachelor degree in engineering and a doctorate in Theology. The least scientifically trained is the present author, who was trained mainly in Religious Studies and Theology, without any degree in any discipline in natural science. Admittedly, the co-authors are more knowledgeable in Christian theology and religions than natural sciences. What makes it quite different from some other textbooks remains its attempt to bring in the non-theistic religions, particularly the three traditional Chinese religions – namely Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism – into the discussion. Furthermore, it also attempts to make more direct and explicit references to the topics related to the “Religious Studies and Ethics” as well as “Liberal Studies” in the secondary school curriculum of Hong Kong.

### Liberal Studies and Religion-Science Dialogue

The relevance of the book to the curriculum of “Liberal Studies” can be seen in two ways: the contents and the aims. In terms of contents, the curriculum of “Liberal Studies” includes 3 major areas, which can be divided into 6 modules.<sup>25</sup> According to the curriculum guide, these areas and modules are:

Area 1: Self and Personal Development:

Module 1: Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships

Area 2: Society and Culture

Module 2: Hong Kong Today

Module 3: Modern China

Module 4: Globalization

Area 3: Science, Technology and the Environment

Module 5: Public Health

Module 6: Energy Technology and the Environment

It is rather reasonable to expect that the results of religion-science dialogue can inform the teaching of “Liberal Studies”, especially Areas 1 and 3. However,

25. [http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/chi/curriculum2015/LS\\_CAGuide\\_e\\_2015.pdf](http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/chi/curriculum2015/LS_CAGuide_e_2015.pdf).

the possible relevance to Area 2 cannot be ruled out. For example, there is an anthology of teaching materials on “Global Ethic and Globalization” which is supposed to be related to Module 4 of Area 2, and the anthology as a whole is focused on the socio-political issues, including economics, international affairs, human population, and racial relationship. However, the book covers not only the religious perspectives, including Buddhist, Catholic, Confucian, Daoist, Islamic, and Protestant, on globalization, but also the scientific perspectives on global environmental issues and climate change.<sup>26</sup> This coverage of religious and scientific perspectives is very much in line with the curriculum aims of “Liberal Studies”, which are summarized in the official document as below:

The aims of Senior Secondary Liberal Studies are:

- a. to enhance students’ understanding of themselves, their society, their nation, the human world and the physical environment;
- b. to enable students to develop multiple perspectives on perennial and contemporary issues in different contexts (e.g. cultural, social, economic, political and technological contexts);
- c. to help students become independent thinkers so that they can construct knowledge appropriate to changing personal and social circumstances;
- d. to develop in students a range of skills for life-long learning, including critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication skills and information technology skills;
- e. to help students appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society and handle conflicting values; and
- f. to help students develop positive values and attitude towards life, so that they can become informed and responsible citizens of society, the country and the world.”<sup>27</sup>

Viewed in this perspective, perhaps one may find that the religion-science dialogue can contribute tremendously to the attainment of the curriculum aims of “Liberal Studies” in various ways and in different degrees. It may “enhance students’ understanding of themselves, their society, their nation, the human world and the physical environment,” and can contribute to their development of critical thinking, independent thinking, communication skills, etc. Above all, perhaps the most relevant may be the multiple perspectives approach involved in the religion-science dialogue. As the dialogue may

26. Zeng Jialuo 曾家洛 (=Tsang Ka Lok, George) et al (eds.), *Quan qiu lun li yu quan qiu hua : tong shi zi liao hui bian* 全球倫理與全球化：通識資料匯編 [Global Ethic and Globalization: Anthology of Materials for Liberal Studies] (Hong Kong: Roundtable Synergy Production 圓桌精英, 2014), 39–54, 179–224.

27. [http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/chi/curriculum2015/LS\\_CAGuide\\_e\\_2015.pdf](http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/chi/curriculum2015/LS_CAGuide_e_2015.pdf).

involve the understanding of life, the dialogue may be relevant to the aim of “to help students develop positive values and attitude towards life, so that they can become informed and responsible citizens of society, the country and the world.” If the religion-science dialogue incorporates an inter-religious approach, it will also “help students appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society and handle conflicting values.”

### **Final Remark**

This essay does not aim to “sell” or “promote” the case of Hong Kong as the best or the only viable way to relate religion-science dialogue to religious education. It only attempts to show one of the possible ways to make use of the results of the religion-science dialogue to contribute to the betterment of religious education in the East Asian context.