

Chapter 7

The “Two Ways” of Citizenship Education in China: Benefits and Challenges for China in a Multicultural World

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to analyze the “Chinese way” of citizenship education as a meeting place between the historical lessons of Confucianism, Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology, and newer concepts of global citizenship. Furthermore, this project seeks to understand how the model of education for “global” citizenship fits within the established system of ideological and moral education. To this end, research was carried out at three different levels. Firstly, a review of the most recent and “global” literature on education for citizenship was conducted. Secondly, public government documents were studied and compared, in particular, those from the Ministry of Education and the Association for Higher Education, which is supervised by the Chinese communist party and its General Secretary, President Xi Jinping. Thirdly, surveys were conducted to gauge the degree of involvement of students in their own citizenship education at high school and university level. Finally, a field study was conducted at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangdong province (Zhuhai campus).

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, many school systems around the world have established a series of measures designed to reorient and strengthen the role of citizenship education. From the introduction of new school subjects and themes (citizenship, civic education, democratic education, national education and political education) to significant reforms of existing curricula (Johnson & Morris, 2010). This training seeks to teach young people a set of attitudes and moral values which are crucial to public welfare and reflect the needs and challenges of the society. Citizenship education is particularly essential when social ties cannot be taken for granted, or are not sufficient to inspire respect (Dubet 1991; Fejes & Nicoll, 2015).

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Citizenship education is a relatively new area that emphasizes community participation and cognitive reflection as a set of skills and dispositions that individuals may possess. (Lawy & Biesta 2006; Mannion et al., 2011). In general, the context of teaching citizenship is tied to that of the nation-state because historically education was closely linked to the process of state formation and was designed to build a collective identity, instill patriotism and inspire loyalty to the nation. Recently such educational programs have also begun to include international or global issues, for example, globalization, citizenship, environmental change, and human rights¹ demonstrating the changing conception of what it means to be a “good citizen.” (Davies, Evans & Reid, 2005, p.84; Johnson & Morris, 2010). This new style of “global” education has begun to challenge borders, flows, power relations, notions of belonging, individual rights and responsibilities, and the ideas of otherness and interdependence. (de Oliveira Andreotti, 2011; Tasneem, 2005). However, such education could, in turn, be used to understand rights, poverty or conflict at the local level. (Davies, 2006; Parmenter, 2011). In short, citizenship education must help young people to “live together in increasingly diverse local communities and in an interdependent world” (Osler & Starkey, 2003).

The Ideological and Moral course issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2011) occupies a similar position in the national curriculum, and the central themes of the program are divided into three fundamental parts. The first section is called “Personal Growth”, followed by the second part which is entitled “Others, Collectives and Me”, and finally “The State, Society and Me”. Within this program may be found outlines of the fundamental moral and legal norms for the field of private and public life, guided by socialist values and characterized by high ethical points of inquiry.² The manifestation of these teachings indicates the anticipated attitudes and values that will enable the citizen to participate effectively in public life alongside the foundational knowledge of law and politics that will qualify them to do so. It also discusses the nature of engagement with other citizens and emphasizes the importance of environmental protection. Furthermore, it highlights the individual’s identification with the state and nation and seeks to build enduring and affective links of national identity (Zhong & Zhang, 2015, pp. 4-5; Han, 2010) alongside the development of a global consciousness and an international vision. The objectives of the Ideological and Moral course emphasize contemporary civic skills but without neglecting the age-old teachings. Unlike in Western countries, the Chinese path of citizenship education is based on moral community relations between individuals and the nation and does not take individualism and political rights as a starting point (Zhong & Zhang, 2015, pp. 8-9).

This project aims to analyze the “Chinese way” of citizenship education as a meeting place between the historical lessons of Confucianism, Marxist-Leninist socialist ideology and newer concepts of global citizenship. Furthermore, this project seeks to understand how the model of education for “global” citizenship fits within the established system of ideological and moral education. To this end, research was carried out at three different levels. Firstly, a review of the most recent and “global” literature on education for citizenship was conducted. Secondly, public government documents were studied and compared, in particular, those from the Ministry of Education and the Association for Higher Education, which is supervised by the Chinese communist party and its General Secretary, President Xi Jinping. Thirdly, surveys were conducted to gauge the degree of involvement of students in their own citizenship education at high school and university level, and their attitudes on citizenship education in general, both Chinese and global. Finally, a field study was conducted at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangdong province (Zhuhai campus).

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