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<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Law, WW</b>
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## Understanding China's curriculum reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Wing-Wah Law, The University of Hong Kong

This article uses curriculum making frameworks to analyse and reconstruct the Chinese curriculum-making model and unpack the dynamics, complexity, and constraints of China's curriculum reform since the early 1990s. It argues that curriculum reform is China's main human capital development strategy for coping with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that the state plays an important role in the reform of curriculum making mechanisms and in the social distribution of knowledge, skills and dispositions through curriculum making. Data are drawn from a discourse analysis of public texts, such as official documents and curriculum standards. This study has four major findings. First, China uses curriculum reform as a key strategy to counter manpower-related global challenges and to empower the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Second, to this end, China has re-oriented its curriculum making from a state-dominated model to one that is state-led, expert-assisted and evidence-based. Third, China's new curriculum reflects the increasing tension between globalization and nationalism; while preparing its students to compete globally, China also urges them to identify with and take pride in the nation's achievements and culture. Fourth, Chinese curriculum reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not unfold as the state expects, as it is constrained by curricular and extra-curricular factors.

Keywords: Curriculum reform; globalization; nationalism; state; China

As China emerges as a world power, it and the international community seek to deepen their mutual understanding (Jacques, 2012; Obama, 2009). While there is scholarly debate over whether China might dominate the global economy and world order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Beckley, 2011; Shenkar, 2005), China's sustained rise and long-term growth largely rely on its human capital development, which depends on its education system (W. Chen, 2012; Morgan, 2012). China has recognized this challenge since the 1980s (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1985); however, understanding its approach thereto requires understanding the dynamics and complexity of Chinese curriculum reform, including how constraints on that reform might limit China's manpower development potential. This topic is, however, under-researched in English-medium literature.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, globalization has compelled China and other countries to reform their educational institutions and curricula (Yates & Young, 2010). China approach, conducted in two sequential stages since the 1990s, reformed compulsory basic education curriculum for its roughly 150 million primary and junior secondary students. The Principal Stage (early-1990s to 2001) laid the major foundations for the curriculum reform and led to experimental curriculum standards, while the Fine-tuning Stage (2001-2011) refined those standards and gradually implemented them nationally.

This article unpacks the dynamics and struggles of China's curriculum reforms and the related complex interplay between state and other actors since the 1990s. Its theoretical analysis and reconstruction of China's curriculum making approach is guided by Doyle's (1992a, 1992b) tripartite curriculum framework (institutional, programmatic, and classroom curricula), and Haft and Hopmann's (1990) and Westbury's (2003) frameworks for state-based curriculum making. Specifically, it focuses on social perceptions of what schools should do (institutional curriculum) and the curriculum standards (programmatic curriculum) promulgated as official pedagogical discourse in 2001 and 2011. It examines the state's mediation between society and schools and between China and the world, and how this has recontextualized the pedagogical discourse. It does not address classroom curriculum, which deserves separate study, but does examine possible constraints on translating programmatic curriculum into classrooms.

The article argues that curriculum reform is China's primary manpower development response to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, specifically economic, socio-political and educational needs arising from social changes; it is marked by struggles regarding the social distribution of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and between preparing students to compete globally and preserving their sense of national identity. To rationalize this distribution, China has set the overall direction for institutional curriculum reform, but has engaged various players (*e.g.* experts, principals and teachers) to build consensus around its programmatic curriculum. Moreover, since the early 1990s, the state has played key roles in institutional and programmatic curriculum making, negotiating between global and national frames of reference. This negotiation is refracted into and reflected by struggles between curriculum's economic and socio-political tasks. In programmatic curriculum making, the state selects global curriculum elements that will equip students to survive and compete globally; it also acts as gatekeeper, infusing state-prescribed socialist and Chinese values into curricula to foster a socialist citizenry. China's curriculum reform and human capital development, however, is constrained by curricular and extra-curricular factors.

This article first reviews the literature on curriculum making, and then presents its methodology. Next, it examines China's institutional and programmatic curricula, reconstructing the nation's approach to curriculum making and analysing its globalization/nationalism dilemma. Third, it discusses challenges to realizing institutional and programmatic curricula in classrooms, then concludes by discussing the state's role in curriculum making, the importance of curriculum to cultural heritage, and constraints on curriculum reform.

## **Curriculum and State-based Curriculum Making**

The 1990s and 2000s witnessed a major shift of focus in curriculum research; rather than concentrating on the work of schooling (Westbury, 2007), curriculum development and implementation (Connelly & Xu, 2012), and curriculum systems and services, researchers increasingly addressed student learning outcomes (Sivesind, Van den Akker, & Rosenmund, 2012), comparative accountability, high-stakes assessment, academic standards and standard-based reforms (Hopmann, 2008); this put curriculum theory in 'a state of crisis' (Z. Deng, 2013, p. 653). Despite this, research on curriculum making processes and programmes could still explain 'knowledge formation and education policy steering' in Europe (Sivesind *et al.*, 2012, p. 320) and countries such as China.

Doyle's (1992b) framework theorizes curriculum making as a series of dynamic, complicated processes at the institutional, programmatic, and classroom levels. Institutional curriculum is a shared conception of what school should be, combining society's educational aspirations and expectations and schools' forms and procedures (Doyle, 1992a). The framework focuses on the policy intersection between schooling, society, and culture (2003, 2008b), embodying social expectations, creating a new language of education and using metaphors and narratives concerning the purposes and aims of schooling, teaching and learning to steer the discussion (Westbury, 2008a) and to rationalize and justify 'the selection and arrangement of content' for the programmatic curriculum (Doyle, 1992b, p. 487), which translates institutional curriculum into school subjects or programmes of study (Doyle, 1992b) and outlines intended outcomes (Westbury, 2003). It involves subject formulation, the content selection and prioritization and curriculum standards development that meet the social expectations and purposes informing the institutional curriculum. Classroom curriculum is what teachers/students/communities actually implement/enact (Doyle, 1992a) through a sequence of jointly developed classroom events (Westbury, 2003). As such, tripartite curriculum making can be seen as the process of recontextualizing and reproducing knowledge after its production (Bernstein, 1990; Singh, 2002). Institutional and programmatic curricula generate and recontextualize pedagogical discourse, respectively (Neves & Morais, 2001).

Haft and Hopmann's and Westbury's state-based curriculum-making frameworks help explain the leadership role of China's national leadership in curriculum reform and interactions with stakeholders. Curriculum making is a social process that determines and legitimizes what knowledge, skills and dispositions are distributed through education and how, with the state as principal regulator. In many national education systems, curriculum is a state-based document approved by educational authorities, and curriculum administration is symbolic, concealing complex power relations and struggles over the distribution of knowledge between dominant forces (Haft & Hopmann, 1990), both insiders (*e.g.*, the state, curriculum developers, professional associations) and local players (*e.g.*, school boards, parent associations, unions) (Kirst & Bird, 1997; Westbury, 2008a). At the institutional curriculum level, the state can turn public curriculum-making into 'a vehicle for steering a national dialogue ... about the narratives and metaphors of the nation and school' to form and reform 'the public's and teachers' canopy of understandings about schooling' (Westbury, 2008a, pp. 58, 59). Thus, the state defines curriculum by generating the pedagogical discourse, legitimizing 'the principles of distribution of social power and control', and recontextualizing official pedagogical discourse as syllabus (Neves & Morais, 2001, p. 454).

