

*Mobilising Morality: Moral Education
Reform within China's 21st Century 'New
Era'*



by
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Preface

I declare:

- This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.
- It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.
- It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Faculty of Education Degree Committee.

Abstract

Title: *Mobilising Morality: Moral Education Reform within China's 21st Century 'New Era'*

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The purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of Chinese moral education reforms under the scope of Xi Jinping's 'New Era' national reforms. It does this through examining the relationship between the *prescribed* expectations and *lived* realisations of moral education reform within the compulsory moral education class (*deyu*) in Mainland Chinese primary schools.

This research adopts a constructivist and grounded theory epistemological perspective. Theoretically, it draws upon cross-cultural theories of moral education, socio-political philosophy, cultural hegemony, and moral philosophy. The research methodology utilises a mixed methods approach to critically analyse the current state of moral education and its socio-political implications. Methodologies used include autoethnography, critical discourse analysis, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and quantitative surveys.

It was originally assumed that there would be a prominent disparity between the *prescribed* expectations and *lived* realisations of moral education reform due to vague official policies that included few details regarding implementation or assessment measures. This research found this to be true, but also found that the functional role of moral education reforms extends far beyond the classroom. The effect of this was that moral education not only *passively* facilitates social change, but *actively* produces social change. This thesis suggests that moral education is a driving force in an ideological policy feedback loop that reproduces cultural hegemony and ruling Party legitimacy. By highlighting the integral role of moral education within ongoing socio-political transformations in contemporary Chinese society, this thesis argues that moral education is a driving force for Chinese 21st century 'New Era' development.

Keywords

Moral education, People's Republic of China (PRC), ideological education reform, ethnography, critical discourse analysis, legitimacy, hegemony

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Mǔ dān suī hǎo, zhōng xū lǜ yè fú chí

Although the peony is beautiful, it depends entirely on help from the green leaves
(however brilliant you may be, you can't do anything without support from others)

I have always loved Chinese idioms; phrases that succinctly convey rich history, culture, tradition, and emotions in only a few characters. Whenever I struggle to find appropriate words, I scour my Chinese dictionary for a pithy phrase that captures my thoughts in a concise yet eloquent manner. As I flipped through the dictionary for inspiration on how to acknowledge and thank the countless individuals who have been instrumental in my PhD journey, the idiom above stood out. While I am proud of this thesis and the academic I have become, my success during the past three years is built upon the support and encouragement of those around me.

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Definition of Terms

People's Republic of China (PRC)	also 'Mainland China' (<i>zhonghuarenmingongheguo</i>) 中华人民共和国
Chinese Communist Party (CCP)	founding and sole governing political party of the PRC
Ministry of Education (MOE)	a branch of the State Council of the PRC that manages compulsory, vocational, and tertiary education
National Plan Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)	(National Plan) comprehensive education reform policy introduced by Hu Jintao in 2010 for the development and modernisation of the Chinese education system
Socialism with Chinese Characteristics	guiding political theory of PRC, incorporating Marxist-Leninist theory, Deng Xiaoping Thought, Three Represents, Xi Jinping Thought, and other philosophies
Xi Jinping	(1953–) paramount leader of PRC, currently General Secretary of CCP, Chairman of Central Military Commission, and President of PRC (in office 2012–present)
Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era (Xi Jinping Thought)	set of political and governing theories formulated by Xi Jinping; incorporated into the Chinese constitution in 2017
Core Socialist Values	(<i>zhongguosheshehuizhuyihexinjiazhiguan</i>) Official interpretations of Chinese socialism consisting of 12 values: prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship

China Dream	(<i>zhongguomeng</i>) Propaganda campaign first mentioned in 2012 and developed by Xi Jinping for the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'
Compulsory education	(<i>yiwujiaoyu</i>) 1986 Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education required all citizens to attend school for a minimum of nine years; consists of primary school (six years) and junior secondary school (three years) and is managed by the MOE
Primary school	(<i>xiaoxue</i>) grades 1-6 in compulsory education system (ages 6-11)
Junior secondary school	(<i>chuzhong</i>) grades 7-9 in compulsory education system (ages 12-14)
Senior secondary school	(<i>gaozhong</i>) optional continuing education of grades 10-12 (ages 15-18); students can also pursue vocational education after junior secondary school
<i>Zhongkao</i>	Senior High School Entrance Examination: annual standardised examination for ranking and entrance into senior secondary schools, usually taken in the last year of junior secondary school
<i>Gaokao</i>	National College Entrance Examination: annual standardised examination for entrance into tertiary education, usually taken in the last year of senior secondary school
Morality (<i>daode</i>)	Composed of two characters, <i>dao</i> (道) and <i>de</i> (德), it is a key concept of Confucian, Daoist, and Chinese Buddhist philosophy pertaining to morals, virtue, and character
Moral education (<i>daodeyufazhi</i>)	A mandatory course in the compulsory education system, sometimes shortened as <i>deyu</i> ; in primary school, the class is often called 'Morals and Law class' (<i>defake</i>); in junior secondary school, the class is called 'Politics class' (<i>zhengzhike</i>)
Chinese (<i>yuwen</i>)	A mandatory course in the compulsory education system that encompasses Chinese language, reading and writing, literature, history, etc.

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Prologue

This thesis is the outcome of a much longer journey that I've taken over the past ten years. I come from an archetypal small American town near San Diego, California, a place abundant with avocados, sunshine, and conservative values. I received the standard American education at local schools, but never felt passionate about my studies. Even as I approached the end of high school, I was still unsure if I would go to university, or much less what I would study if I did attend university.

Despite my general apathy towards most subjects, there was one topic that I loved: foreign languages. I devoured any sort of language content at my school and studied Spanish and French (the only languages offered). I was enthralled by new words, phrases, lifestyles, and cultures of places I'd never even dreamed of visiting.

In high school, I volunteered to translate our school's televised morning announcements from English into Spanish, just so I could get extra language practice. One day while I was translating, I saw a scholarship opportunity to study a 'critical language' – a language not usually studied and critical to US government domestic and international interests. I immediately knew I wanted to apply and that this scholarship was the only way I could afford to travel internationally. However, I didn't have a clue which language to study. I recall my very simplistic thought process of picking a language where I placed more consideration on the country's weather than its socio-cultural characteristics. After rejecting country after country, I ended up with China as my last choice. Without finding any faults in the weather patterns (it's a good thing I didn't know about 三大火炉), I chose China on a whim and submitted the application.

To my surprise, I got the scholarship. At eighteen years old, the transformational six-week language study and homestay program in Beijing was the first time I had ever left the US and my first time away from my family. After 6-weeks was over, I realised that I did not want this opportunity to go to waste. I transferred universities and switched my major to Chinese Languages and Literature to join an intensive Chinese language program through the Language Flagship program at Arizona State University, spending my capstone year abroad at Nanjing University.

Since then, I have spent almost every summer in the past decade travelling to China to study, work, or teach. I gained fluency in the language and began to learn Chinese culture, history, tradition, and philosophy. After I completed my BA, I worked for the same scholarship program that sent me on my first trip to Beijing, a role which allowed me to see international education through the eyes of a programme administrator instead of a student. It was during that time of working for the scholarship programme that I realised how important international education was to international relations, diplomacy, and politics. Books like Henry Kissinger's 'On China' and Jonathan Spence's 'The Search for Modern China' ignited an intellectual passion in me that I didn't know I possessed, and I was eager to learn more about China, a place that was soon becoming my home away from home.

I studied for my master's degree in East Asian Studies at Yale University. After I completed my masters, I continued to work in international education while

applying for PhD programmes in the UK. There was no one more surprised than myself when I accepted the offer from Cambridge to pursue doctoral studies at the Faculty of Education. I designed my project around contemporary issues that I had seen during my studies and time abroad, trying to understand China's rapid changes that were happening right in front of me. I wanted my project to focus on the intersection of education and politics and felt this could be done in either an education or politics department. However, I chose to study with the Faculty of Education because of practical reasons, such as the feasibility of conducting distinctly 'political' research in China. But most importantly I retained the strong belief that education is the heart of international relations and global diplomacy.

My understandings of culture and education changed significantly during the course of this project. I began my research understanding these concepts through practical and applied terms: i.e., culture constitutes visual habits, customs, and norms of a certain group of people, and education is the process of learning, whether through self-discovery or institutionalised teaching. However, along this intellectual journey, I gained a broader and more nuanced understanding of both concepts, recognising that every chapter in this thesis is entrenched in cross-cultural understandings of values, morals, tradition, inherited ideas, language, and other cultural components that shape both my education and the education of the students I researched.

This thesis discusses many aspects of CCP legitimacy. I do not claim that the CCP is legitimate; rather, I highlight the numerous ways in which the ruling Party acquires and manages legitimacy. While my research indicated that many aspects of ongoing ideological reform and Xi's leadership receive broad support, Elizabeth Perry (2018) reminds us that support is not the same as legitimacy. Avenues of resistance, disapproval, and ideological heterogeneity permeated much of this research. Yet extensive censorship and restrictions of intellectual and personal freedoms make assessing the legitimacy of the CCP through the eyes of Chinese citizens impossible.

I do not attempt to lay broad claims of all Chinese perspectives or experiences of moral education, as my project is temporally, spatially, and ethically restrained. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to enhance our understanding of ongoing ideological reforms in Xi's 'New Era' through the primary school moral education classroom. It provides insight from students, teachers, school administrators, and scholars to demonstrate empirical and theoretical perspectives on the intersections between moral education, governance, and ideology. This thesis demonstrates many aspects of my intellectual and personal journey. It is thus another path along what has been a longer journey, one that I invite the reader to take with me.

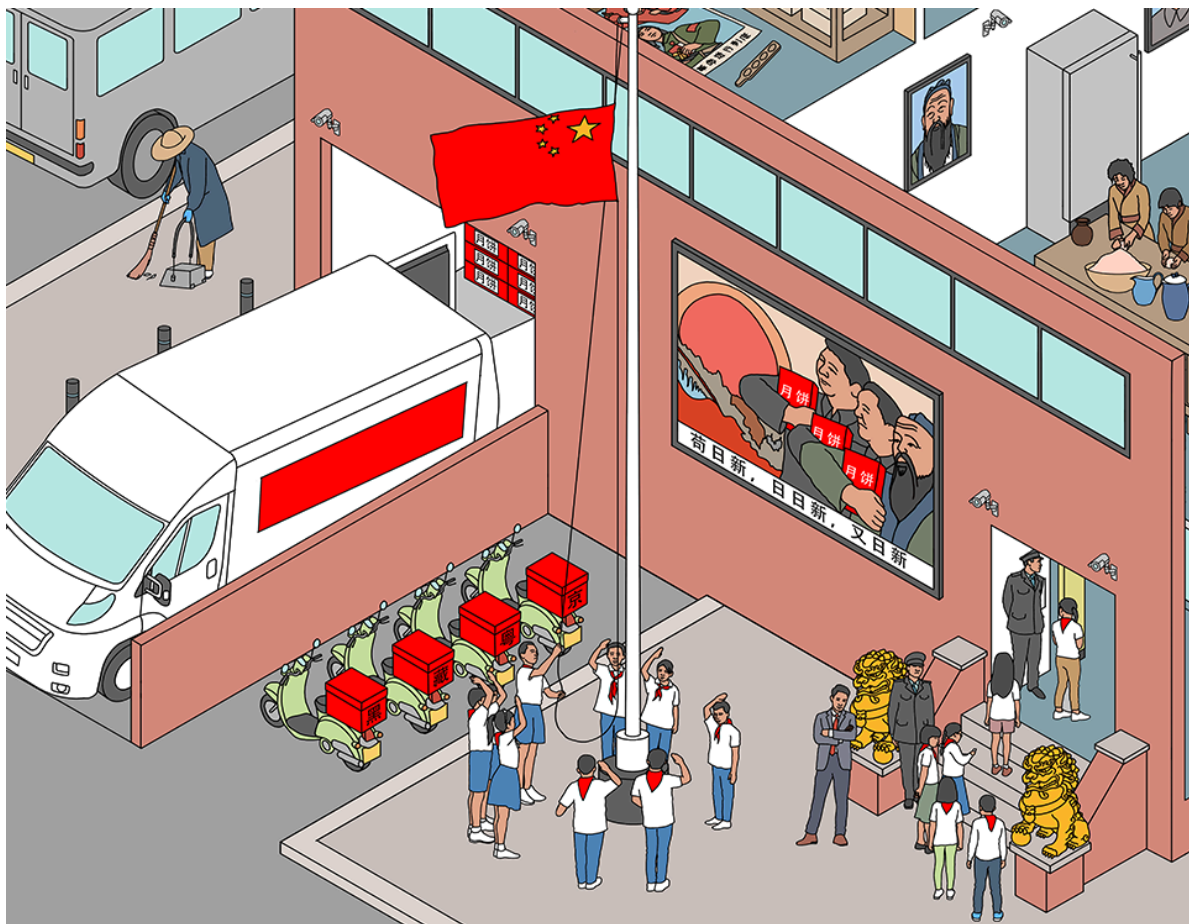
Chapter 1

Introduction

抛砖引玉

Pāo zhuān yǐn yù

To cast a brick to attract jade (To attract others' suggestions by putting forth one's own modest ideas to get the ball rolling)



1.0 Introductory statement

What can a nation's education system teach us about how it envisions its future society? Throughout its turbulent 20th century, the People's Republic of China's (hereinafter 'China') education policy was closely tied to its geopolitical strategy, with each curriculum reform responding to and reflecting larger societal, political, and economic goals (Yu, 2017). This strategic relationship between education and political reform has become a key tool in the ideological campaign led by current General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping (1953–). Since taking office in 2012, Xi has invested heavily in a particular set of ideological reforms throughout the education system aimed at shaping the ideal Chinese citizen. Reforms thus far have ranged from conceptual changes, such as equating morality to patriotism and nationalism, to tangible transformations within classrooms such as textbook revisions and mandatory ideopolitical study.

While all governments and schools engage in ideological education, ideological education has become increasingly central to the CCP's political agenda under Xi. His overarching reforms have shifted the CCP's ideological narrative in the direction of a particular moral order that creates the ideal worker within China's 21st century 'New Era.' These ideological education reforms are not simply a reframing of traditional Chinese ideology but rather constitute a stark change in the role of the education system that has not been seen since the draconian reforms of the Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong (1893-1976).

A key area of reform is moral education (*deyu*), a class within China's highly centralised nine-year compulsory education. Standardised moral education allows the CCP to design a specific course of intellectual development for youth throughout the nation. Taken in conjunction with China's ongoing widespread political and economic reforms, moral education reform provides a unique case study to examine the correlative relationship between society and pedagogy.

Within the past decade, significant ideological campaigns have been introduced within the Chinese education system. Notable propaganda campaigns include Xi Jinping Thought for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (hereinafter 'Xi Jinping Thought'), Core Socialist Values, and the 'Chinese Dream.' Many campaigns have been integrated into the standardised curricula as foundations for youth national identity. One example of the dynamic link between morality, education reform, and societal development is China's National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education

Reform and Development (2010-2020) (hereinafter 'National Plan') (PRC, 2010).¹ The National Plan is a comprehensive ten-year reform plan that aimed to tackle disparity and modernise the Chinese education system. The policy demonstrated a concerted effort to reform youth ideological education through highly patriotic and nationalist moral education.

Ideological education reforms respond to an alleged 'moral crisis' within Chinese government and society (Kipnis, 2015; Xu, 2014). This crisis has been attributed to the disunity of traditional Confucian moral dynamics, Marxist/Leninist moral reasoning of the current government, and the ethics required for a modernised state (Kipnis, 2015). Shifts in moral education's ideological discourse reflect the inherently political nature of education and knowledge production (Apple, 2013). Moral education is a crucial link between the control of cultural capital and the legitimisation of knowledge. The reinterpretation of 'legitimised' moral knowledge within schools represents processes of ruling Party legitimisation and a reinvention of ideology for China's 21st century 'New Era.'

1.1 Positioning this project

Moral education is a multifaceted and dynamic research topic which allows for various schools of thought and inquiry (Nie, 2008). Research into moral education often delves into psychology, neuroscience, religion, sociology, politics, and many other disciplines. Moral education's interdisciplinary nature reflects its central role within societal progress and development; this is particularly apparent within modern-day China.

There has been an increased interest from Western researchers studying Chinese moral education, particularly after 1989 (Ibid.: 15). However, research into Chinese moral education can present numerous questions for Western scholars regarding access, ethics, and reflexivity (Lawrence, 2020). Recent events in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and abroad have exacerbated the sensitivity of international research into ideological education (Craymer, 2020; Sharma, 2020). Government control and censorship limit research and publication. Lastly, the dynamic and timely nature of moral education reforms makes research into this evolving topic difficult.

There is a significant amount of research pertaining to the National Plan, from its role in Chinese modernisation (Yang, 2021) to specific curriculum development (Li

¹ 国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要(2010-2020年)

& Xue, 2021). Most reporting has focused on quantifiable measurements such as funding, enrolment statistics, or satisfaction ratings to gauge implementation. In addition to scholarly articles, numerous government policy briefs and analyses have reported on the success of the National Plan (Zhang, 2015; MOE, 2015; Qinsi, 2020). Many of these reports come directly from Ministry of Education (MOE) or affiliate mouthpiece news sources such as the Chinese Education Newspaper (*zhongguojiaoyubao*).

However, the National Plan contained few details regarding implementation or assessment (Tsegay *et al.*, 2017). The educational reform mission described is weighty and demanding, yet no specifics are provided in terms of *what* will be implemented or *how* these changes will be assessed. The policy's ambitious goals of registering 'dramatic improvement...in students' ideological awareness' and proclaiming 'moral conduct shall become the foremost factor in testing, appointing, employing and evaluating teachers' (Xinhua, 2010) ring hollow with the absence of clear implementation criteria and measures. In addition, the policy did not distinguish between policy *outcome* and *impact*. This gap suggests that the National Plan is an experimental policy and will be implemented in various different ways by different regions, an implementation method that undermines the policy's overarching goals of establishing ideological and moral homogeneity.

To date, very little research has addressed both the *prescriptive* changes and *lived* realities of Chinese ideological reform within the education system.² This gap raises important questions regarding the purpose of China's ideological campaigns and the role of students within societal reform, as well as the individual perspectives of the people that the policy influences. It is important to note that the National Plan is an outline of educational reform policy, not law. The basic objectives of the plan are neither new nor innovative, yet the difference between previous reforms and the National Plan is its clear timeline of modernising education by 2020 (Pan, 2016). While experimental policies are useful for governments to learn from policies and may be a contributing factor in the CCP's authoritarian resilience (Teets & Hasmath, 2020), they can also be inefficient and prone to failure. Previous educational reforms failed due to lack of understanding on how to execute the reforms, uncertainty of responsibilities, and lack of effective supervision (Ibid.). A lack of policy implementation is common in China and policy implementation research remains an emerging topic (Bi, 2006; Hu,

² See Alduais & Deng (2019) on special education and (2017) on vocational education

2012). Many top-down education policies are frequently misinterpreted or not enacted by lower levels of government (Hu, 2012: 15).

Chinese intellectuals have voiced concerns wondering whether schools will actually enforce education reforms as required (Hernández, 2017). A recent study found that education is negatively associated with trust in government, concluding that past CCP ideological campaigns have largely failed to shape the public mindset (Xie *et al.*, 2017). Despite clear ideological objectives, vague implementation and assessment methods of the National Plan underline the need for further research into the actual and lived realisations of the policy, underlining the need for further investigation in school settings.

There is a limited amount of research on the lived experiences of students and teachers regarding new moral education reforms. Comparative studies of cross-cultural moral education theories have been conducted by Ma (1988), Snarey (1985), and Yang & Peng (2017), among others. Huang *et al.* (2015), Kennedy *et al.*, (2013), Lee & Ho (2005), and Li *et al.* (2004) have analysed Chinese ideopolitical shifts by tracing moral education policy throughout different eras. Likewise, Fairbrother (2004), Nie (2008), and Xu (2017) conducted similar ethnographies to assess moral education within schools.

A review of existing literature indicates widespread analysis pertaining to the National Plan and ideological education reform but a lack of clarity regarding implementation or realised impact. The sheer volume and strong language of policy announcements within the past decade suggests that Chinese classrooms and students will have experienced a *significant change* in moral education. To date, there is no study that compares the prescriptive and lived realisations of moral education reform within China. Given that the critical study of the relationship between ideologies and education thought and practice is a neglected area of educational research (Apple, 2013: 29), this research aims to address this lacuna through a multifaceted investigation into lived moral education reform.

1.2 Developing research questions

My doctoral research topic was developed through my work and personal experience in international education programs in China. Throughout my travels in China, I was aware of the growing presence of explicit ideological work aimed at choreographing a new moral order in China. Signs of this ideological work included large billboards of the Core Socialist Values, media advertisements illustrating

China's military strength, and slogans plastered throughout public areas touting pro-CCP phrases. Seemingly everywhere I went, I was emphatically greeted by a smiling Xi and his new ideology. When I consulted Chinese friends and colleagues about this phenomenon, many nodded in a knowing manner and shrugged; most were unwilling to discuss this topic in depth. My continued inquiries were met with hesitation, indicating that the omnipresence of explicit ideological reforms and propaganda are widely recognised yet remain a sensitive topic not open to debate. This paradox seemed to contribute to a positive growth correlation between the amount of overt ideological propaganda and its sensitivity; the more one became surrounded by ideology, the less free one was to acknowledge it.

During the same time that I observed this phenomenon, there was a massive boom in establishing specialised schools and ideological study centres. For example, less than one week after Xi Jinping Thought was integrated into the constitution in 2017, twenty universities had already established Xi Jinping Thought centres; two years later, the official account listed over 145 centres.³ Higher education institutions were described as 'falling over themselves' to set up study centres (Huang, 2017b).

From a Gramscian viewpoint, and one that will be developed in this thesis, ideological hegemony requires nominated intellectuals to normalise and neutralise knowledge to appear as common sense (Gramsci, 1971; Apple, 2013). This process of legitimisation is reflected within classrooms, as schools serve to 'process' people and knowledge (Apple, 2013: 23). CCP ideology is legitimised within the newly established study centres; CCP members and educational researchers become the nominated 'intellectuals' within society. This phenomenon marks a stark change from historical events of China's 20th century, such as the May 4th Movement, the Great Leap Forward, and even the 1989 events in Tiananmen which demonised intellectuals as 'ideological enemies' and separated the university from the Party (U, 2009). The reification of the 'Chinese intellectual' as an extension of the CCP, rather than a separate entity, reflects a broad expansion of power by the ruling Party.

Bernstein (1977) recognised the structure of knowledge as strongly correlated to societal and cultural control. The targeted focus on youth moral education reform raises further questions of the purpose of ideological reforms. Moral education class within the nine-year compulsory education system, and particularly within primary school, was described to me by students and teachers as an easy class that is not taken

³ Data retrieved May 2021 http://news.sina.cn/news_zt/ddgxclxjpsxyjjg2017

too seriously because it is not tested on the competitive senior high school entrance exam (*zhongkao*) or university entrance exam (*gaokao*). I was told that moral education class time was often used to supplement 'more important classes' or extra self-study. Due to teachers' and students' ambivalence towards moral education class, moral education reforms may have little realised impact on the average student's education.

Apple (2013) notes that to understand society one must question what is seen to be 'unquestionable' and what is not debated or is accepted as 'common sense.' Furthermore, educational research should rely upon cultural and ideological orientations and connect to people's *real* understanding of their lives (Apple, 2006; *Ibid.*: 29). Given moral education's central role in the CCP's socio-political agenda, this study aims to assess the *prescribed vs lived* comparisons of moral education reform. This project also questions the socio-cultural foundations and influences of education reform and national identity, as well as domestic and foreign policy implications of education reform. Based on the prevailing gaps in literature and analysis, this project aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the *prescribed* and *lived* definitions, descriptions, and realisations of the National Plan differ?
2. How is the *impact* of ideological reforms measured, and how does that compare to the *outcome*?
3. What is the influence on Xi Jinping's ideological campaign on the National Plan and moral education within the classroom?
4. From a policy perspective, what is the societal and political rationale behind moral education reform?

This research also aims to understand morality and moral education through the eyes of those most influenced by the reforms: teachers and students. How has the average Chinese student's education changed considering these reforms, and how does their experience reflect a change in CCP ideology? If the CCP was not implementing these comprehensive top-down ideological reforms, would society, moral education, or youth moral identity be any different from their current state? With China's vast population and centralised governance system, individual perspectives are often overlooked by Western researchers who ignore the agency and autonomy of individuals in favour of overly simplistic generalisations and

presuppositions (Ibid.: 21). The dialectical relationship between ideological education and societal development remains central to this research.

The overall goal of this research is to encourage a broader debate on Chinese ideological education. However, many significant changes to China, Chinese education, and the world have occurred since this project's inception. Societal upheaval and the global pandemic have influenced this research in unexpected ways. This study attempted to not only stay up to date to China's rapidly shifting domestic and international landscape, but also to continually revise and reassess those shifts in the context of this research. While this research cannot address every change that has occurred in China within the past few years, it acknowledges the current state of CCP ideological power and influence on an important group: the nearly 260 million students in the Chinese education system.⁴

1.3 Method of investigation

The theoretical framework of this research relies heavily upon the seminal works of Gramsci (1971), Apple (1996; 2006; 2013), Kohlberg (1975a; 1975b), and others. While this research acknowledges the potential limitations in literature stemming from Chinese scholars due to the sensitivity of this research, it does not wholly rely upon Western scholars and takes an interdisciplinary approach to engage in cross-cultural theoretical analysis. The colonialist, racist, and Euro-centric rhetoric within much of Western educational and moral philosophy is identified as inimical to ethical research (BERA, 2018).

This study took place over the course of my doctoral studies beginning Michaelmas 2018 and culminating with the submission of this report in September 2021. The initial research plan included a dual-pronged approach. First, I aimed to establish the *prescribed* changes of ongoing moral education reform through critical analyses of official policy and curricula, including the National Plan and recently published moral education textbooks. Second, I planned to assess the *lived* aspects of youth moral education reform through a ten-month ethnographic study in primary schools in a provincial capital city in Mainland China. The research subject was primary schools, specifically upper primary school consisting of fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, as they represent a transitional period in students' moral development as described by Kohlberg (1975a) and Ma (1988). This is also a transitional period

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/education/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf>

between implicit and explicitly politicised moral education. The fieldwork component was funded by the US Fulbright Student Research Scholarship.

Unfortunately, the initial research plan was untenable due to the outbreak of the global coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. I was forced to leave China under concerns of safety and continue my research remotely. This proved to be a major disruption for my data collection, shortening the planned ten-month ethnographic period to five months. Given this unanticipated circumstance, I transitioned my research plan and data collection to utilise my ethnographic fieldwork while incorporating desk-based and online methodology (see section 2.5 for further details). Although the research methodology changed, the initial research questions remained the same.

1.4 Concluding statement & significance

Ideological reform has not occurred in isolation to China's recent societal, economic, and political developments. China's once unprecedented economic growth continues to sharply decline, as its GDP fell from 14.2% growth in 2007 to 6.6% in 2018; the pandemic may exacerbate this trend (Morrison, 2019; IMF, 2021). In addition, China's increased presence on the global stage has spurred international controversy, from contentious South China Sea claims to social upheaval in Hong Kong. Through strengthening ideology during a time of societal turbulence, Xi and the CCP aim to ensure the survival and legitimacy of the Party by reiterating their critically important role in societal success and stamping out any opposition (Brown & Bērziņa Čerenkova, 2018). During China's 'New Era,' the CCP will take an active role to strengthen domestic control while expanding the nation's international power.

This research presents a timely account of the many changes occurring within China's educational and ideological landscape through the lens of broader socio-political theory. By integrating research with current insights into education, this project engages questions such as: the relationship between cultural and national identity; the role of 'soft power' within an education system; and to what extent political ideology dictates citizens' intellectual development.

1.5 Thesis outline

The structure of this dissertation aims to analyse ongoing ideological education reforms through various vantage points, revealing the interconnected structures between education, the state, and societal reform. Each chapter provides a different

angle to analyse the research questions, resulting in a comprehensive yet personal representation of present-day ideological education reform.

This report begins with an introduction of the Chinese education system, contemporary moral education, and an overview of ideological policies and current reforms under Xi's 'New Era' reforms. Next, the literature review expounds upon moral education theory, a recent history of CCP moral education policies, curriculum development, and CCP methods of legitimacy. This review is entrenched in a discussion of literature pertaining to ideology, the state, and power.

Four research questions, which serve as the basis of this project, are identified based on gaps in existing literature and analysis. The methodology chapter includes a discussion of research design and theory, changes to the initial plan following the global coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, and justification for how the final research plan was developed. The following sections describes host affiliations and access, ethics, budget, and timeline.

Next, the findings are presented through three vantage points: macro, meso, and micro-levels. The discussion section critically reviews the findings within the context of educational, ideological, and societal reforms under Xi's 'New Era' initiatives. This includes a comparative analysis of the *prescribed* vs *lived* realisations of moral education reform. Following a review of curriculum development through policy experimentation, the concept of an 'ideological policy feedback loop' is applied to theorise moral education's role within policy and governance. This report concludes with a discussion of epistemological gains and losses. The final sections contain the bibliography and appendices.

1.6 Reading this thesis

The title page of each chapter includes a Chinese idiom that offers a subtle hint towards the chapter's contents and my thought process. Each chapter also has a small section of a larger illustration (the full illustration can be found at the beginning of Chapter 8). This image was developed by me and brought to life by the talented Rob Cowan thanks to the University of Cambridge's Creative Encounters fund.

The image is an intricate metaphor of students touring a mooncake factory which represents the development of contemporary moral education. Mooncakes represent CCP 'New Era' moral values, which are being produced in a modern factory. Three different eras of workers contribute to the development of the mooncakes, working under the watchful gaze of three leaders: Confucius, Mao Zedong, and Xi

Jinping. Each row of workers wears clothing and use tools typical of the era to make the mooncakes, representing how present-day mooncakes (and moral values) are a product of a unique recipe of Confucian, Maoist doctrine, and Xi ideology. Xi and the Politburo's Standing Committee keep a careful eye on the production and approve the mooncakes at the end of the assembly line. In a classroom on the second floor, students learn moral values, such as the Core Socialist Values. Scooters and vans indicate that the mooncakes are ready to be shipped to all four corners of the country. Outside the factory, however, daily life continues, with many unaware of the fervent ideological production happening behind the scenes.

Chapter 2

Research methodology

狡兔三窟

Jiǎo tù sān kū

A crafty rabbit has three burrows (To succeed you must have alternative options)



2.0 Introduction

This section details the research methodology. It begins with a discussion of the research design and theory. Then, practical details are presented, such as the selection of the fieldwork host site and institutional affiliation, focus groups and participants, and a description of the two host primary schools. I explain the changes to the research plan and methodology due to the global pandemic. This leads into a discussion of the justifications and descriptions of research tools, including ethnographic observation, qualitative interviews, and questionnaires. The final section discusses data analysis, ethics, and funding.

2.1 The development of this project

The first iteration of this project was developed during my PhD application, a time which coincided with China's 19th Party Congress in October 2017. The significant and rapid changes to ideological education that occurred during the Congress signified to me that my project was timely and important. Rubin & Rubin (2005) suggest the focus of qualitative researchers is on 'depth' rather than breadth, narrowing their research and questions to understand specific temporal or social events or moments in time. This research, which is strongly rooted in qualitative methods, follows the advice of Rubin & Rubin (2005) by diving deep into moral education reforms to investigate larger socio-political transformation. The research design is analogous to a camera capturing a wide-angle panorama. I focused the camera lens on one key area of reform, youth moral education, but the interdisciplinary analysis and mixed methods research design aimed to capture an elongated and broad field of view.

2.2 Research design & theory

This project was designed with the consultation of numerous interdisciplinary scholars, methodological trainings, and international practices. It is holistic and adaptive, combining education and political theories within Western and Chinese pedagogical and research practices. This project is informed by the work of previous scholars such as Fairbrother (2004), Nie (2008), and Xu (2017), among others, to develop a feasible and adaptive research design.

2.2.1 Ethnography

The baseline research methodology for this study is a mixed-methods ethnography. Ethnography involves the researcher not only observing a social phenomenon but actively participating through integration into the community or research tools (Reeves *et al.*, 2013). Social science research is based upon participant observation; ethnographic research allows researchers to use the reflexivity of their own presupposed knowledge to produce and justify accounts of the social world (Peterson, 2000).

Ethnography is best suited for this research due to a variety of factors (outlined in Peterson, 2000). First, this research studied people and society in their everyday environments. This allowed a more accurate assessment of the lived experiences of students. Second, data collection followed structured and unstructured methodology. While initial plans for questionnaires and interviews changed based on observational and preliminary data, I remained cognisant of discrepancies between presupposed inferences and actual observations. I used this introspection to appropriately guide interviews, questionnaires, and other methodology. Third, this research focused on a small subset of a large population to study broader questions pertaining to education theory, cultural governance, and ideological reform.

This ethnography relied heavily upon the use of ‘thick description,’ a mode of inquiry that merges interpretive cultural theory and ethnography (Geertz, 1973). This method encourages richly descriptive accounts of social behaviour within phenomenon, including details of settings, places, situations, people, and more (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holloway, 1997). Thick description is useful in ethnographic research because it transports the reader to the ethnographic scene, and also helps confirm the research’s external validity (Ibid.; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I included detailed descriptions of my surroundings and people I encountered during my fieldwork to enhance the robustness of this study.

2.2.2 The auto-ethnographic method

Auto-ethnography is an epistemic approach to ethnographic research. It combines methods of autobiography and ethnography, whereas the researcher describes and analyses their own experiences to understand cultural and social phenomena (Ibid.: 273). Prior to my fieldwork, I was confronted with numerous questions. What is the ‘proper’ positionally for the researcher? How can I reflexively yet rigorously describe and evaluate my experiences in the field, both acknowledging my bias whilst building upon assumptions to frame my research? I strove to engage

in critical evaluation of my perspective, bias, and reflexivity and challenge my own assumptions.

Hertz (1997: viii) describes the process of a researcher as ‘having an ongoing conversation about [their] experience while simultaneously living in the moment.’ Hertz’s description was aptly pertinent to my fieldwork experiences. I embodied the ‘participant researcher’ identity through my analysis of media, cultural artifacts, and cultural experiences. I engaged in critical dialogue with my past and present self through the process of taking notes and revising notes during the write-up process. I also engaged in critical dialogue with key participants throughout the research process (Bergman & Lindgren, 2018).

2.2.3 Critical discourse analysis

This research is also framed within the theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The primary motivation of using CDA is often pressing social issues which lends itself to a multidisciplinary approach in which distinctions between theory, description, and application become less relevant (van Dijk, 1993). CDA merges sociological and psychological theories to systematise phenomena of social reality (Ibid.; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA views discourse as a communicative event, relying upon collective ‘social representations’ that link individual cognition with the greater social system (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA considers ‘language as a social practice’ and illustrates the reciprocal exchange between discourse *shaping* events and *being shaped* by them (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Ibid.). While there is no one methodology of CDA (Gee, 2011), CDA acknowledges that language mediates our constructions of the world, and in doing so can reveal hidden ideological strategies that may appear ‘normal or nature on the surface’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012). CDA’s interdisciplinary approach is used to assess both spoken and written texts in relation to the text’s wider sociocultural framework (Fairclough, 2003; Liu, 2005).

Discursive practices are also influential in terms of unequal power relations through ideology. They either create or reinforce marginalised populations, illustrating the important relationship between social power, control, and dominance (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). van Dijk (1993: 256) explains that control pertains to action and cognition, such as the group that holds power using strategic methods to change the mind of others for their own interests. This leads to a parallelism between social power and discourse access: the more avenues, methods, and audiences that can be controlled, the greater the control of those in power. The

reverse is also true, as a lack of power is also measured by a lack of discursive control (Ibid.: 4).

Wang & Tan's (2013) examination of textbook usage in moral education throughout different stages of China's history illustrated that changing ideologies lead to different kinds of texts. This research focuses on content analysis of the primary sources in use during the fieldwork period, such as official policies, curricula, and texts, rather than a longitudinal textual analysis. Scholars such as Price (1992), Lu & Gao (2004), Wang & Tan (2013), and Zarrow (2015) have conducted lengthy moral education textbook analyses. These primary sources were useful in establishing prescriptive knowledge from the *lived* experiences, which are evaluated through ethnography, qualitative interviews, and other research tools.

2.3 Fieldwork location & host affiliation

My fieldwork was designed to be completed during a ten-month period in China from August 2019 to June 2020. The ten-month in-country research period was a requirement of the US Fulbright Program. The length of the fieldwork was designed to allow for longitudinal studies and insight into temporality, processes, and social change (O'Reilly, 2012). The provincial capital city of Jiangsu Province, Nanjing, was designated as the host site due to several factors. First, I have previously lived and studied in Nanjing, so I was familiar with the city's culture, geography, and urban layout. This familiarity allowed me to integrate into the host site more easily.

Jiangsu Province is a centrally located, moderately wealthy, and densely populated province in China. Nanjing, which translates to 'southern capital,' is a historic Chinese capital city. Metro Nanjing has a population of roughly 8 million, while urban areas have over 11.5 million residents (OECD, 2015). Nanjing is classified as a second-tier city, which can be described as a large, important city that has a significant economy, population, and international influence. However, second-tier cities do not yet have fully developed health facilities, economies, or infrastructure at international standards.

Nanjing's multiple universities and top educational research centres make the city an important base for education reform throughout China. Nanjing Normal University (NNU) was chosen as the host affiliation; obtaining a host affiliation was a requirement of the Fulbright Scholarship. In addition to the university's history and prestige, NNU is home to the Research Institute of Moral Education (IME) at the Faculty of Education Sciences. The IME was founded in 1994 and designated as a

‘national key research institute of humanistic and social sciences’ by the MOE in 2000 (IME, 2017). As described on the website, the IME’s aim is ‘to form an excellent working team at the national level and to be the first-grade centre for research and exchange, for training of professionals, for consultancy and for information browsing at national or even international levels’ (Ibid.).

Affiliation with NNU and the IME allowed direct access to top Chinese moral education scholars, practitioners, and government officials which bolstered the safety and reputation of my project by grounding my research within a local and trusted university. *Guanxi*, or ‘relationships,’ is an essential quality in Chinese personal, political, and business interactions (Qi, 2013). *Guanxi* stems from Confucian ideology and is described as: ‘relation-centred and collaborative culture that seeks relationship harmony’ (Qian *et al.*, 2019: 2). While different types of *guanxi* exist (Chen *et al.*, 2013), it remains central to business and interpersonal relationships.

Guanxi is similar to the Western idea of ‘gatekeepers’ who allow access to participants (Lawrence, 2020). Formal and informal gatekeepers (Seidman, 2006) are accessed by researchers through established relationships. *Guanxi* is indicative of a mutually beneficial relationship that grows from existing interpersonal relationships or from researchers establishing themselves as credible and providing mutual benefit. I first established *guanxi* with my host affiliation at NNU through my cultural and linguistic fluency and experience in China. My host advisor at NNU was Professor Feng Jianjun, a leading scholar in Chinese moral education and ideological thought; he is the current director of the IME. Professor Feng welcomed my project and supported me through a myriad of ways. He was instrumental in linking me with schools, scholars, and research participants, and provided knowledgeable advice and suggestions on my research. Another prominent scholar at the IME is Professor Lu Jie, who is the editor of the standardised moral education textbooks titled, ‘Morality and Rule of Law’ (Lu, 2019).

I was guided by my host institution to select two schools as the focus groups of my study. Schools were chosen as they were both available during the research period and willing to provide access and support. Researching two schools led to adopting a method of comparative case study (CCS), which involves two or more cases and emphasises comparisons and contrasts across different contexts (Goodrick, 2014). CCS can be beneficial to understanding the success of programs or policy initiatives by ‘tracing’ phenomena (in this case, moral education reform policies) throughout

multiple sites (Ibid.). CCS is a useful methodology to provide in-depth analyses of moral education reform in different settings.

2.4 Focus groups & participants

I chose to research public primary school students between grades 4-6 (typically ages 8-11). Primary schools are subject to mandatory education laws and a nationally standardised curriculum. Enacted in 1986, the Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education guarantees all Chinese youth nine years of free compulsory education (MOE, 2009a), comprising of six years of primary school (ages 5-11) and three years of junior secondary school (ages 12-14). According to official data from 2018, the MOE estimates 99.95% of school-age children are enrolled in school (MOE, 2019a). In 2018, there were 161,800 primary schools with an enrolment of 18.673 million pupils; recent statistics place net primary school enrolment of registered Chinese youth at 98.9% (MOE, 2019a).

Grades 4-6 were chosen as the focus group because they represent a transitional period in moral education. Grade 6 is the final year of primary school; once students enter Grade 7 in junior secondary school, moral education shifts to more explicit political and Party-affiliated education (Huo & Xie, 2021). The National Plan and Xi Jinping's moral education reforms suggest they aim to change primary school moral education to a more politically oriented context.

According to J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg's theories of moral development (see Chapter 4), children in primary school undergo a significant shift in their recognitions of morality during this time, typically shifting from an individualistic to a conformist recognition of morality (Kohlberg, 1975a; Piaget, 1932). This transition also includes understanding what constitutes a good citizen within a socialist society (Shu, 2016). Therefore, the curricula developed for this age group provides significant insight into the role of morality in China's planned future and how concepts of morality merge with socio-political identities in later education.

2.5 Changes to research plan stemming from the pandemic

The original research plan included a ten-month ethnographic study at both host primary schools; all ethnographic and qualitative data collection would be collected in-person within that period. I spent the first few months of the research period gaining access to the host schools, familiarising myself with each campus and school culture, the curriculum, and students and teachers. Given sensitivities towards

foreign researchers, it was not feasible to curate relationships before my arrival in China. I undertook some initial surveys and ethnographic work between September and November 2019, but students and teachers became very busy in the lead-up to the mid-term exams and Chinese New Year in December 2019 and January 2020. Both schools ended their first term on 10 January 2020, and I hoped to resume my ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and surveys in earnest after the Chinese New Year.

Unfortunately, the global pandemic stemming from the coronavirus disease COVID-19 significantly impacted this research. In late January 2020, weeks into the pandemic's outbreak in Wuhan, the US Fulbright Program ordered all scholars to immediately leave China for safety and security reasons. Given such short notice, I left Nanjing on the next flight available on January 30th, 2020. I anticipated leaving China for one or two months and continuing with the original research plan upon my return.

However, I was wrong. I became keenly aware of Arksey & Knight's (1999) apt warning that researchers should 'not assume that your study will proceed as you imagined.' As the pandemic grew in severity, I realised my initial plan was untenable, as travel bans inhibited my ability to return to China before my visa expiration. I would not be able to continue in-person ethnography, longitudinal classroom observation, or face-to-face interviews. Given this unprecedented setback, I was forced to design a new plan that allowed me to conduct research without crossing international borders. A significant challenge of this redesign was maintaining ties with the host schools while they had to navigate the pandemic while transitioning to online learning. I found it difficult to ask for information on teachers' plans for moral education during the first half of 2020 because China was grappling with the largest wave of the pandemic at that time, and moral education (and my research project) was a low priority in the greater scheme of things. I therefore had to carefully prioritise when and why I contacted my host affiliates from abroad and made sure that any requests I made were simple and straightforward.

One of the biggest challenges I faced when transitioning my research project from a ten-month in-country study to a five-month in-country, five-month remote study was my inability to conduct an in-depth, longitudinal ethnography. At the beginning of my fieldwork in September 2019, I was invited to numerous events at both host schools planned throughout the school year, such as moral education field trips, school performances, teacher seminars, and an annual international US-China

student & teacher exchange programme. All of these events were cancelled for the 2019-2020 academic year.

I intended to use the ethnographic period to engage with children's perspectives on a deeper level. I hoped to observe their peer-to-peer and adult interactions in various contexts, and intellectual and personal development over the course of the school year. In order to see moral education through students' own perspectives, I designed a participatory photography activity (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2018; Jewitt, 2012) for students. This activity utilised photography by giving students a camera to document moral education, morality, and ideology from their own perspectives so I could understand moral education through the eyes of students, a perspective commonly overlooked. This activity aimed to shift my research from a hierarchical power dynamic (such as researcher to student or adult to child) to a two-way communication model which encourages an equalisation in power dynamics (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2018).

In addition, I planned to engage with parents to understand their involvement in youth moral ideology and their perspectives of moral education reform for their child's intellectual development. Guided by studies such as Zou *et al.* (2013) and Ji & Koblinsky (2009), I hoped to use ethnographic methodology at students' homes to understand if and how the curriculum extends to students' home life, particularly considering many of the textbooks gave explicit instructions to children of how to act at home or interact with their family. Considering many Mainland Chinese parents are highly involved in their child's education (Zou *et al.*, 2013), this research would have given ethnographic context to student-parent dynamics and perceptions of moral education.

I planned to conduct multiple surveys and interviews at various stages during the fieldwork period to gauge youth ideological development and teacher experiences over the course of the school year. I also hoped to integrate cross-sectional surveys with S1 & S2 to gauge multiple different variables at both schools at the same point in the school year, for example student learning objectives, pace of the curriculum, youth moral development, and the influence of any new policies or curriculum objectives on teachers' perspectives or the daily experiences of the moral education classrooms. I was unable to continue with these plans due to lack of access and school closures during the beginning of the pandemic.

Given the ethical and safety concerns guiding my methodological design, I hoped that interviews could be arranged and conducted in a somewhat informal and

casual in-person manner. I hoped to establish my presence at the host schools through my ethnographic study to make myself easily recognisable on campus and non-threatening to teachers. I would have preferred interviews to take place in a casual setting, such as a restaurant, cafe, or park, in order to make the interviewee feel most comfortable and reduce the chances of the interview being recorded by a third party or censored. Although online interviews elicited significant findings, I remain cognisant that the quality, content, and depth of the interviews would likely have differed if they were conducted in-person as originally planned.

Lastly, I aimed to use my time in-country to explore the process of an ideological policy feedback loop from empirical perspectives, which is an understudied area (Ci, 2014). I hoped to gain more access to school policies, initiatives, and training, as well as how school officials respond to directives from local, provincial, and national governments. I also intended to measure perspectives of an existing moral crisis from teachers, school officials, and parents, and assess the impact of moral education reforms on societal moral crises. This component of my research was not feasible once I had left the country and had very limited access to teachers and school resources, so I transitioned my research plan to analyse moral crises and ideological policy feedback loops from a theoretical perspective.

Given my inability to conduct my research as planned, I designed a new methodological framework that incorporated a five-month in-country ethnography, online qualitative interviews, and a stronger focus on desk-based research such as textbook and policy analysis to make up for the lack of in-country access. The theoretical backings of ethnography and CDA remained constant and continued to guide this research. The following section describes the practical research tools used during this study, including CDA of textbooks, observational data, qualitative interviews, and questionnaires. These were integrated into the project to provide further analysis into the *lived* realisations and individual understandings of ongoing reforms. All research tools were designed to be simple for the participant and easily interpretable by the researcher (Kelley, 2003). The following section details the research tools used for the redesigned research plan inclusive of a five-month in-country, five-month online study.

2.6 Research tools

2.6.1 Critical discourse analysis of textbooks

Chapter 5 uses frameworks of CDA (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Gee, 2011; Machin & Mayr, 2012) to reveal ways in which textbooks represent discursive tools of mobilisation to shape normative forms of thought, actions, and identity. CDA helped to highlight the relationships between language and power under the assumption that power relations are negotiated through discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 272, 258). Data was collected through close reading, content analysis, and an examination of the textual, visual, and lexical constructions of textbooks. These themes were coded and categorised by myself and analysed in relation to 'New Era' ideological education reforms.

Primary school moral education is the first formal experience of ideological education for most Chinese youth. Therefore, textbooks represent an important stage of ideological Party-building for youth during a transitional period of their ideological development. Lower primary school moral education in grades 1-3 (ages 6-8), focuses on simplistic topics such as health, safety, and awareness. Students in late childhood (approximately ages 9-12, the same ages as fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students) experience important developments in morality and judgement (Gibbs *et al.*, 2007; Kay, 2017; Piaget, 1932). Early adolescence mental cognition transitions from concrete to abstract thinking, which allows students to understand theoretical or symbolic concepts (Keil, 1992). These factors make upper primary school an important initial platform for ideological reform that continues throughout the education system.

2.6.2 Observational data

A major component of the ethnographic study was observational data. Observational data is important to this research because it provides first-hand experience of natural social settings of the participants, which demonstrates societal, political, or cultural patterns that are otherwise unobservable (Schensul *et al.*, 1999). Angrosino (2007: 54) describes the role of observation within ethnographic research as, 'predicated on the regular and repeated observation of people and situations.' Observational data is best suited for this research because it occurs throughout specific settings and events (Ibid.: 56).

Due to several factors, I was unable to adopt the role of a *complete observer* with a discreet presence or full immersion experience (Ibid.: 54). As a non-Chinese foreign researcher, my presence in the classroom drew the attention of students who were interested in my unique facial features, clothes, and culture. Anytime I entered a classroom for observation, students would gasp in excitement, begin whispering, and

turn their heads to look at me (much to the chagrin of the teacher). I tried to ameliorate this situation by establishing a presence on the campus and interacting with students during class breaks to remove the mystery around my identity.

Given these realities, I adopted the role of *observer-as-participant* during the ethnographic fieldwork period. I was recognised on school campuses and in classrooms but maintained a detached relationship to the research subjects (students, teachers, and school administrators). This role is also best suited to researchers conducting observations for brief periods (Ibid.: 54-56). Observational research relies upon strong language and cultural knowledge and explicit awareness of the phenomenon observed (Ibid.: 57). Although I had significant experience in Chinese educational settings, I maintained a 'cultivated naivety' and ensured that I questioned knowledge that is 'taken for granted' (Ibid.: 57). This role was also ideal to minimise student distractions or interference in the school curriculum.

I visited each host primary school roughly twice a week. Monday and Wednesday I visited S1; Tuesday and Thursday I visited S2. This schedule changed at the discretion of the host school and teachers. I kept a running description of the day's observations during each visit to accurately record observations (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Tools such as a notebook and camera (when permitted) were utilised to help with observational recordings (Sangasubana, 2011). On site, I consulted Spradley's (1979, *as cited in* Reeves *et al.*, 2013) nine observational dimensions (Figure 2.1) to record all aspects of moral education.

Table 2. Nine observational dimensions (Spradley 1979).	
Dimension	Descriptor
Space	Physical layout of the place(s)
Actor	Range of people involved
Activity	A set of related activities that occur
Object	The physical things that are present
Act	Single actions people undertake
Event	Activities that people carry out
Time	The sequencing of events that occur
Goal	Things that people are trying to accomplish
Feeling	Emotions felt and expressed

Figure 2.1: Nine observational dimensions (Spradley, 1979 from Reeves *et al.*, 2013)

2.6.3 Semi-structured qualitative interviews

Interviews are described as the ‘hallmark’ of observational research because they grow logically from observation (Angrosino, 2007: 42). As a basic mode of inquiry in qualitative research (Seidman, 2006: 7), interviews are important to my phenomenological study to collect diverse opinions, perspectives, and language. My original research plan included interviews with teachers, school administrators and staff, parents, and students at the host schools; however, given the pandemic, the target audience transitioned to moral education teachers and academics, including those in Nanjing, the host schools, and in other areas of China. This diverse sample of teachers allowed a broad analysis into the *lived* experiences and understandings of moral education reform by moral education practitioners.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because they allowed a combination of predetermined agenda and questions with flexibility in practice (Schensul *et al.*, 1999). The conversational nature of semi structured interviews also fits well within this aspect of Chinese culture. I hoped to create a friendly atmosphere and inquisitive tone during interviews that reinforced positive *guanxi* and strengthened established relationships (Longhurst, 2010).

Teachers’ perspectives are an important link to compare similarities and differences between the prescribed and lived. On one hand, teachers receive direct instruction from the CCP in the ‘ideal’ moral education pedagogy, curriculum, and learning goals. In this sense, they are the linking factor between top-down ideological reforms and the ideal education for youth. On the other hand, classroom instruction is subject to numerous outside factors, such as teachers’ own internal bias, school requirements, or time or resource constraints.

2.6.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of videoconferencing

Traditional social science research dictates that face-to-face interviews are the ideal qualitative interview methodology, while other modes can be described as ‘second best’ (Holt, 2010). After reviewing the logistical and ethical practicalities of ‘virtual’ interviewing (Lobe *et al.*, 2020; Lawrence, 2020), I chose to use online videoconferencing platforms for interviews. These platforms, also called voice over internet protocol (VoIP), provide new and useful avenues for qualitative research in the face of social distancing protocols (James & Busher, 2006; O’Connor *et al.*, 2008; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Lo Iacono *et al.*, 2016). I also felt that this mode was the closest

substitute to face-to-face interviews and would still allow synchronous and natural conversations.

Despite its many advantages, there are numerous ethical and practical problems that inhibit the use of VoIP as a research tool (Seitz, 2016; Weller, 2017; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Conducting interviews with participants in China presented significant cultural-specific difficulties, including censorship, participant safety, and logistical issues such as time zones or technological difficulties (Lawrence, 2020). To mitigate these risks, I asked participants to choose which VoIP platform they preferred to use, including Skype, Zoom, or WeChat, platforms which are convenient, cost-friendly, and easy to use. Platforms banned in China, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Google Hangouts or Microsoft Teams, were not offered. 92% of participants chose to use WeChat (Tencent Holdings, Ltd.), the most popular social media application in China; only one participant chose Zoom.

Although videoconferencing was the optimal choice for my research, the use of video during interviews was further assessed to ensure participant comfort, anonymity, and ethical integrity (Seitz, 2016; Lo Iacono *et al.*, 2016; Sipes *et al.*, 2019). Hanna (2012) notes that participants may be more comfortable with interviews conducted online and through VoIP platforms because they can remain in their preferred safe environment. Most participants did not elect to use video, but this was largely due to internet connectivity issues. Participants were also allowed to select the date and time for the interview. Most interviewees were flexible with times and modes of interviewing. The most common problem encountered during the interviews was calls dropping or poor internet connection.

Widespread familiarity with WeChat mitigated technological difficulties (Sie *et al.*, 2016). However, the frequent monitoring and censoring of domestic and international WeChat accounts (Knockel *et al.*, 2020) presented safety and ethical problems. Wechat's online monitoring places restrictions on the type of speech that can be conveyed through the platform, which must avoid controversial or politically sensitive topics. As participant and researcher safety was the utmost priority, questions had to be thoughtfully designed to achieve data collection while maintaining integrity in the eyes of Chinese law. I made all efforts to ensure interviewees were comfortable, safe, and respected.

2.6.3.2 Interpretive phenomenological analysis

The purpose of interviews was to qualitatively understand how ongoing reforms were perceived, signified, and understood by educators. Interviews were also guided by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory. IPA is a research approach that focuses on personal lived experiences of research subjects (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Through a detailed analysis of the researched phenomenon, IPA allows researchers to examine 'ways of thinking' about a topic by exploring convergences and divergences across similar case studies (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012; Ibid.: 193). This method encourages 'stripping away' preconceived biases and questioning common sense or generally accepted knowledge (Eatough & Smith, 2008: 193). Furthermore, IPA focuses on the lived and socio-cultural embodied experiences surrounding a phenomenon (Ibid.: 194).

IPA is well-suited for the qualitative interview stage of this research because it focuses on the individual cognitions, perceptions, and understandings of interviewees (Smith *et al.*, 1999). This methodology contributed to the qualitative and interpretive nature of interviews by helping to identify themes and generate theory based on the lived experiences of education practitioners.

By integrating IPA and autoethnographic methodology into my study, interpretive analysis was at the heart of the interviews. I remained cognisant of performative speech, actions, and contextual elements which would enhance the rich, descriptive data elicited from the interview, paying particular attention to *what* was said and *how* my questions were answered. Although I was unable to gauge participant body language or visual clues, I listened closely to word choice, speed, and tone during the interviews and during content analysis of interview transcripts for indications of emotion or 'embodied performance' (Ezzy, 2010).

2.6.3.3 Interview sampling & participants

Given limitations on the feasibility of conducting interviews, I followed the advice outlined in Rubin & Rubin (2005) that encouraged a focus on depth rather than breadth. I placed a stronger emphasis on individual circumstances, unique understandings, and specific moments during the interviews that were revealing (Ibid.: 2). This methodology fit more closely with IPA and 'thick description' (Geertz, 2008).

Snowball sampling and professional *guanxi* were used to identify interview participants. Participants (n=14) were from a diverse range of cities, professional experiences, and qualifications. However, they were all knowledgeable and

experienced in teaching, developing, or researching contemporary primary school moral education. Interviewing a diverse group of experts was important to my study because my ethnographic observations indicated that moral education was not limited to the formal moral education class (*deyu*) but was ubiquitous throughout the curriculum. The diverse sample aimed to use individual experiences and analyses applicable to the research settings to understand how ‘ideas and abstract principles can fit together’ (Nisbet & Watt, 1984, *as cited in* Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 181).

Of the fourteen interview participants, four were university professors, eight were primary school teachers, one was a primary school Secretary (like vice principal), and one was an international doctoral student. Primary school teachers taught a range of subjects: five were moral education teachers, one was an English teacher, one was a maths teacher, and one was a Chinese (*yuwen*) teacher. For the purpose of conciseness, the term ‘teacher’ is used to refer to all interview participants. Figure 2.2 illustrates the interview participants’ occupations.

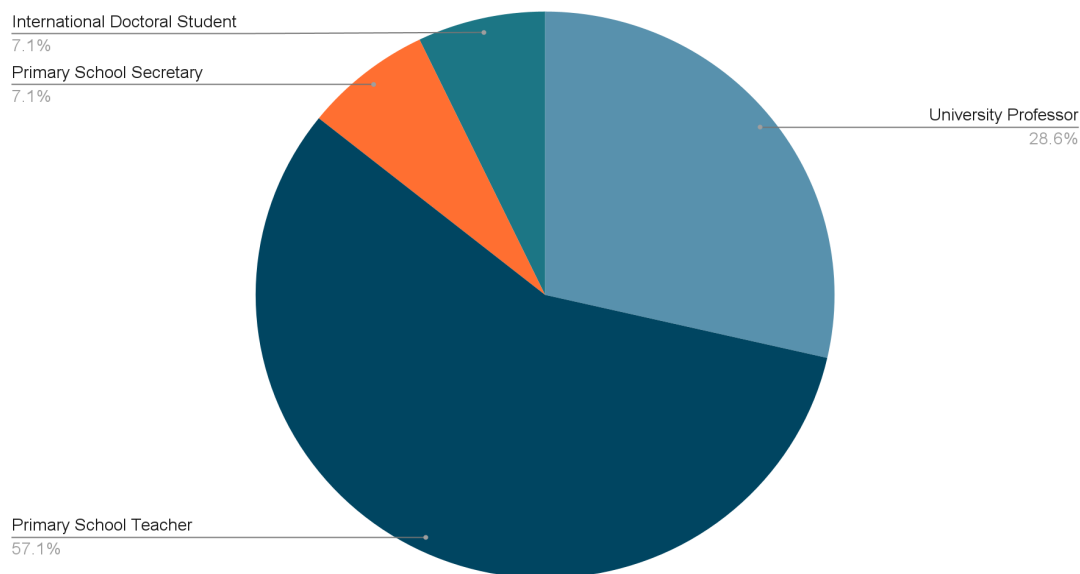


Figure 2.2: Interviewee Occupation

All participants were born and raised in Mainland China and had experience in Mainland Chinese public primary schools. Teachers were located in different cities throughout Mainland China at the time of the interview. Seven of the interviewees were in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province; two were from Beijing; two were from Shenzhen, Guangdong Province; one was from Shanghai; one was in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province; and one was in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province. Figure 2.3 illustrates the

geographical distributions of interview participants during their interview. Figure 2.4 is a describes interviewee occupation and location.



Figure 2.3: Interviewee Geographical Distribution

	Pseudonym	Occupation	Discipline	Location
1	Mr. F	University professor	Moral education	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
2	Ms. Y	University professor	Moral education	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
3	Ms. Z	University professor	Moral education	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
4	Ms. G	University professor	Moral education	Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province
5	Mr. Y	Primary school teacher	Moral education/Chinese (<i>yuwen</i>)	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
6	Ms. T	School Secretary	Moral education	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
7	Ms. V	Primary school teacher	English	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province

8	Ms. D	Primary school teacher	Moral education	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
9	Ms. J	Primary school teacher	Mathematics	Beijing
10	Mr. J	Primary school teacher	Chinese (<i>yuwen</i>)	Shanghai
11	Ms. H	Primary school teacher	Moral education	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
12	Mr. D	Primary school teacher	Moral education	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
13	Ms. D	Primary school teacher	Moral education	Beijing
14	Ms. R	University student	Sociology	Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province

Figure 2.4 Interviewee occupation and location

2.6.3.4 Interview questions & methods

I conducted a pilot interview in May 2020 with a Chinese doctoral student at the University of Cambridge. The pilot interview was helpful to resolve technical and logistical issues with VoIP platforms and to test the appropriateness of questions and identify flaws in question design (Majid *et al.*, 2017). A major issue identified was the number of questions I wanted to ask in a limited amount of time. Following the pilot interview, I narrowed the scope of my questions to allow adequate time for discussion.

Qualitative interviews were conducted during May-September 2020. In total, fourteen interviews were conducted. Interview length ranged from forty minutes to one hour and twenty minutes, with the average interview length less than one hour. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, recorded, and transcribed by myself. Teachers were sent an information sheet with details about myself, my research, its purpose, and their requirements. I engaged in informal discussion about the interview questions and my research with numerous participants before the interview. After agreeing to the interview, all teachers signed consent reforms prior to the interview (Appendix C).

Interviews utilised semi-structured methodology and were not confined to a predetermined hypothetical framework. All interviews followed a similar pattern of 'core questions' that were designed around three stages: 1) introduction and building rapport; 2) generating theory; and 3) identifying convergences and divergences amongst participants. I devised a set of ten interview questions which intersected the prescribed vs. lived realisations of moral education reform: questions were based on my understanding of official policy, teacher training manuals, and moral education textbooks (prescribed) as well as my ethnographic observations (lived experiences).

While each interview followed the same format, there was a large degree of flexibility within each interview. Question order, the amount of time afforded to each question, and time spent exploring topics brought up by participants differed throughout each interview (Shingler *et al.*, 2018). This method of 'responsive interviewing' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) reflected the flexibility of my research design and the less formal interview structure that was designed similar to an extension of an ordinary conversation. Semi-structured methodology and open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to retain autonomy in their answers. This methodology also provided opportunities to gauge interviewee opinions and to collect background information (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

2.6.4 Questionnaires

There is a growing trend within moral education research to incorporate quantitative methods (Han *et al.*, 2017). Questionnaires are useful to assess attitudes, characteristics, and opinions of a population; they are also useful to evaluate programs in schools (Creswell, 2014). While questionnaires limit researchers aiming to describe cause and effect due to the lack of manipulation by researchers (i.e., treatment groups), they are adept at describing and identifying trends (Ibid.: 402). Questionnaires provide transactional links between the established theoretical framework, the research questions, and the research methods (Ibid.). I administered one questionnaire for students in grades 3-6 and one teacher/school administrator questionnaire given at a domestic teacher conference. Both surveys were developed based on the researcher's ethnographic observations.

Questionnaires were designed to gauge participant awareness, perspectives, and variations of moral education reforms (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). I adopted a cross-sectional survey design, a method which is best suited to study current attitudes, beliefs, program evaluation, and comparison between groups (Creswell,

2014: 404). Surveys were completed by pen and paper. Student surveys were completed during school hours; teacher surveys were completed during school hours and the regional conference. Surveys were designed to be easily understood by a diverse audience and had a clear navigational path of question order (Smyth, 2016). Topically similar questions were grouped together to increase respondent efficiency (Dillman *et al.*, 2014; *Ibid.*).

Prior to administering surveys, I received written consent from school administrators and requisite ethics boards. Reliability and validity of responses was assumed to be high, as surveys were completed on an individual, anonymous, and voluntary basis (Punch, 2003). It was clearly explained to participants prior to the survey that there were no right or wrong answers and that there were no consequences for not completing the survey. All research was undertaken in accordance with best practice and safety of minors.

2.6.4.1 Student questionnaires

Student questionnaires were administered in November-December 2019. Student survey participants were chosen based on the model of simple random sampling by selecting the unit of analysis as public primary schools in a centrally located provincial capital city (S1 & S2). This model allowed for a rigorous analysis representative of the greater population of Chinese primary school students (Creswell, 2014). Convenience sampling was also employed due to logistical realities and limited researcher access.

At the agreement of the school administrator and gatekeepers, I was allocated 5-10 minutes in each class to hand out the questionnaire. Within that time frame, I introduced myself to students, spoke briefly about my background and research, and explained the survey questions. I clearly stated that the survey and all questions were optional and anonymous. The teacher reiterated this point and reassured students that their participation or answers would not affect their grades. Students were asked not to write their names or any identifying information on the surveys.

A mixture of open- and closed-ended questions, word association, and Likert scales were used in the ten-question, one-page questionnaire (Appendix G). The same questionnaire was given to all grades. Questions were developed based on the consent of teachers and principal; all questionnaires were written in Mandarin. On average, the questionnaires took 6-8 minutes for students to complete. Questionnaires were

administered via paper and collected after completion (Appendix D). They were coded by school and grade, and all other identifying information was removed.

210 primary school students between grades 3-6 (ages 9-12) completed the survey. Approximately 40% (n=83) of student survey participants were in third grade; 22% (n=47) were in fourth grade; 16% (n=34) were in fifth grade; and 22% (n=46) were in sixth grade. Both primary schools (S1 and S2) were predominantly Han Chinese and followed the government scheme of admitting students based on local housing and *hukou* ownership.

2.6.4.2 Teacher questionnaires

The purpose of teacher surveys was to collect generalised opinions, viewpoints, and understandings of moral education content and reform from practitioners. The survey was administered to teachers at S1 and S2, as well as at a regional moral education training conference in Jiangsu Province, Mainland China in December 2019. The conference was attended by both moral education teachers and university students completing their teacher training; for simplicity, I will use the term ‘teachers’ to describe all questionnaire respondents.

Teachers who expressed interest partaking in the survey were asked to provide oral consent and given an information sheet detailing the study, the researcher, and ethical approval (Appendix A). The survey took most participants approximately 4-8 minutes to complete; the survey and all communication was in Mandarin.

In total, 56 teachers from between the ages of 18-51+ were surveyed. Of these, 20% (n=11) were university students completing teacher training, while the remaining 80% (n=45) were established moral education teachers. Approximately 29% (n=16) of teachers surveyed were between the ages of 18-25; 29% (n=16) were between the ages of 26-30; 4% (n=2) were between the ages of 31-35; 20% (n=11) were between the ages of 36-40; 18% (n=10) were between the ages of 41-50; only one participant (2%) identified as over the age of 51.

The teacher survey used a five-point Likert scale to ask respondents to rate their agreement with or disagreement with twelve statements. The statements were derived from ethnographic and policy analysis data, and used deductive scale development because I was already familiar with the phenomena researched (Hinkin, 1998). The statements were as follows:

1. Compulsory education moral education (*deyu*) course is very important

2. Moral education (*deyu*) is helpful to correct the shortcomings of Chinese society
3. Children's morals and values should be shaped by parents
4. Children's morals and values should be shaped by teachers
5. Moral education (*deyu*) class has a great impact on children's moral behaviour
6. Confucianism has a great influence on the morality of modern Chinese people
7. Taoism has a great influence on the morality of modern Chinese people
8. Current moral education (*deyu*) classes are the same as the moral education classes I learned when I was young
9. Lei Feng is a Chinese moral icon
10. Chinese people value social harmony more than other countries
11. All Chinese people have the same values
12. The values of all countries in the world are in common

2.7 Data analysis

All data was collected in Mandarin. Questionnaires and interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher; they were coded with a unique numerical code to ensure anonymity and organisation. Some data analysis took place in China, but the majority occurred in the United Kingdom. Data was coded and categorised into sub-themes of macro-, meso-, and micro-level analyses, which formed the bases of Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

2.7.1 Thematic analysis

This project used thematic analysis to analyse data through an iterative process. Thematic analysis helps to identify themes and patterns within data and is a useful accompaniment to ethnographic research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ethnography focused on the iterative cycle of description, analysis, and interpretation (Reeves *et al.*, 2013).

In tangent to collecting data, I continuously assessed data for salient themes, consistencies, or incongruence. I relied upon the dialogic nature of ethnography to mitigate bias and adopt the most appropriate methodology throughout the course of the fieldwork period. Suggestions and feedback from host advisors, school administrators, teachers, and students influenced the methodology and conclusions (Sangasubana, 2011).

Qualitative and quantitative data was interactively compared to support or identify new and existing theories. For example, the initial observational data was used to guide interview questions, allowing more grounded lines of questioning

between the *prescribed* and *lived* realisations of moral education reform. Some data presented contradictory findings, such as two interviewees giving opposing accounts. I used these contradictions to guide further investigations, questioning how the valid yet contradictory perceptions interplayed within the larger theoretical context of this study. This iterative process helped to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of moral education reform within the host settings.

2.7.2 Interview coding & data analysis

Interviews were analysed through a scaffolded process. First, I read interview transcripts thoroughly and translated them into English. I then identified codes, and group codes into main 'themes.' These themes were compared throughout the interviews to identify consistencies, discrepancies, and points of interest. I also compared these themes to my ethnographic notes during the interview that analysed participant comfort, ease, and awareness of the topics discussed. In line with IPA (Smith, 2004), I aimed to understand the following questions during interview analysis:

1. How was the topic, questions, or interview perceived by the interviewees? Were they noticeably uncomfortable with certain topics, questions, or areas of discussion?
2. How do teachers (or school professionals) define and understand the current moral education curriculum?
3. Is there consistency between the interview answers, or are there strong variations?
4. Do teachers feel that moral education is politically motivated or constructed?
5. What benefits, or downsides, do teachers identify in terms of the moral education curriculum?

2.7.3 Statistical analysis

The statistical package ATLAS.ti was used to identify themes and systematically analyse qualitative data (Nie, 2008). This software can 'generate theory' on a conceptual level that is grounded in data analysis (Ibid.: 43). The main use of ATLAS.ti for this project was as a secondary method of data analysis to identify key themes or overarching structures that would not easily be visible, as well as quantitatively support observational and textual analyses. Questionnaire data was coded independently and visualised using Excel, ATLAS.ti, and the statistical package R (R Core Team, 2013).

2.8 The researcher's perspective

This thesis does not employ a traditional ethnographic method but maintains an ethnographic approach to a highly subjective social phenomenon. My perspective as a researcher, including my personal biases, experiences, and worldview, impacted the study design, analysis, and conclusion (Fusch *et al.*, 2017). From the outset, I was an outsider: I am not Chinese (ethnically nor nationally) and I have never experienced Chinese moral education. Despite not sharing ethnic or cultural heritage with my research population, I do have advanced Mandarin language and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, my experiences studying at a well-known local university and establishing *guanxi* with high-profile Chinese professors brokered relationships that would not have been accessible to others; these experiences were leveraged to provide opportunities to experience the 'insider perspective.' While traditional ethnography encourages the vantage point of an outsider 'looking in' (Wolf, 2012), I experienced a fluidity of insider/outsider roles. Both roles allowed me to gain multiple vantage points of observation (Dhillon & Thomas, 2019).

There were many instances during the ethnographic process where I was critically aware of my outsider status. For example, my presence in a primary school classroom would elicit rapturous 'oohs!' and 'ahhs' and shrieks of 'look at the *waiguoren* (foreigner)!' from students. After students discovered I spoke Mandarin, many would ask me questions that further solidified my status as an alien. I recall one third-grade student asking me if my blue eyes were natural. When I responded yes, she asked if they were blue because of special contact lenses or makeup. The lasting impression I had from this interaction was that this student, roughly age eight, was so well-versed in cosmetics yet remained relatively unaware of eye colours outside of the dominant brown eye colour of Han Chinese.

I found that my outsider status both helped and inhibited my ethnographic study. On one hand, I was generously invited to many talks and events, often as an 'esteemed guest.' In these instances, I was afforded far more respect than I merited. For example, I was given opportunities to meet guest speakers, speak with local media, and receive preferential treatment that likely would not have been offered to an insider. Yet, the other side of this double-edged sword meant I was often singled out and at times events or activities changed simply because of my presence.

I recall one academic conference at a local university that I attended at the suggestion of my host advisor. I arrived in the large lecture hall, filled with roughly 80-100 attendees, and took my seat in the back row. Ten minutes into the guest

speaker's lecture, he caught sight of me, the only non-Chinese in the audience, and stopped his speech mid-sentence. The lecture hall fell silent. He pointed at me and leaned over to ask my host advisor, who was sitting in the front row, who this 'mysterious foreigner' was. Audience members swiftly turned their heads in my direction and stared curiously; quite a few snapped a quick photo of me. I nodded and waved, desperately trying to deflect the attention. My voice faltered with embarrassment as I shouted across the lecture hall that I was a visiting researcher interested in Chinese education. The esteemed speaker continued to jovially ask my host advisor questions about me, my research, and my background – while speaking directly into the microphone and broadcasting their conversation about me throughout the lecture hall. When the speaker's curiosity was satisfied, he nodded at me, smiled and waved, and returned to his lecture.

This scenario illustrated my inability to embody the traditional methodology of ethnographic observation that studies a foreign culture from an *etic* perspective (Peluso, 2017). An *etic* view encourages researchers to be a complete outside observer and avoid altering the culture they are researching (Bergman & Lindgren, 2018). However, my presence as an outsider in different situations fundamentally altered the dynamics of my research, making *etic* research almost impossible. As Darmon (2018) so aptly described, the delicate balance of insider and outsider perspectives shifted my identity as a researcher from a 'fly on the wall' to 'a fly in the soup.'

I experienced many different and conflicting roles that influenced participant-researcher dynamics. I retained personal responsibility for the safety of all students participating in my research. Furthermore, I attempted to gain the trust of participants whilst promising anonymity for their participation. This dual ethical responsibility created some dilemmas (Hemmings, 2009). For example, when reviewing student surveys, I found one student had written that they valued freedom because it meant they could do whatever they wanted, such as 'blow up the school.' While it was clear that the student did not mean to inflict harm, I felt I had an ethical duty to report this answer to the head teacher. After I reported this to the head teacher, I discovered that the teacher viewed me with more respect, and we established a stronger bond.

Another unique dynamic outside of the insider/outsider perspective I experienced was the student-teacher dynamic. As a PhD researcher, I remained below the status of a teacher in the student-teacher hierarchy because I was still a student, despite being almost twenty years older than their young students. This dynamic allowed me to be inquisitive and play a passive role in certain situations through the

embodiment of the *learner* identity (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). I realised that many teachers saw me, regardless of my age, ethnicity, or nationality, simply as a student and treated me with nurturing guidance and encouragement. This perspective was one of the few times that I enjoyed *insider* identities and allowed me to relate to the experiences of the students at school.

Given these limitations to a traditional etic approach to ethnography, I adopted an integrative etic and emic model of research (Bergman & Lindgren, 2018). I embodied an emic approach, or 'insider' perspective, through my identity as a student at the host institution, my background as a teacher, and my knowledge of site-specific culture such as the city landmarks and parks, the local dialect, and even local cuisine. This reflexivity allowed me to utilise my dual identities as an outsider and insider at different times throughout the ethnographic process, and provided access to data through the balance of 'nearness' and 'remoteness' (Simmel, 1971, *as cited in* Kusow, 2003: 592).

Lastly, an important identity of a researcher is those determined *a priori*. Prior to conducting fieldwork research, I gained a theoretical understanding of the lived experiences of moral education through my literature review, reading, and analyses. I anticipated my perspective based on my learned experiences and theoretical study. However, Kusow (2003) notes that the relationship between researcher and participant cannot be determined *a priori*. Kusow acknowledges that the insider/outsider ethnographic identity is situational and dependent upon social, cultural, and political times and spaces. I focused on a malleable interpretation of researcher identity, building upon my *a priori* perspective and incorporating *a posteriori* knowledge into the ethnographic process. This study's focus on empirical knowledge reflects the *a posteriori* epistemic process adopted during the fieldwork research and highlights the lived truths of the researcher and research subjects through auto-ethnographic methods (Ellis *et al.*, 2011).

2.9 Safety, reflexivity, and ethics

2.9.1 Researcher and participant safety

Conducting research in China presented case-specific ethical and safety considerations. In addition to university (Cambridge University, 2020), British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), and online-specific ethical guidance (Franzke *et al.*, 2020), I considered Chinese ethical practices, cross-cultural issues, risks,

and benefits for the participant and researcher before conducting online research (Ess & Hård af Segerstad, 2019).

China's long history of institutionalised censorship, particularly within online realms (Guo & Feng, 2012), raised unique ethical issues for participants. I recognised that participation in my study could translate to real-life consequences if the CCP deemed my research sensitive. For example, under the Hong Kong National Security Law (Lam, 2020), speech or actions contrary to established doctrine can translate into severe consequences for its citizens in China and abroad. This research took every precaution to mitigate sensitivities and ensure informed consent and participant safety. All questionnaires were reviewed by the school administration prior to dissemination, and all participants or the requisite gatekeeper gave informed consent prior to the research being conducted.

2.9.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity played a crucial role in research design. Prior to undertaking the fieldwork research, I asked myself a series of questions to ensure I could safely, ethically, and confidently conduct this research. Questions included: What aspects are crucial to my research? Am I in the best position to describe what is 'safe' or 'unsafe' for another person (i.e., the participant)? What are the potential consequences, for me or for participants, of conducting this research? Who will benefit from the interview? How will the interviewee benefit?

These questions engaged with both prospective and retrospective reflexivity to consider the ways in which the researcher *affects* and *is affected* by the research (Cole & Masney, 2012; Attia & Edge, 2017). This reflection constituted the first steps in ensuring research validity and reliability (James & Busher, 2006; Berger, 2015). As (Morse *et al.*, 2002) aptly wrote, 'research is only as good as the investigator.' Therefore, I focused on critical reflection and 'uncomfortable reflexivity' (Pillow, 2010) to confront my own bias, subjectivity, and the foundations by which I legitimise and validate my research and role. I was aware that my unique background and opinions, including lack of personal experience with the phenomena I study, would shape the research, analysis, and findings of the study (Smith, 1999; Berger, 2015; Attia & Edge, 2017).

2.9.3 Ethics

This research adhered to all ethical requirements of involved partners, including the BERA and University of Cambridge's ethics review board. This study also followed the guidelines and requests of the host universities and primary school research requirements. Based on discussions with the host supervisor, NNU does not have an ethics review board nor ethical guideline documents. This is common in China, which has recently worked to set up numerous ethical guidelines and review boards among all fields of research. Research ethics largely depends on *guanxi* established between the researcher and gatekeepers to build trust and gain access to research sites.

Officially, the MOE is responsible for arranging and directing research by higher education institutions in all disciplines. The MOE has established numerous academies to continue to meet international ethical standards in research (Ming *et al.*, 2015). In 2015 the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a branch of the MOE, launched the Chinese Evaluation Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences with the goal of building an authoritative ethics evaluation system (Ibid.). It is unclear whether that goal has been met at the time of writing.

This research involved participation from children, youth, and adults. Gatekeepers provided access to classrooms, teaching materials, and students. My identity as a researcher, details of my project, and my contact information was presented to all parties in a clear and comprehensive manner via an 'Information Sheet' prior to the research taking place (Appendix A). In-country research was subject to a review by the gatekeepers and abided by any ethical requirements or suggestions made. Signed consent forms for ethnographic research at schools were collected before any research was conducted (Appendix B). Information regarding the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences was included on the consent forms and reiterated before the start of each activity. No compensation was given for participation.

All consent forms and information sheets included information concerning the purpose, methodology, and ethical guidelines of the research. All consent forms were presented in Mandarin; these were initially created and translated by the researcher using the BERA (2018) and Faculty of Education's ethical and consent form guidelines. Forms were reviewed and approved by the host university for translation accuracy and suitability.

Information collected during fieldwork research in any capacity was treated on an 'in confidence' basis. Given their consent, the host university affiliation of NNU

was named; however, host primary schools have been kept confidential to ensure the privacy of participants. All data from participants was anonymised and edited, if required, to guarantee anonymity. Participants have been identified through basic titles such as 'teacher' or 'student' or an appropriate pseudonym.

2.10 Funding

The fieldwork was conducted under the support of a 2019-2020 US Fulbright Scholarship research grant. The Fulbright Scholarship is the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' most prestigious award, which I received in April 2019. The Fulbright Program's international reputation and large network of scholars will also provide considerable support for this project in terms of legitimacy and merit among Chinese academia, government officials, and international scholars. The Fulbright Program provides travel allowance, tuition reimbursement for NNU tuition fees, and living allowance. In addition, I received supplemental funding from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) and St John's College.

2.11 Limitations

The qualitative and quantitative research methods had numerous limitations. First, the sample population, although representative of the population, does not account for the myriad of individual, economic, or cultural variance throughout Chinese primary schools which may influence moral orientation. This paper did not address homogeneity among schools, which may contribute to alternative hypotheses. Although the sample was drawn using probability to increase validity (Creswell, 2014), practical issues such as access, availability, and willingness to participate influenced the sample population.

In addition, this study was limited in size and scope. Large-scale and longitudinal studies would have allowed further analyses to be drawn on grade-related variance and the realised impact of reforms. Research incorporating social domain theory largely focuses on 'normative patterns and age-related shifts' in youth moral judgement and often fails to account for individual differences (Smetana *et al.*, 2014: 41). Future research can build upon this project to gauge unique perceptions, opinions, and variance between the individual and the generalised population.

Chapter 3

Setting the scene: Background & policy review

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After rain, the spring bamboo emerges (Rapid new growth in quick succession)



3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a discursive review of ideological education reforms and the development of contemporary moral education. The section introduces the National Plan and defines important distinctions, such as the differences between ideological and moral education. From there, this chapter details recent developments of moral education by the CCP. I argue that while CCP reforms have increased the importance of moral education, the scope and extent of moral education curriculum has narrowed to a more rigid representation of CCP ideo-political education. This section engages with questions into practices of power, institutionalised ‘cultural capital,’ and the correlation between education and political legitimisation.

3.1 The development of a literate and modern nation

Twentieth century China rapidly transformed from a poor, agricultural dynastic monarchy to a socialist economic powerhouse. During these drastic changes, the nation was forced to confront its outdated social and political systems that were inimical to a modernised world. Since 1949, the CCP has led China’s tremendous efforts of modernisation and economic development – no easy feat considering its geographically vast and diverse population. Present-day China has settled into its position as a global economic leader, successfully wielding its economic clout to expand China’s breadth and influence throughout Asia and the global stage.

A key focus of China’s rapid modernisation is its education system. During the late 1970s ‘Opening Up’ era, then-paramount leader Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) recognised the crucial link between education and modernisation. Deng’s perspective demonstrated a shift from previous Mao-era thought that viewed education as political doctrine designed to serve the Party and ideology (Zhong, 2005). Education reforms of the mid-1980s developed the education system to focus on scientific and technological development (Pepper, 1990), reforms which successfully popularised education and encouraged broad literacy campaigns (Zhang & Zhao, 2006). For example, in 1949, the founding year of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), 80% of the Chinese population was illiterate (MOE, 2009b); as of 2018, almost 97% of Chinese adults over the age of 15 were literate (UNESCO, 2020).

Today, China is home to the world’s largest education system. As of 2019, 282 million students were enrolled in 530,000 educational institutions throughout the nation (MOE, 2020a). Despite limiting factors such as a declining birth rate (BBC, 2020), China’s education system continues to grow. Official data notes a 2.1% increase in the

number of accredited educational institutions and a 2.4% increase in enrolled students between 2019 and 2020 (MOE, 2020a). Consumer spending on domestic education has also grown. Chinese parents, driven by cultural ramifications of the One Child Policy and increased wages in urban areas, have driven the market and demand for education to unprecedented growth (Lin, 2019b).

3.2 Ideological vs. moral education

Ideological education is an important aspect of most modern education systems. It refers to specific culture, knowledge, or values that guide curriculum (Fiala, 2007). China has a long history of ideological education, from Confucian discourse in traditional imperial examinations (*keju*) (Lee, 2000) to Mao-era political doctrine (Reed, 1995). Within contemporary China, one platform of ideological education is moral education (*deyu*), a mandatory course in the compulsory education system. Moral education follows a standardised curriculum and teaches a broad range of topics, including politics, history, culture, health, wellbeing, safety, and other disciplines (Nie, 2008). Moral education has always been closely associated with politics in China. The term ‘moral education’ is often interchangeable with other terms such as ideological and political education (Lee & Ho, 2005).

The main difference between ideological and moral education in the contemporary Chinese education system is their tangible representations. Ideological education is an abstract concept, guiding societal development and ruling Party doctrine. Moral education, in contrast, is a practical representation of ideology; it is printed on textbooks, written down by students, and spoken by teachers. Moral education can be understood as a form of ideological governance, whose content shifts to meet the needs of a dynamic state. Changes to moral education reflect and always accompany political change (Ibid.).

3.3 The development of moral education under CCP leadership

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949, moral education has always held a somewhat stronger focus on ‘ideo-political’ content than ‘moral’ content within the curriculum (Ye, 2013). During Mao-era governance, moral education was explicitly ideo-political education and was mobilised to teach orthodox political dogma of the CCP (Li, 1990). For example, one tenet of the highly politicised moral education system of that time, pulled from *The Quotations of Mao Zedong* (1957), left no room for

any form of moral ambiguity by writing, 'Not having the correct political viewpoint is like not having a soul' (Ibid.: 163).

Between the years 1949 and 1978, Mao Zedong's government utilised ideological campaigns to equate moral education with ideo-political education, with politics eventually becoming the sole content of moral education during the Cultural Revolution (Lee & Ho, 2005: 419; Shu, 2016). As the CCP leaned heavily upon Marxist ideology, morality was defined in relation to Marxist ideology and was explicitly used for political purposes (Lee & Ho, 2005). Mao built upon Marx's theories by viewing education as a tool for social re-engineering, socialist indoctrination, and the inculcation of loyalty to the party (Lall & Vickers, 2009; Nie, 2008). Mao saw the aim of education as serving proletarian politics and re-educating people in contemporary socialist doctrine that served the people and politics (Niu, 1995).

In 1958, schools began compulsory ideo-political and citizenship education with a focus on Marxist-Leninist doctrine and collective views of proletariat struggle (Zhong & Lee, 2008). Themes of collectivism, patriotism, nationalism, and self-sacrifice were prominent throughout the citizenship curriculum (Ibid.). Jiang & Xu (2014: 73) concluded that during this time, political education was 'deprived of its function in developing the political cultivation of individuals and was reduced to a tool of class struggle.' Moral education in the sense of educating moral personality was replaced with ideological and political education (Ibid.: 73).

Moral education was highly politicised during the development of the CCP's nation-building strategy. As a 1958 directive issued by the Party's Central Committee and State Council wrote: 'Education must serve the purpose of proletarian politics' (China Education Yearbook, 1984 *as cited in* Ibid.: 163). The CCP publicly declared the main purpose of moral education (including citizenship, ideological, and political education) was to indoctrinate youth with a specific national ideology for state-building (Chu, 1977).

After Mao's reign, the CCP admitted that dogmatic moral education was ineffective in guaranteeing youth ideo-political homogeneity (State Education Committee, 1990; Cheung & Pan, 2006). This realisation led to changes to moral education during the Opening-Up reforms under Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Deng argued that China was still in the early stages of Marxism and focused his efforts on modernising the nation's stagnant economy (Brugger, 2018). Deng's new era of ideological development focused on economic development over political supremacy (Ibid.: 416). Education was therefore shifted to promote the skills necessary for

building a wealthy, modernised, and global nation (Lall & Vickers, 2009). Deng's ideology of modernisation was a turning point for China; the country's political, social, and economic development was reflected within citizenship and moral education curricula (Lee & Ho, 2005).

During in late 1970s and early 1980s, the course gradually transitioned to a topic independent from explicit political doctrine (Lee & Ho, 2005). In 1978, moral education was established as an independent class in primary schools (Wang, 2012), marking an important distinction between ideological education as a class versus as the focus of education. The adoption of the market economy also influenced Chinese moral education by allowing for the development of unique and independent identities (Li *et al.*, 2004). However, the integration of new ideas was not always smooth. Lee (1996) highlights the CCP's struggle in the late 1980s to integrate ideas of independent thinking into the curriculum whilst maintaining a strong focus on upholding Deng Xiaoping's Four Cardinal Principles, suggesting tension between strict ideo-political doctrine and the development of moral education.

The period after Deng's leadership saw Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin (in office 1993-2003) and his successor Hu Jintao (2003-2013) continue economic development and embrace globalisation and modernisation. The education reforms of this era, from the late 1980s to 2012, aimed to cultivate national Chinese identities within a global mindset – far removed from the previous eras of isolationism and political indoctrination. Political, ideological, citizenship, and moral education were further delineated into their own identities (Lee & Ho, 2005). Moral education became a more open concept encompassing citizenship, independence, and even aspects of democracy into the moral education curriculum (Li *et al.*, 2004). Pan (2014) argues that this period saw a gradual transition and liberalisation in scope and content in state moral education policy, shifting away from previous political and ideological education and towards subjects that were inherent to the values of a new Chinese identity, a Chinese citizen within the global world. Nie (2008: 23) notes that in the late 1980s, moral education documents reflected an air of de-politicisation by integrating more consideration to students' psychological development. Yet despite whiffs of depoliticised and liberal reforms, moral education remained a method of ideological control to support the nation's socialist reconstruction (Price, 1992).

The term 'quality-oriented education' (*suzhi jiaoyu*) was introduced in 1985 and gained broad acceptance amongst educators in the mid-1990s (Zhan & Ning, 2004). The integration of quality-oriented education, which launched themes of academic,

moral, physical, and mental health development, broadened the scope of moral education to include more holistic learning objectives in addition to its core of political ideology. Teaching pedagogy was encouraged to shift from indoctrinatory to heuristic in line with other holistic improvements (Zhang & Fagan, 2016). However, despite the 'opening up' of pedagogical methods and curriculum experimentation during this time (Cheung & Pan, 2006), the content of moral education remained firmly rooted in CCP socialist ideology.

At the turn of the 21st century, the CCP engaged in a dual-stage approach to reform compulsory education curricula. Law (2014: 332) categorises the two stages of development in this period as (i) the Principal Stage (early 1990s-2001), which established footing for curriculum reform and experimental curriculum standards, and (ii) the Fine-tuning Stage (2001-2011), which refined experimental standards and integrated them on a national level. Law's framework suggests that over the course of these two stages, curriculum reform by the CCP was a delicate balance of maintaining cultural traditions while integrating external globalisation trends. During both stages of basic education curriculum development, the CCP produced, regulated, and controlled the distribution of knowledge (Ibid.).

At the turn of the 21st century, education reform shifted to focus on themes relating to globalisation, democratic ideals of education, and the concept of 'national rejuvenation' (Li, 2017). The 2001 *State Council's Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* marked a new era for moral education (MOE, 2001). This seminal policy aimed to modernise moral education by increasing quality-oriented education (MOE, 2001; Yin, 2013) and improving students' overall moral, intellectual, and physical education (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Wang, 2019). The policy called for broadening knowledge transmission within classrooms, shifting towards a diverse curriculum, and experimenting with decentralised models of curriculum development (Cui & Zhu, 2014). Pedagogical practices within moral education classes also shifted from previous models of 'abstract concepts and empty principles' to real-life examples that were applicable to children's daily lives (Lu & Gao, 2004). The policy also redesigned China's education management system by encouraging schools to supplement the national standardised curriculum with courses highlighting local and unique school-specific characteristics (Tang & Wang, 2020).

The 2002 *Morality and Life Curriculum Guidelines* integrated a focus on personal development into moral education curricula (Lee & Ho, 2005). Subsequent reforms in 2003 integrated more opportunities for student reflection and experimental student-

based learning pedagogical models, a change from earlier curriculum models (Liang, 2016). Reforms under Hu Jintao encouraged school autonomy (Xu *et al.*, 2010) and curriculum experimentation (Law, 2014), but the CCP maintained direct control of the moral education curriculum and the distribution of moral knowledge.

Early 21st century China experienced unprecedented economic growth through selective privatisation and foreign investment (Lin & Rosenblatt, 2012), economic practices that were once viewed as inimical to the CCP's founding principles under Marxism (Qian, 2000; Liu, 2018). China's integration into the World Trade Organisation in 2001 was a watershed moment for the previously isolated nation and a decisive factor in its economic success (Mavroidis & Sapir, 2019). The CCP developed new models of governance during this period that adopted select aspects of neoliberalism and shifted the nation's governance strategy to a more proactive stance on domestic and international fronts (Zheng & Tok, 2007).

Cheung and Pan's (2006) framework on the CCP's 'new socialist' model of governance during this transitory period suggests that moral education shifted to incorporate a version of 'regulated individualism' to cope with ideological tensions rising from citizens' new personal freedoms and the CCP's adherence to socialist collectivism. Cheung and Pan argue that this version of individualism, distinctly different from Western definitions, served as a 'conditional strategy' which allowed the Party to maintain ideological hegemony amid socio-economic change (Ibid.: 37). This strategy was enacted by maintaining moral education's focus on socialist ideology while diversifying pedagogy and broadening the scope of moral education (Ibid.).

Moral education's mid-2000s shift away from ideo-political education and towards citizenship and individualist education reflected a change in the CCP's core values (Li *et al.*, 2007). Globalised and democratic ideals that the CCP integrated into its governance practices during that period were also reflected in the moral education curricula that encouraged holistic education guided by CCP principles (Li, 2017). New frameworks of citizenship education incorporated a broader concept of patriotic values that included individual, community, and societal responsibilities within the CCP's ideo-political foundation (Cheung & Pan, 2006). The integration concepts of civic awareness, individual rights, and democratic principles within the curricula mirrored unprecedented levels of engagement with principles of modernisation from the CCP (Li, 2012).

Although these changes broadened moral education's scope to a more holistic iteration in the 2000s, moral education remained strongly controlled by the CCP who retained overall authority of curriculum design and management (Tang & Wang, 2020). Many decentralised policies, such as allowing local schools to develop their own teacher training and school-based curricula, were strictly controlled by the central government (Cheung & Pan, 2006). Schools were still required to adhere to national curriculum standards using CCP-published standardised textbooks (Ibid.).

3.4 A new manifestation of moral education under Xi

When Xi assumed power in 2012, China was at a difficult crossroads. The 2007 global financial crisis severely impacted China's economy by highlighting its weaknesses and dependence upon other nations' economies to maintain its growth (Overholt, 2010). The crisis threatened the CCP's 'performance legitimacy' model of governance (Zhu, 2011), which relies upon economic growth to maintain political legitimacy. Corruption was a mounting threat to CCP legitimacy (Keliher & Wu, 2016) and rising Chinese environmental pollution levels were causing millions of deaths, environmental degradation, and international conflict (Lu *et al.*, 2020). Xi confronted these challenges by quickly taking steps to reassure the public of continuity of the government and the legacy of power of the CCP (Brown & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018). While ideological education has always been a policy priority (Yang, 2017; Lee & Ho, 2005), Xi has used education reform to justify state-building initiatives and the consolidation of his power.

In 2013, the CCP issued an internal memo that detailed the ideological threats to the Party and called to strengthen resistance against 'outside' ideological ideas (Chen, 2014). Also known as 'Document 9,' this memo laid the groundwork for Xi to assume broader power on ideological fronts by framing education reform through a hermeneutic 'us vs. them' narrative that attacked 'Western' and historical beliefs (Ibid.). For example, the document described 'Western values' as attempting to infiltrate the nation's 'ideological sphere' (ChinaFile, 2013). Xi's campaign against this purported infiltration signalled a change from the ideological positionings of his predecessors who viewed Western and liberal ideas with more tolerance (Zhao, 2016; Economy, 2018: 38). However, it is important to note that the 'us vs. them' narrative against the 'West' has been a common theme throughout past ideological campaigns. Propaganda has fought against Western imperialism, capitalism, and loose Western

values (Callahan, 2004; Buckley & Bradsher, 2021) to justify CCP political ideology by antagonising international allies and competitors.

Xi raised the status and role of moral education to be positioned as a central issue in education reform and described moral education as a fundamental task of the Party (Tang & Wang, 2020). Schools were ordered to increase the amount of education on 'traditional Chinese values and culture' in all subjects, with a particular focus on moral education (Meng & Wu, 2017). China's 'traditional values and culture' in turn constituted a curated selection of history and culture that supported CCP claims to ideological legitimation (Kubat, 2018).

The production of moral education textbooks has also changed under Xi. The construction and management of textbooks is closely linked to political and social changes within China (Zhao, 2020). During the Hu administration, the CCP's approach of 'having multiple versions for one guiding principle' gave local authorities the option of selecting versions of standardised textbooks for their schools (Tang & Wang, 2020). However, the CCP under the Xi administration changed this approach to 'one version for one guiding principle' which standardised all textbooks and monopolised the writing and publication authority of textbooks (Ibid.). The publication authority of standardised moral education textbooks was consolidated to the authority of the central government (CCP, 2014b; Peng *et al.*, 2019), a move to increase education uniformity and ensure all teaching materials are directly approved by the Party (Zhou, 2017).

Changing titles of moral education textbooks also offer clues regarding the CCP's shifting ideological education perspectives. In 2016, primary and junior secondary school moral education textbooks, once titled 'Morality and Life' (*pindeyushenghuo*) and 'Ideology and Morality' (*sixiangpinde*), were combined into one comprehensive theme titled 'Morality and Rule of Law' (*daodeyufazhi*) (Xinhua, 2016b). This semantic recontextualisation of moral education textbooks mirrors the subject's discursive repositioning so as to undertake a more significant political and nationalistic role in youth education. The title change also signals CCP approval of legal elements into existing ideo-political and moral education (Chen, 2018).

Xi's leadership has reversed trends set by his predecessors to strengthen his individual power and deepen the role of the Party in education while restricting foreign ideological influence (Economy, 2018: 53). Put differently, Xi has shifted the Party narrative away from the trends of his predecessors to a model that defines the relationship of the Party and society through ethnically homogenous Han-centric

moral terms, rather than through political ideology (Kubat, 2018). This narrative, echoed throughout education and media, paints the CCP as a moral vanguard of China and Chinese society; the future objectives of the Party are also defined in moral terms, legitimising CCP's nation-building practices (Ibid.).

3.5 A foundation for change: The National Plan & Xi Jinping

Many recent ideological campaigns took root in the seminal policy outline, the *National Plan Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)* (National Plan) (PRC, 2020). This strategic ten-year reform outline aimed to modernise education, shape a 'learning society,' and turn China into a 'country rich in human resources' (Zhang, 2010). The National Plan built upon the *2001 Action Plan for the Development of Civic Morality*, which elevated moral education to a prominent status alongside political and ideological education (Zhao, 2013). It was propagandised as a collective effort through its unique public opinion-driven development (MOE, 2010a).

Improving educational quality was a top priority of the National Plan (Yang, 2017). The National Plan aimed to 'enhance' the quality of education by registering 'dramatic improvement... in students' ideological awareness, [and] moral conduct' (MOE, 2010b: 9), drawing clear links between 'quality education' and ideological education. The policy's first 'Strategic Theme' stated that moral education should be the foremost priority in education development (Ibid.). The Strategic Theme notes that patriotic, citizenship, and nationalist education, including education in the Core Socialist Values, Party leadership, and revolutionary traditions, should be enhanced to guide students' 'correct perspective of the world, of life and of values' (Ibid.: 10).

Reforms under Xi built upon the National Plan's focus on improving the quality of education (Li, 2017). Scholars have noted a change in ideological discourse since Xi assumed power (Ibid.; Stanzel *et al.*, 2017). Since 2012, particular emphasis has grown on the importance of moral and ideological guidance within the education system. For example, China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) placed a strong focus on youth ideological educational development and strengthening patriotism. It also focused on education reforms guided by Deng Xiaoping Theory, the 'Three Represents' (*sange daibiao*), and the 'guiding theories of Xi Jinping' (MOE, 2016). The 13th Five-Year Plan stepped up the ideological focus of the National Plan by shifting moral education discourse to ideo-political and patriotic education and established Xi as an ideological leader for the nation.

Xi capitalised on his elevated status with a rousing speech during the 19th Party Congress in 2017. His three-hour speech mapped out China's future rise to the global stage, promising that as the nation embraces its 21st century 'New Era' it will transform itself into a 'mighty force' to lead the world on political, economic, military and environmental issues (Xi, 2017). Xi's speech led to the announcement of 'Xi Jinping Thought as a guiding ideology for China's 'New Era' (Xinhua, 2017c). Xi Jinping Thought was integrated into fundamental law not long after its announcement (Holbig, 2018), a move which elevated Xi's status as an ideological leader akin to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. This announcement also indicated that China would experience fundamental ideological shifts under Xi's tenure.

Moral education is a major focus within Xi Jinping Thought. In 2019, Xi stressed the importance of ideological education and described Xi Jinping Thought and patriotic education as essential for China's future development (Mu, 2019). In the 2019 *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Education and Teaching and Improving the Quality of Compulsory Education* (Xinhua, 2019d), moral education was reformatted to revolve around Xi Jinping Thought and the renewed use of the phrase 'cultivate the youth by erecting morals' (*lideshuren*). This document prioritised moral education by using similar language to the National Plan and defining moral education within patriotic, collectivist, and political spheres.

The National Plan and Xi's ideological campaigns reflect the current government's agenda of consolidating power and navigating threats through moral education reform. Policies and ideological initiatives have leapfrogged off the National Plan to focus on a dual strategy for compulsory moral education reform: growth in size and status amid narrowing the breadth of content. On one hand, reforms under Xi have aimed to expand ideological education through increased funding, teacher training, and elevating the status of ideological education. On the other hand, the content of moral education has been culled down to a highly centralised and standardised version of Party-sponsored ideo-political discourse.

3.6 Growth & investment in Chinese compulsory education

Within the past decade, the CCP has made significant strides in expanding youth ideological education through a variety of methods, such as the reallocation of resources, expansion of Party-sponsored activities, and elevating the status of moral education teachers. Many of these changes reflect the experimental nature of moral education reforms on national and regional levels.

3.6.1 Reallocation of resources

The first example of expansion is through fiscal resources. In academia and higher education, existing research funding has been co-opted to support ideological work. For example, in 2014 almost all the prestigious National Social Sciences Fund of China (NSSFC) were awarded to projects focusing on Xi's 'thoughts or ideology,' a change from previous years which gave awards to diverse research themes (Huang, 2014). Today, the political oversight of the NSSFC is prominent; the front page of the NSSFC's website shows a slideshow of Xi in various activities such as planting trees with youth and speaking to young military men.⁵ The reallocation of funding towards ideological thought and the visual prominence of Xi throughout the website gives both explicit and implicit indication of Xi's power over ideological and academic realms.

Education funding in China has traditionally not met the needs of the growing population or education system (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). In 1999, government spending on education was approximately 1.89% of the nation's GDP (World Bank, 2021). Since then, government expenditure on education has increased steadily, totalling more than 4% of GDP spending since 2012 (UNICEF, 2018; Xinhua, 2019a). However, given China's slowing economic growth rate, education spending has levelled to match the rate of GDP growth (Textor, 2021). Despite nearly doubling educational spending within the past two decades, public education expenditure on a per-student basis remains well below the international average (OECD, 2021). While this data illustrates the significant progress China has made in educational investment, it also shows the country remains behind other developed nations in terms of educational investment.

The 2019 *About Strengthening and Improving the New Era Opinions on the Construction of Teachers' Ethics and Style* policy called for all schools to give financial priority on constructing a teaching team with strong morals and values that are guided by Xi Jinping ideology and core socialist values (MOE, 2019c). According to data from the MOE (MOE, 2019a), the number of full-time moral education teachers increased by almost 17% from 2010 to 2017. This was the highest increase in full-time teachers of any elective class.

The MOE has called for the need to create a 'moral atmosphere' on school campuses that are 'beautiful, positive, and culturally elegant' to enhance students' all-

⁵ <http://www.nopss.gov.cn/GB/index.html>

around moral development (NAEQ, 2018: 22). A recent report noted that 90% of schools use ‘Core Socialist Values, school motto, and school-running concepts’ to create a moral education environment. Roughly 82% of primary schools use statutes, portraits of mottos of ