

The Chinese Citizenship Education and Authoritarian Resilience: Political Socialization of the Textbooks

Summary

Introduction

China's educational modernization efforts began in the 1980s when Western educational theories and experiences were widely introduced and learned from. Its reform efforts after 1990s were consistent with what Asian countries were doing with ideas of student-center, curriculum integration, alternative assessments, innovation in curriculum and instruction, school-based curriculum, technology in education, teacher professionalism, etc. (Cheng, 2001; Huang, 2004). In 2001, China launched its basic education reform, and political and moral education has made great changes. Educational modernization allows the long-standing Marxist political education to be shifted to citizenship education, a change that values socialist democracy, rule of law, freedom and equality, and social justice (Li, 2009). Research literature on China's citizenship education shows that scholars are divided, with scholars (mostly with Chinese origins) who are optimistic about this change and believe that Chinese political education and moral education are becoming "depoliticized" (Lee & Ho, 2005; Li, Zhong, Lin, & Zhang, 2004; Qi & Tang, 2004; Zhong & Lee, 2008), and scholars who analyze the change of history and social studies textbooks and believe that textbooks remain ideological which strengthen the Communist Party rule (Jones, 2002; Vickers, 2009). Jones (2002) discovers that textbooks after 1980 highlighted Chinese nationalism and patriotism, pushing class struggle, peasant revolution, socialist morality, and communism to the background.

This study attempts to clarify the two polarized views about what is going on in the Chinese civic education by examining current Chinese elementary and junior-high school civics textbooks. The results are explained

from the perspectives of “institutionalization” and “Chinese nationalism”, which help manifest how the authoritarianism of CCP remains powerfully resilient through the new civics textbooks.

Methodology

This study uses interpretive qualitative analysis method to analyze the texts (Lacity & Janson, 1994). The validity of this approach depends upon the research community’s recognition of the researcher’s interpretation in the face of evidence. In this study, I pay attention to the underlying meanings of the texts’ cultural, political, and ideological backgrounds. In addition to the content of the subject matter, I analyze the instructional approaches the texts suggest to capture the potential effect of the texts in a fuller way. I start the analysis by reading the text line by line; themes emerged inductively as the data are analyzed and informed by the literature and research question.

China does not have a subject matter called “civic education”. In this study, I examine *Moral and Life* (grade 1-2), *Moral and Society* (grade 3-6), and *Thought and Moral* (grade 7-9) published in 2007-2009. They are referred in this study as civics courses. In terms of textbook versions, I use textbooks from the People’s Education Press, which was the only official publishing center that monopolized China’s textbooks. Its textbooks remain the most adopted ones in most provinces in China.

Results

We can find even from the unit titles that civic education in China has included contents of physical and psychological health, character education, law education, civic rights and real-life subjects and global issues (Zhong & Lee, 2008), which indicates that the effect of institutionalization on civic education is obvious. However, the civic textbooks are still full of ideas of patriotism, nationalism, and collectivism, narrated in a way to legitimize the Chinese Communist Party’s rule. Findings are briefly explained below:

Effects of Institutionalization

Life-relatedness and thinking-oriented content

Like textbooks in Taiwan and other countries, civic textbooks in China are organized in an order of children's family, school, community, the country, and then the world. In modernizing education, textbooks begin emphasizing thinking and inquiry, rather than indoctrination and didactic citizenship transmission. When contents are not related to political ideology, many are designed in the social sciences approach reflecting the use of Western educational theories (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977).

Change of the nature of moral education

Textbooks are no longer dominated by Marxist-Lenin-Maoist political moral education (Lee & Ho, 2005; Li et al., 2004). Socialism is pushed to the background; Confucian ethnics are emphasized to mold the citizens' moral characters.

Individual rights and democratic rule of law

Institutionalization affects not only the social sciences approach to designing the curriculum, but the teaching of individual rights and democratic rule of law. Textbook contents encourage different opinions and citizens fighting for their own rights.

It appears that there are signs for democratic values and ways of life that could incrementally lead to democracy (Ding, 2002; Wang, 2007). However, the emphases below trump the individualistic, life-related, democratic contents in civic textbooks. The higher the grade, the more contents aim at encouraging students' Chinese nationalism, collectivism, patriotism and identification with CCP.

Effects of Chinese Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism

About one fifth of the civic textbooks are about ethnic nationalism,

using blood, historical and cultural heritage, national humiliation, Confucian culture and Chineseness to foster patriotism.

State nationalism

The higher the grades, the more emphasis is placed on responsibility and dedication to the collective and the state. Confucian ethics are cultivated for the benefit of the collective. The state requires citizens to do their responsibility of protecting national unity, ethnic cohesion, state secret, and public goods; observing labor discipline, public order, social morality; safeguarding national security, honor and interest, etc. The textbook says that “these are the patriotic behaviors that the laws request from the citizens” and that “doing these responsibilities consciously is our ‘heavenly calling’ and important patriotic manifestations”.

Love of the country = love of the Chinese nation = love of the Communist Party

Textbooks not only legitimize the CCP rule by modernized and progressive civics curricula and methods, but equate ideas of loving the state to loving the Chinese nation, and to loving the CCP to promote Chinese nationalism. From political socialization point of view, textbooks tactfully celebrate Chinese nationalism and convince the youth that China needs CCP in order to be wealthy, strong and unified.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper argues that the authoritarian resilience of CCP indicates that China’s civic education will continue to prepare citizens that differ from Taiwan’s on important aspects: non-empowering ideas of democracy, values of self-sacrifice for the collective, high regards for the nation-state above the individuals, and ideas of loving the CCP. Taiwan needs to know the nature of China’s civic education after its open policy, and consider how to interact with it for peace and freedom across the Taiwan Strait.