The state (particularly educational authorities) can recontextualize the pedagogical discourse for regulating and balancing the interests of diverse social groups in the selection of knowledge, skills and dispositions. Haft and Hopmann (1990) argued that to ensure this distribution is socially secured and not effectively challenged, social definitions must be imposed by consensus or through social acceptance. Three administrative instruments of symbolic action safeguard social interests: compartmentalization of knowledge into subject-based syllabuses, (cataloguing goals and contents and providing guidelines for structuring schooling); licensing of teaching (separating state-run curriculum development from school-level instruction planning and disengaging public authorities from executive responsibility); and segmentation (facilitating the discussion and negotiation of administration between practitioners and external forces). These instruments involve dynamic and

complicated interactions between school, family, community and political/administrative agents, recontextualizing pedagogical discourse (Neves & Morais, 2001). Westbury (2008a, p. 55) interpreted these instruments as pacification tools – compartmentalization by taming ‘what [one] know[s] or believe[s] cannot be attained’, and licensing by shifting responsibility for outcomes onto teachers and schools.

Several works have examined China’s curriculum reformation response to globalization. Focusing on education’s economic function, Wang (2012) traced the history of Chinese curriculum reforms, identifying changes in reform-promoting terminology from 1978-2008. Huang (2004) identified major intended changes and introduced in China’s Principal Stage curriculum reform strategies, while Deng (2010) examined curriculum making processes and Dello-Iacovo (2009) evaluated China’s use of ‘quality education’ to promote curriculum reform.

These studies, however, do not specifically examine how China has handled external globalization pressures and maintained its own cultural traditions. This inadequacy is somewhat supplemented by Ding’s (2001) comparison of Chinese approaches to foreign influences on its educational institutions in the 1920s-1930s and the 1980s-1990s. Focusing on education’s economic function, Ding demonstrated that, despite different political leaderships, similar approaches were taken to educational reform in both eras – Western elements were integrated with emerging practices to balance domestic and external/international influences and develop an ‘education system with Chinese characteristics’ to suit national aspirations (p. 182). Liu and Fang (2009) contended that China’s adoption and adaptation of Western education and curriculum concepts reflected negotiations between global/local dynamics, creating ‘globalization with Chinese characteristics’ (p. 411).

Although the literature sheds light on China’s curricular responses to globalization, it addresses neither curriculum-making developments in the Fine-tuning Stage, nor four major aspects of China’s school curriculum reform since the 1990s: the complex interplay between the state and other actors; struggles between the curriculum’s economic and socio-political functions; curriculum elements specific to China’s culture and achievements added at the Fine-tuning Stage; and, curricular- and extra-curricular challenges to China’s curriculum reform and human capital development.

### **The study: Its Purpose and Research Methodology**

Based on the above, this study investigates the dynamics and complexities of China’s curriculum reform in response to globalization and social change since the 1990s. It poses three interrelated, major research questions.

1. What were the key reasons used by the Chinese government to reform its basic education curriculum beginning in the early 1990s, and how did that generate and shape social expectations for the nation and schooling (institutional curriculum)?
2. How did the Chinese government recontextualize and translate such expectations into curriculum standards (programmatic curriculum)?
3. What are the possible challenges to realizing these expectations through curriculum reform?

This study used critical discourse analysis to reconstruct and interpret why and how China reformed its curriculum. Critical discourse analysis can help reconstruct the social world of China's curriculum reform by identifying historical and contemporary contexts, tracing events and developments (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), understanding conditions and politics underlying specific problems/issues and social interactions (van Dijk, 2003), and exploring connections between language, power and ideology (Junling Wang, 2010).

This study analysed two major types of public documents related to the two consecutive stages of curriculum reform. First, official curriculum standards for some 20 primary and junior secondary education subjects, both the 2001 experimental and the 2011 fine-tuned versions; these state-mandated programmes of study are 'authoritative statements about the social distribution of the knowledge, attitudes, and competences seen as appropriate' (Westbury, 2008a, p. 47) and are 'legitimate official pedagogical discourse text(s)' (Neves & Morais, 2001, p. 454). Second, state policy documents (such as Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's decisions on education policy and speeches and/or reports by CPC leaders) and the 1999 and 2010 national educational development plans, which, in contemporary China, effectively constitute institutional curriculum, capture state and societal expectations, and indicate how schooling can equip students to meet those expectations. These documents are often cited as authoritative sources for educational reform. For example, the Ministry of Education (MoE) (2001b) has stated that the 2001 curriculum reform was launched to implement the CPC Central Committee's (1999) *Decision Concerning the Deepening of Education Reform and the Full-scale Promotion of Qualities Education*.

Following Wiersma's (2000) suggestion, the analysis identified, categorised and synthesised noteworthy or regularly-used words, phrases and events (e.g., economic globalisation, education/curriculum aims or goals, student/teacher expectations). Similar to Bryan's (2012) discourse analysis, the study focused on texts related to such analytical questions as: 'What are the state's nation building aims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?'; 'What are the perceived challenges to human capital development of globalization and domestic change?'; and, 'What are the major changes needed in terms of curriculum purposes and tasks, content, teaching and learning activities, and assessment?'

It should be noted that the adoption of these public official documents as major sources for analysis, however, has its own limitations. While they represent the official view, they do not necessarily represent the actual viewpoints of other curriculum stakeholders, particularly teachers, students, and parents. Likewise, although they indicate intended curriculum changes, they do not necessarily reflect actual outcomes or classroom teaching and learning realities. In other words, there could be gaps between classroom curriculum and institutional and programmatic curricula, as well as between intentions and reality in curriculum reform in China, as will be shown later.

## **China's approach to state-based curriculum reform**

This section examines why and how the Chinese government revised its school curriculum, and how its institutional and programmatic curricula are used to address new economic, political and educational needs arising from social change, including globalization, since the late 1990s. Specifically, it analyses the Chinese state's aspirations for nation building and expectations regarding schooling (institutional

curriculum) for the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and how it translated these into a state-mandated program of study (programmatic curriculum). China's two sequential curriculum reform stages show how its approach to state-based curriculum making at the national system level changed from a top-down model to one that engaged different curriculum stakeholders in the recontextualization and social redistribution of knowledge, skills and dispositions. This approach was marked by three major, interrelated phenomena: the state's initiation and engineering of social perceptions of the nation's future and schooling; an evidence-based approach to curriculum making at different junctures; and, diverse players revamping and deciding the programmatic curriculum. The latter two reflect state efforts to legitimise the pedagogical discourse and reduce challenges to the reform.

### State-guided, social perceptions of China's future and challenges

The first feature common to the Principal and Fine-tuning Stages is that both were state-initiated, with the state acting as principal regulator of the social distribution of knowledge. The stages arose from China's hopes for rejuvenation and its fears that its manpower development trailed that of its global competitors, and were an attempt to deal with problems arising from China's educational expansion. One important state means of shaping other players in institutional curriculum making was to steer and guide national discussions about the nation and schooling (Westbury, 2008a); the Chinese state played an important role in setting the institutional curriculum in both reform stages by highlighting common aspirations for nation building and using education to achieve those in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These aspirations, politically driven and shaped by historical and contemporary contexts, reflected the circling of China's past and future around its institutional curriculum making.

China's leaders' aspirations for its global rejuvenation have been an important component of its institutional curriculum since 1978, and are closely related to the CPC's desire and need to demonstrate its leadership ability. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping expressed his wish that China's *per capita* GDP reach the middle level of developed countries by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. Deng's successors, Jiang Zemin (1997) and Hu Jintao (2007) established related nation-building goals, including making China a fairly prosperous society by 2020 (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CPC), and a strong, prosperous, modernized socialist country by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC); in his inaugural speech, Xi Jinping (2013) called realizing China's rejuvenation by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century the 'Chinese dream'.

These new institutional curriculum aspirations can be interpreted as the historical legacy of late-Qing Dynasty military defeats that confronted imperial China with its economic and technological backwardness (G. W. Wang, 1977). Reformists such as Liang Qichao (1936) criticized China's traditional, Confucian-oriented culture and education for focusing on cultivating an obedient, agrarian citizenry and for failing to develop and modernize China. What many Chinese saw as the source of their cultural identity seemed "irrelevant or worse" in a world shaped by the Industrial Revolution (Gray, 1990, p. 3). To revive the nation and foster a modern citizenry, the late-Qing and Republic of China (ROC) governments established Western-style public educational systems, and re-purposed Chinese education to affect economic modernization by emphasizing language proficiency and science literacy (Ministry of Education, Republic of China, 1934). However, they still selectively used Confucian values in citizenship education to foster Chinese cultural identity (Law, 2011).

This tension between development and preserving national identity in schooling expectations persisted in 1950s' socialist China. In its efforts to establish a utopian, socialist China, the CPC-led state, under Mao Zedong, adopted a dualistic worldview (communism versus capitalism) in its diplomatic relations, replaced Confucianism with socialism as the state orthodoxy for guiding China's development, eliminated market forces and introduced a universal planned economy, suppressed civil society, and criticized Chinese culture as feudal and as a barrier to China's modernization (Law, 2011; Tang & Zuo, 1996; Yabuki, 1995). In terms of education, Mao emphasized the curriculum's economic and socio-political function of cultivating 'new socialist' persons for China's modernization (T. H.-E. Chen, 1969) – students who would be 'red and expert' (*i.e.*, possessing a socialist political consciousness and academic knowledge or technical skills (Baum, 1964)).

In the late 1970s, under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, the CPC-led state began to reverse most of Mao's policies. Economic development replaced class struggle as a Party objective, and a policy of reform and opening China to the world was enacted in 1978 (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1978). Internationally, China expanded its diplomatic relations, until then mainly limited to other socialist states, to include capitalist countries, including its former main ideological enemy, the United States. It also increased its competition for global capital, and its integration with and engagement in the world economy by, for example, joining, in 2001, the World Trade Organization (Chow, 2011). Although maintaining tight control, China began to allow foreign countries foreign nationals to enter its economic, educational, and cultural markets.

Domestically, there were significant changes in the relationships between the state, market, and society. The CPC-led state successfully used market economic forces to revive its socialist economy, even allowing some areas and people to get rich ahead of the rest of the country. By 2010, China had become the world's second largest economy (after the United States). In 2011, China's *per capita* GDP was RMB35,083, more than 90 times its 1978 level of RMB381 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012); although this is still low compared to other countries, it nonetheless affords Chinese people greater freedom to choose their lifestyles, own property, and buy stocks and securities. Moreover, the CPC-led state has changed its policy on civil society from suppression to toleration, leading to dramatic growth in non-government organizations, mass media and electronic mass media (Yu, 2002). The CPC-led state has also accepted the spread of the Internet and Internet-connected smartphones, as well as public discussion in the cyberspace on a range of topics, including criticisms on the government and its policies; however, it continues to block access to websites and discussion topics it deems a potential threat to social stability or its political leadership. Accompanying these advancements, however, are serious social problems, including increased economic and social disparities between and within areas, the intensification of social unrest and ethnic conflicts, and growing popular dissatisfaction with governmental performance (Law, 2011). To address some of these problems, the CPC-led state, as will be shown later, turned to traditional Chinese cultural values, such as "harmony".

Despite China's recent emphasis on its economic growth and global prominence, its institutional curriculum has retained its dualistic nature, with politically-motivated national revival goals in the contexts of a changing society and a changing world. Deng (1983) recast the 'red and expert' formula in a less ideological way, gearing education to the needs of modernization, the world and the future (*sange mianxiang*) in order to cultivate 'new persons with four-haves' (*siyou xinren*) –



socialist ideals, moral virtue, good education, and discipline. Similar goals were enshrined in 1999's *Decision Concerning the Deepening of Education Reform and the Full-scale Promotion of Qualities Education* and the 2010's *Outline of China's National Plan for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development* (2010-2020).

Both documents reveal the state's rhetoric of justification to other curriculum stakeholders (including schools, teachers, students, parents, and the general public) for fostering popular sense of urgency regarding perceived external and domestic challenges. They emphasize China's need to address dramatic scientific and technological progress, an increasingly globalized economy and intensified international competition (Communist Party of China Central Committee & State Council, 1999, 2010), and articulate the CPC's fear that China may lag behind other countries. They further justify the need to revise programmatic and classroom curricula by identifying domestic problems (from economic development to environment protection) confronting China's reform and development efforts, and by criticizing Chinese education for trailing other countries in educational theories, systems and structures, training models, curriculum contents and pedagogies, and for not helping improve China's citizenry.

Another impetus for Chinese institutional curriculum making was the change in school clientele arising from the expansion of basic and higher education. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century United States, expanding secondary and higher education to meet increased 'demand for highly trained and educated people of all kinds' turned primary or secondary education into a preparatory stage for higher education rather than an exit to the labour market, leading to major educational and curriculum reforms placed 'the children with their background and needs' before 'the school with its content and purposes' (Trow, 1961, p. 154).

Since the 1986 introduction of nine-year compulsory schooling, the universalization of senior secondary education in the early 1990s and the massification of higher education in the late 1990s, China's has faced similar pressures for curriculum change. To address expanding student enrolment, 1999's *Decision* and 2010's *Outline* assigned Chinese education the twin tasks of cultivating more and better talents to allow China to compete globally, and turning China's huge population into an asset for national development and 'the revival of Chinese nation' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Communist Party of China Central Committee & State Council, 2010); the *Outline* even specifies increasing secondary and higher education enrolment rates to 90% and 40%, respectively, by 2020. The change in China's school clientele has shifted the focus of major educational discourse from the provision of school places to the quality of school education (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Addressing the latter, the MoE (2001b) expressed China's determination to reform and modernize its curriculum for nine-year compulsory education by shifting from a 'textbook-centric' to a 'student-centric' pedagogical model and reducing the difficulty of learning contents.

To that end, both documents emphasize 'red and expert' as a major economic and socio-political curriculum making principle. However, while 1999's *Decision* employs Deng's 1983 version of 'red and expert', 2010's *Outline* casts it as persistently prioritizing moral education (*jianchi deyu weixian*) and emphasising competences (*jianchi nengli weichong*). It assigns education the socio-political tasks of developing students' patriotism and 'firm belief and faith in the [CPC's] leadership and socialist system' and transmitting the CPC's political values and socialist model (Chapter 2). Regarding economic tasks, it accepts global education imperatives,

highlighting competence rather than knowledge. Modelling UNESCO's (1996) four pillars of learning (learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together), it urges strengthening students' competencies by teaching them 'knowledge and skills... to use brain and hands... to survive and live, and... to be and to do' (Chapter 2). This re-interpretation of the dual task of education, as demonstrated later, is refracted in and reflected by the 2011 school curriculum.

From McEneaney and Meyer's (2000) perspective, political aspirations for national rejuvenation and critiques of China's educational quality are, together, compelling reasons for China to modernize its education and curriculum. This suggests the state made these two documents part of the institutional curriculum to express its expectations and to frame a national dialogue on what Chinese schooling should be and do for the nation and its students in a global era. As shown below, they guide the translation from institutional to programmatic curriculum, and inform the latter's priorities.

#### Emphasis on evidence-based approach to inform programmatic curriculum making

Programmatic curriculum making translates ideals and expectations found in the institutional curriculum into school subjects or programs (Doyle, 1992b); it is an arena in which stakeholders fight over what is to be selected, prioritized and included in the curriculum (Hopmann, 1990). Although it steered the national discussion, the Chinese state adopted an evidence-based approach to decision making at important junctures of this process, to moderate the curriculum reform and enhance the legitimacy of its intended outcomes (including curriculum standards) in China's increasingly pluralist society. To that end, the state collected evidence from surveys and consultations, and piloted the programmatic curriculum in selected areas, highlighting its new approach to curriculum making in the two sequential reform stages.

Pre-1990s curriculum reforms met with 'little resistance or objection', because they mainly involved educational administrators and textbook editors making *ad hoc* changes to teaching plans and textbooks (Jianjun Wang, 2012, p. 59). The 1986 introduction of nine-year compulsory basic education meant the curriculum now had to meet the learning abilities and needs of all eligible students, not only the elite. Comprehensive subject-specific curricula (*kecheng*) began to replace earlier prescriptive 'teaching plans' (*jiaohan*). In the 1990s, with China facing new economic and socio-political challenges, parents, teachers and education specialists began widely and severely criticizing Chinese education and curricula for not accommodating the shift from quantity- to quality-related educational needs and to equip students to cope with emerging global economic needs and challenges (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), concerns similar to the state's.

To ease public dissatisfaction with and solicit public support for curriculum reform, the MoE began, in the late 1990s, to involve national, local and school-level stakeholders in developing curriculum standards for primary and junior secondary education (F. Q. Huang, 2004). Between 1993 and 1997 (during the Principal Stage), the MoE unprecedentedly surveyed opinion in nine provinces and municipalities to inform the 2001 programmatic curriculum, soliciting the opinions of some 16,000 students, over 6,000 school principals and teachers, and roughly 50 members of the Committee of Education, Science and Culture of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (China's highest political advisory body) (Cui, 2001). The

survey provided empirical evidence on major problems confronting the Chinese curriculum, including: (a) an over-emphasis on knowledge transmission; (b) having too many subjects and too little coherence; (c) difficult, tedious courses that were unbalanced (in favour of the sciences) and featured outdated curriculum contents; (d) passive, rote learning; (e) an over-reliance on assessment to select students for higher education; and (f) a failure to address the diverse needs of China's huge population (MoE 2001b). These findings helped the MoE define what needed to be changed in the school curriculum, including pedagogy and assessment and, with expert help, it produced draft curriculum standards for 18 primary and junior secondary subjects and organized over 100 public seminars to gather feedback; the resulting 'experimental' curriculum standards (*shiyán gāo*) were promulgated in June, 2001.

Programmatic curriculum making in the Fine-tuning Stage was more carefully planned and organized. Between 2001 and 2003, China piloted the experimental curricula in selected schools in 42 experimental areas (and in more than 1,400 areas of 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions) before implementing them nationally (Ma, 2009). In 2005-06, all primary schools and secondary schools began to phase-in the experimental curriculum standards at grades one and seven, respectively.

Moreover, the state continued to use surveys and consultation to assess and solicit views on the experimental curriculum, but on a larger scale and in a more sophisticated manner. In 2003 and 2007, the MoE (2012a) conducted nationwide surveys, involving some 117,000 provincial education officials, principals, teachers, students and parents from pilot schools, on the nature, principles and goals of China's school curriculum; curriculum standards for individual subjects; and curriculum implementation at the school and subject levels. Between 2003 and 2010, the MoE organized roughly 1,000 seminars to gather feedback on revised experimental programmatic curriculum standards from frontline teachers across China. The empirical evidence gathered moved the MoE to fine-tune, rather than revamp, the design and implementation of the experimental curriculum standards (National Center for School Curriculum and Textbook Development, 2012); thus, in the late 2000s, it (2012a) formulated five fine-tuning principles and established subject-specific curriculum committees (involving 172 experts). In 2011, the MoE promulgated fine-tuned curriculum standards for all subjects in primary and junior secondary education.

#### Diversification of players in curriculum decision-making

The third feature of China's new curriculum making approach involves the diversification of the actors making and finalizing the programmatic curriculum. As noted by Kirst and Bird (1997) and Westbury (2008a), state-based curriculum making does not necessarily exclude other curriculum stakeholders at the state level; the state can engage them at major decision-taking points to 'manage the political, professional, and public fields around schooling (Westbury, 2008a, p. 61). In addition to surveying students, teachers and principals, the Chinese state relied on experts and professionals to design and decide the school curriculum, rather than dominating the social distribution of knowledge.

In 1999, at the end of the Principal Stage, the MoE established a team of education and psychology scholars from teacher-training universities and provincial education research centres and several school principals that spent, under its leadership, two-and-a-half years selecting content for different subjects at different grade levels and drafting and finalizing experimental curriculum standards (Cui,

2001). Unlike previous ‘teaching plans’, which focused mainly on content, these curriculum standards covered curriculum design, implementation and assessment, and shared a similar structure. For example, the experimental curriculum standard for mathematics specified: (a) the reasons for reforming the curriculum and social expectations of the new curriculum; (b) the purpose of mathematics education and specific goals to be achieved by students in grades 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9 in terms of knowledge and skills, thinking, problem solving, and feelings (*qinggan*) and attitudes; (c) teaching and learning contents to be covered at each key learning stage; and (d) suggestions for implementing the curriculum at key learning stages, how to teach and assess students, and how to design lessons and learning materials (MoE, 2001d).

Building on Principal Stage findings, the state developed a sophisticated state-led, expert-assisted, three-tiered mechanism to review, discuss and finalize curriculum standards in the Fine-tuning Stage, one which further diversified the players in the decision-making processes. Specifically, in early 2010, the MoE (2012a) established three high-level committees: the National Commission for Basic Education Curriculum and Textbooks (NC), the National Working Committee of Experts for Basic Education Curriculum and Textbooks (NWC), and the National Advisory Committee of Experts for Basic Education Curriculum and Textbooks (NAC). The NC, which made curriculum policy and oversaw the fine-tuning process, was chaired by the Minister of Education and included 10 senior education officials and nine officials from non-education ministries/departments (MoE, 2010a).

Unlike the NC, the NAC and NWC were dominated by experts and other curriculum stakeholders. The overwhelming majority of the NAC’s 48 members were senior academics or university administrators (listed on MoE, 2010b), while the NWC, chaired by former Deputy Minister of Education Wang Zhan, included six to eight deputy chairpersons (MoE, 2010c) and more than 110 education experts, teachers and school subject specialists (H. Liu, 2010). Unlike the NAC, which made broad suggestions and proposals, the NWC was an operational taskforce, responsible for developing national curricula and standards for different subjects; researching and assessing major curriculum and textbook problems; organizing taskforces for writing and reviewing textbooks and vetting textbook writers; and advising local governments and schools on curriculum reform (MoE, 2010c).

Numerous stakeholders were involved in the process, as the NWC organized more than 1,000 consultative seminars on the draft programmatic curriculum. At the final stage, it sent curriculum standards drafts to 32 provincial-ranked educational authorities, 16 university centres for basic education curriculum and 11 textbook publishers and editors, which generated over 20,000 comments (Wu, 2012). In an unprecedented move, it also engaged frontline primary and secondary school teachers, principals, and education experts in a series of deliberations (general, comprehensive and subject-specific) on the standards, and allowed them to vote on the fine-tuned versions (Wu, 2012).

As a result, it took nearly 20 years for China to reform its curriculum making processes and mechanisms and finalize basic education curriculum standards for all subjects, which were gradually implemented beginning in September, 2012 (MoE, 2011a).

## **China's dilemma between globalization and nationalism in curriculum reform**

In addition to reforming its curriculum-making processes, China also revised its programmatic curriculum. This section compares the contents of the experimental and fine-tuned curriculum standards, focusing on their specification of purposes, selection of contents, organization of student learning, and assessment. Special attention is placed on how the reforms addressed educational, economic and political needs arising from domestic developments and increasing global competition and engagement. The comparison shows that both curricula were marked by struggles between economic and socio-political tasks, and between encouraging students to compete globally and developing their attachment to and love of China and the CPC. However, the fine-tune version differs from the experimental one in that the former explicitly and strongly infuses China-related elements into the school curriculum and emphasizes the importance of cultivating students with Chinese cultural identity in a global age.

### **Equipping students to stay competitive and get closer to the world**

Both programmatic curricula emphasise the economic and human capital development aspects of education and highlight China's efforts to enhance its global competitiveness through a school curriculum paradigm shift. To address global challenges and curriculum problems hindering human capital development, the state specified five interrelated intended classroom curriculum changes in the 2001 experimental programmatic curriculum, reiterating them in its 2011 fine-tuned version.

The first involves students' global economic competitiveness and closeness to the world. Increased global interconnectedness, interdependency and competition has led many nation-states, including China, to (a) increase citizens' awareness of other cultures; (b) make their knowledge base broader and specializations more flexible; and (c) improve core competences for lifelong learning, such as getting and using information independently, learning to learn, critical thinking, problem-solving, improvisation and creativity, digital competence, and linguistic proficiency (Altbach & Davis, 1999; Poisson, 1998; Sani, 2000). China's 2001 and 2011 programmatic curricula included new expectations of schooling and expanded the purpose and objectives of the school curriculum to accommodate global imperatives and education demands, and to enable students to 'meet the needs of the time', 'progress with the times', and face challenges in a fluid, knowledge-based global economy (MoE, 2001b, 2011i); China wanted the new curriculum to address major, identified problems that might prevent this.

To that end, both programmatic curricula expanded the focus of learning from mere content learning to include the cultivation of attitudes and feelings and the mastery of general skills or basic competences, including searching for and processing information, acquiring new knowledge, analysing and solving problems, communicating and cooperating with others, and language proficiency (MoE, 2001b, 2012a). Both curricula emphasized the importance of ensuring students were competent in Chinese and at least one foreign language; to that end, both reform stages identified three foreign language subjects – English, Japanese and Russian – to be offered at key basic education learning stages (MoE, 2001a; 2001c). Since 2001, English has been taught as the primary foreign language for all students from primary

grade three; Japanese and Russian are offered as elective second foreign languages to grade seven students in select junior-secondary schools.

The third intended curriculum change concerns China's attempt to adopt a learner-centric classroom curriculum, give school education a universal orientation, and meet students' developmental needs at different levels. First, in each subject curriculum standard, the MoE identified explicit subject-specific learning goals and contents for different key learning stages. Second, it adjusted the content and difficulty of such subjects as Chinese language and mathematics (MoE, 2011g, 2011k). Third, daily applications and updated elements were added to bring the curriculum closer to students' lives, including greater emphasis on understanding and interpreting situation students might encounter in daily life (MoE, 2011g), and adding space exploration and alternative energy topics to the general science curriculum (MoE, 2011b). Fourth, a new learning area, integrated practical activities, was introduced to give students 'more opportunities for practice-related or inquiry learning' and to integrate their learning from different subjects (Jianjun Wang, 2012, p. 63).

Fifth and most important, both curricula attempted to establish a constructivist learning model in which students are active participants. Specifically, the MoE (2001e, 2011a) strongly discouraged passive knowledge reception, memorization without digestion (*siji yingbei*), and mechanical drilling; instead, it strongly encouraged learning how to learn and learning through exploration. For example, the fine-tuned art curriculum standards encouraged students to explore the art of different ethnic groups and how it is reflected in local architecture, clothing and dialects, and share their findings with their classmates (MoE, 2011d).

The fourth intended curriculum change concerns the role of assessment, study load and examination pressure. Since 2001, the MoE (2001b) has attempted to replace China's longstanding culture of learning for assessment with one of assessment for learning and teaching, and has advocated using assessment to facilitate students' development; schools, teachers, and parents should not focus only on academic results, but also on exploring and developing students' potential, understanding their developmental needs, and establishing their self-confidence. It also encouraged using assessment to inform teaching and create teacher self- and co-assessment mechanisms in which school principals, teachers and parents could participate. Assessment for learning and teaching was reiterated in the 2011 curriculum standards (MoE, 2011a).

The fifth intended curriculum change addresses the need to meet local needs and school conditions, in addition to global demands. The MoE (2001b) divided the experimental curriculum for primary and junior-secondary education into national components (80-85% of total class hours) and local and school-level components (15-20%), devolving limited power to local governments and schools and changing its top-down mode of curriculum management. This, however, did not specifically require schools to re-organize to implement school-based curriculum.

The intended changes stressed in both curricula reflect China's awareness of the urgent need to readjust its school curriculum to meet changing domestic and global manpower needs and contexts, and its determination to prepare students for global challenges and to link them to their nation and the world. This could increase the scope and pace of students' opening to the world, and has raised concerns about how to help them identify with and belong to China in a global age.

### Reinforcing students' socialist national identity

Parallel to helping students remain globally competitive runs education's socio-political task of cultivating a socialist Chinese citizenry. Because of its increasing engagement with the world, China has followed the international trend of promoting multiple (local, national, and global) rather than single citizenship. The 2001 curriculum standards for citizenship education specified, for the first time, a socialist framework for multileveled/multidimensional citizenship education – involving self, family, school, local community or home town, China and the world (MoE, 2002a; 2002b) – similar to other multileveled/multidimensional citizenship education models (e.g., Kubow, Grossman, & Ninomiya, 2000). Within and linking each level/dimension in the Chinese framework are the social contexts in which students' activities take place, social activities in which they are involved, and social relationships in which they engage or govern their behaviors (MoE, 2002a; 2002b).

Despite this accommodative framework, the Chinese state worries about its students abandoning China's traditions and socialist identity, especially since socialism has lost much of its appeal, globally (Burbach, Núñez, & Kagarlitsky, 1997). Similar worries about the loss of national distinctiveness and identity can be identified in the citizenship education of other countries, including Singapore (Gopinathan, 2012) and South Korea (So, Kim, & Lee, 2012). Citizenship curriculum standards in China's 2001 and 2011 institutional and programmatic curricula commonly stress national dimensions of citizenship, the CPC's political leadership and socialism. Similar to the 1999 *Decision*, the 2010 *Outline* detailed social conceptions of education's socio-political task, and emphasised using moral education to make Chinese students 'qualified socialist citizens' with socialist values, and to strengthen their faith in the CPC's leadership and socialist system; in the late 2000s, the MoE (2012a) infused socialist values into the entire basic education curriculum.

Similar to their 2001 counterparts, the 2011 citizenship education curriculum standards encourage grade 1-2 students to respect the national flag and emblem, learn the national anthem, and take pride in being Chinese (MoE, 2011f). Grade 3-6 students are expected to know basic Chinese geography, recent domestic developments and policies, and China's contributions to world civilization (MoE, 2011e). Grade 7-9 students must understand China at a deeper level, including such CPC-led policies as making China moderately prosperous by 2020, features of China's socialist economic and political systems, the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the role of the CPC in China's achievements since the 1980s (MoE, 2011h). To avoid or reduce ethnic conflicts, the standards recognize China as a multi-ethnic country and emphasise the importance of unity, equality, harmony and respect for cultural and ethnic differences. A new curriculum goal for junior-secondary students emphasizes the importance of helping students, regardless of ethnicity, 'identify with Chinese culture, inherit (CPC-interpreted) revolutionary traditions, and promote the spirit of the Chinese people', while developing a 'global consciousness and international outlook' (MoE, 2011h, p. 5).

### Bringing Chinese culture back to foster Chinese cultural identity

In the Fine-tuning Stage, the Chinese state realized that stressing the national dimension in citizenship education was not enough, as China was increasingly engaged in the international community. Compared to the 2001 version, the 2011 programmatic curriculum standards were more inclusive of China's cultural past in preparing students for the future, more Sino-centric, and incorporated China-specific

or -related elements in all subjects rather than compartmentalizing them into a single subject, to reinforce students' identification with and pride in China's cultural traditions and contemporary achievements. This change in the curricular status of Chinese culture is best understood in terms of its historical and wider contexts. Curriculum and culture are closely related, and can be explained in terms of changing attitudes towards the role of culture in nation building.

The relationship between culture and curriculum has been a tortuous one throughout Chinese history. Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty and during the Republic of China era, Chinese culture and education were criticized as barriers to China's modernization, but were still deemed important enough to be preserved in the school curriculum. Between the 1950s and mid-1970s, China, under Mao's leadership, regarded Confucian-oriented traditional Chinese culture as feudal, and attempted to eradicate Confucian values during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Brugger, 1978). Post-Mao leaders, however, recognizing the importance of Chinese culture to state governance, have begun to use traditional Chinese values (*e.g.*, social harmony, honour, shame) rather than socialism to address domestic problems and issues (*e.g.*, social unrest, money worship, hyper-individuality) arising since the 1980s (Law, 2011).

In the 2000s, the state realized culture's important role in domestic modernization and development and its potential for international soft power influence. Some two months before promulgating the 2011 curriculum standards, the Communist Party of China Central Committee (2011) released its new national cultural policy, which stressed the importance of Chinese culture and made Chinese cultural prosperity a national priority. Domestically, China uses culture to promote ethnic solidarity, increase national competitiveness, support economic and social development, and cultivate citizens' spiritual life (Law, 2011). Internationally, China promotes Chinese language, history and culture to resist the cultural aggression of other countries, increase its international cultural influence, and showcase China's openness and achievements to the world. From 2004-2011, China established 358 Confucius Institutes (similar to the UK's British Council) in overseas higher education institutes, and Confucius teaching sites in 500 primary and secondary schools in 105 countries, servicing 500,000 registered students (MoE, 2013b).

The 2011 programmatic curriculum brought Chinese culture to the fore. First, to afford students more exposure to Chinese cultural traditions, the Chinese language curriculum requires grade 1-9 students to take calligraphy lessons (in addition to learning how to write Chinese characters with an ordinary pen) (MoE, 2011k), while music curriculum standards require students to learn and sing more Chinese traditional music and ethnic music (such as Beijing opera) (MoE, 2011j). In mathematics, grade 1-3 students need to learn the historical importance of the abacus in ancient China, and how to show a three-digit figure on it (MoE, 2011g).

Second, the new standards emphasize China's advancement and achievements under the CPC's leadership with a view to increasing students' pride and faith in their political leadership. For example, the general science curriculum teaches junior-secondary students about China's achievements in astronomy, aerospace technology and industry (MoE, 2011b), while the history curriculum standard addresses China's achievements since the 16<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress in 2002, to helping students 'persistently uphold' the CPC's leadership and 'firmly believe' in Chinese socialism (MoE, 2011c, p. 22).

All this suggests that, while encouraging its students to master the knowledge and skills needed to face global challenges, China under the CPC fears they may lose



a national identity that includes ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, and continues to imbue the programmatic curriculum with prescribed socialist values. It has also added elements relating to past and contemporary Chinese achievements to curriculum standards for both citizenship and non-citizenship-education subjects to help foster students’ sense of belonging to and pride in China and, more important, their faith in the CPC’s leadership. As in the past, the Chinese school curriculum, with its emphasis on development and socio-political socialization, perpetuates the tension between ‘red’ and ‘expert’ for reviving China and making a modern Chinese citizenry.

### **Challenges to translating programmatic curriculum into classroom curriculum**

The translation from institutional and programmatic curricula into actual classroom curriculum can be difficult because the latter is often shaped by teachers’ curriculum perspectives and factors shaping classroom context and events (Doyle, 1992b). Both the 2001 and 2011 programmatic curricula reveal China’s willingness to change longstanding curricular perceptions and practices for enhancing the quality of its human capital by broadening the scope of learning to include competences, shifting from teacher-centric to learner-centric pedagogy, and from learning for assessment to assessment for teaching and learning. While these proposed curriculum changes in China are expected to be realized at the school and classroom levels (Halpin, 2010), they are constrained by both curricular and extra-curricular factors.

Firstly, of the five intended curriculum changes, the attempted shift to learner-centric and constructivist learning has received the most severe criticism. At the systemic level, Xing (2011, p. 5), a physicist, severely criticized the approach as ‘absurd’, as the major pedagogy behind constructivism and scientific exploration has not yet been proved successful; Xing cited Taiwan’s unsuccessful foray into constructivism, which was finally abandoned in the early 2000s. At the school level, since the 2001 implementation of the experimental curriculum, the intended pedagogical changes have not materialized, and schools have been criticized for failing to help the state realize them (Walker, Qian, & Zhang, 2011). At the classroom level, pedagogical changes in many schools are, from a teacher’s perspective, ‘ritualistic’ – for example, replacing lectures with low-level questions and answers to give the appearance of enquiry (Cheng, 2004). These criticisms may be too harsh, however, as testing the proposed pedagogies and changing the classroom culture and teachers’ mentality and practices could take a long time.

Secondly, the ability of curriculum reform to reduce students’ heavy study and examination load by promoting assessment for teaching and learning (rather than *vice versa*) has been questioned. This study pressure manifests itself in long school hours; students learning more (and more difficult) content than the curriculum requires; different forms of drilling, including supplementary lessons organized after school and on non-school days, and additional exercises and mock examination papers (Gu & Shi, 2010). The CPC Central Committee and State Council (2010) identified reducing this study load as an important task for China’s education reform and development between 2010 and 2020, and expected the 2011 fine-tuned curriculum for basic education to hasten this goal.

Despite its good intentions, the 2011 curriculum might not be able to do so, as shifting the classroom curriculum paradigm involves several intertwined, extra-curricular barriers. The first relates to structural problems in China education system. Despite the expansion of senior-secondary education in the early 1990s and higher

education in 1999, competition for post-compulsory education spots remains very keen. In 2011, 84% of age cohorts were admitted to senior-secondary education (grade 10), while only 26.9% went on to degree and sub-degree programmes in higher education (MoE, 2012c). Public academic examination scores remain a major determinant of access to further education; getting a place in famous senior secondary schools and universities normally requires higher scores and is therefore more competitive. In addition, China's one-child policy feeds parents' sociocultural fear of having their child fall behind, and their desire to have their child be a 'dragon' or 'phoenix' and enjoy a better future (Q. Huang, 2012).

An additional barrier involves widespread, symbiotic webs of interest among different education stakeholders. The first involves money-making; despite being forbidden to do so by the State Council (2011), it is not uncommon for government units, schools and publishers to profit from parents' fear of having their child lag behind, by requiring students to buy supplementary learning materials or drilling exercises, or attend fee-for-service tutorial lessons outside school hours. Another web of interests is more subtle. In many areas in China, students' academic performance is linked to their assessment by teachers, their teachers' assessment by their schools, schools' by educational authorities, and educational authorities' by local governments (Law, 2006). Many parents and students use public examination and competition results as major criteria for assessing and choosing schools, thus affecting schools' reputation, status, student intake and funding (particularly from non-government sources, such as sponsorship fees from parents). As such, schools compete for better students, force teachers to give more drills and examinations, and promote their students' performance and promotion rates to parents to attract new students. Similarly, local educational authorities use students' academic performance to assess school performance, while local governments use school performance to assess those same local educational authorities, thus creating a vicious cycle of assessment, with students' needs largely disregarded.

In March, 2013, the MoE (2013a) started a Long March Campaign for Reducing Study Load (*jianfu wanlihang*) in primary and junior secondary schools across China. The MoE (2012b) also moved to hold principals and deputy principals accountable by incorporating five major items into their professional standards: not freely raising the difficulty of the curriculum; reducing students' study time; discouraging the over-pursuit of academic performance; stopping teachers from offering fee-charging tutorial lessons; and forbidding the promotion of commercial goods and services to students.

Whether China's new efforts will rectify the above-mentioned irregularities remains to be seen. Since the founding of socialist China in 1949, both national and local governments have attempted, in vain, to use administrative regulations and measures to reduce students' heavy study load (Zhang & Fan, 2009); thus, there is no compelling reason to believe that these recent initiatives will fare any better. The impact of limited access to higher education, the vicious cycles of assessment and the sociocultural psychology of not falling behind are strongly entrenched across China and remain strong impediments to the realization of a paradigm shift in Chinese classroom curriculum.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

To help explain how China copes with 21<sup>st</sup> century manpower challenges, this article has examined the dynamics, complexity and constraints of China's curriculum reform

over the past 20 years. It has demonstrated that, in China, curriculum reform was used by the state as an important human development strategy to meet the state's emerging manpower needs by resetting the aims of schooling and socially (re)distributing and (re)prioritizing knowledge through content selection. The process was propelled by China's need to sustain its growth and remain competitive in a global age, its longstanding historical aspirations for modernization and a return to global prominence (stemming from its military defeats at the hands of foreign powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), as well as its need to cope with educational issues arising from change in school clientele since the late 1980s due to enrolment expansion.

As such, the Chinese government played an important role in generating and recontextualizing pedagogical discourse. Specifically, the state was a major mediator between the nation and the world, and between curriculum and society. It highlighted, in the institutional curriculum, the nation's aspirations for modernization, as well as broad societal goals and conceptions of general pedagogies in response to domestic and global socio-economic changes, including those stemming from globalization. It was a principal selector, choosing and prioritising the knowledge, skills and competences to be included in the programmatic curriculum standards, and served as a gatekeeper and reinforcer of socialist values, Chinese culture and national identity among students in China's pursuit of global ascendance. The Chinese curriculum reform, however, may not come to fruition as hoped for at the classroom level, because the major problems it addresses (such as learner-centric pedagogy and students' heavy study load) cannot be solved by reselecting and reprioritizing curriculum components alone. The realization of the new curriculum is challenged by both curricular and extra-curricular factors.

This article contributes to the literature on curriculum making and to specific studies on Chinese curriculum and social change. Although there is a body of curriculum research focusing on assessment and standards-based curriculum reform, this article has demonstrated that curriculum (re)making remains an important educational concern in countries like China. China's curriculum reform shares some of the features of state-based curriculum making frameworks, including: the vital role of the state in shaping the institutional curriculum as a social perception of schooling and society, and in deciding what is to be included in the programmatic curriculum standards (Westbury, 2008a); the regulation of the social distribution of knowledge, as well as of social power and control during the generation and recontextualization of the pedagogical discourse (Neves & Morais, 2001); and, the involvement of different actors to co-shape the curriculum and participate in its making at various levels (Kirst & Bird, 1997; Westbury, 2008a) so as to balance diverse interests and ensure that the reform is, at least, less effectively challenged (Haft & Hopmann, 1990).

Despite these similarities, China's case demonstrates four interesting, distinctive features. First, China's case shows that the state can employ curriculum reform as an essential strategy for enhancing the quality of its human capital and its international competitiveness by reselecting and reprioritizing in programmatic curriculum standards what to be learned and mastered at which learning stage. Second, it demonstrates that the state can use a two-stage approach to curriculum making to legitimise and moderate planned changes. In the case of China, this approach consisted of a Principal Stage in which the course and contents of major institutional and programmatic curricula were set, followed by a 10-year long Fine-tuning Stage that saw the piloting of and collection of evidence from the experimental curriculum standards for different subjects at the classroom level across the country, the soliciting of feedback from political and professional fields and, in particular, frontline teachers

and principals, and the making of appropriate curriculum amendments. Third, the case of China shows that while pigeonholing subject-related knowledge, skills and dispositions into different subjects, the state transcends subject boundaries and holds all subjects responsible both for promoting the skills and attitudes that bring students closer to the world, and also for reinforcing in them a socialist national identity and sense of pride in China's historical and contemporary achievements.

Fourth, China's case shows that dominant state governments, like China's, can learn how to engage stakeholders, and to facilitate their engagement with and participation in different stages of curriculum making. In the Principal Stage, as shown above, the Chinese state learned to engage other stakeholders, such as students, teachers, principals and experts, in drafting experimental curriculum standards. In the Fine-tuning Stage, the scale and scope of that engagement was greatly increased and made more systematic, as the state fine-tuned the curriculum standards. The Chinese state's efforts reflect the new dynamics of its interactions with various players, its acceptance of consultation and evidence to inform its decision making, and its willingness to build consensus and solicit popular support in public processes to tame planned changes and translate the institutional curriculum into programmatic curricula for different subjects, and thence to the classroom.

Moreover, this article advances extant studies on Chinese curriculum and social change in two major ways. First, the article supplements the literature on Chinese curriculum and globalization, which has focused mainly on the economic function of curriculum (e.g., Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Jianjun Wang, 2012), by expanding its scope of analysis to include the socio-political function of curriculum, so as to provide a better interpretation and explanation of the Chinese curriculum and its reform. The article has shown that curriculum's economic and socio-political functions were equally important factors in Chinese curriculum reform in the 2000s. The 2001 and 2011 institutional and programmatic curricula reveal China's struggle between opening itself to the world and promoting nationalism in a global age. On the one hand, China significantly revamped its programmatic curriculum and sought to change what is taught and learned in classrooms, and how, to equip Chinese students with the necessary knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, it continued to emphasize the transmission of socialist values to students in the Principal and Fine-tuning Stages of the curriculum reform, and stressed the promotion of Chinese civilization and culture in the Fine-tuning Stage.

The latter suggests an interesting relationship between national building, culture and curriculum. Lawton (1975) saw curriculum as a selection from the culture of a given society and an important vehicle for cultural transmission to future generations. People's views of culture, as Thaman (1993) argued, can affect their attitudes towards education and curriculum. In China, giving Chinese culture such a high profile in the new curriculum required the CPC-led state to reposition the role of Chinese culture in China's modernization and rejuvenation. To some extent, the official reinstatement of Chinese culture in the 2011 school curriculum represents a retreat from the state's earlier denunciation of traditional Chinese culture as a barrier to development, and signifies culture's importance to China's nation building and revival.

The new Chinese school curriculum is tasked with being an important medium for cultural and heritage preservation. The trajectory of China's tension between development and national identity since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as presented earlier, suggests that the more China opens to and engages in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the more

open and responsive the curriculum will be to foreign concepts and practices, and to encouraging Chinese students to remain globally competitive and closer to the world. The more integrated China becomes with the world, the more urgent its need to reinforce its students' Chinese identity, particularly their knowledge about and sense of identification with Chinese culture and their pride in and sense of belonging to a CPC-led China.

Second, the article advances studies on Chinese curriculum reform, which mainly attribute China's failure to apply imported foreign educational concepts in its reforms to Chinese cultural traditions (e.g., F. Q. Huang, 2004) or examination pressure (e.g., Cui & Wang, 2006; Dello-Iacovo, 2009), by offering a more complex explanation. It has demonstrated that China's curriculum reform is likely limited by three inter-related, extra-curricular constraints. First, it is impossible to separate curriculum reform from other economic, political, social, and cultural forces, or for it to be a panacea for the myriad longstanding and deep-seated problems confronting China's education. Second, curriculum changes seldom succeed without favourable extra-curricular conditions, such as broadening students' access to higher education and narrowing the gap between good and weak schools. Third, societal culture can be a strong barrier to curriculum reform. Although experimental curriculum standards have been implemented for more than 10 years, the intended curriculum changes have been hindered by students' heavy study load and examination pressure, vicious cycles of assessment in judging performance, and the domino effects of a deep-seated sociocultural psychology on the part of parents, students, teachers, schools, and local governments.

To conclude, Chinese curriculum reform, as a key human capital development strategy since the early 1990s, has been driven by new economic, socio-political and educational needs resulting from globalization. China sought to use curriculum reform to realize its century-old dream of national revival, enhance its competitiveness in the face of intense global competition, and maintain its national cultural distinctiveness and socialist identity under the CPC's leadership. The state serves as an important actor, charting the course of pedagogical discourse and regulating the social distribution of what is taught and learnt in school by mediating curriculum reform between society and schooling, and between China and the world. It remains to be seen whether the 2011 fine-tuned curriculum will help China balance globalization and nationalism, and whether it will bring about the intended curriculum changes needed to enhance the quality of China's manpower and sustain its growth and rise in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Similar to its 2001 experimental counterpart, the fine-tuned curriculum is expected to confront both curricular and extra-curricular factors that curriculum reform alone cannot address.

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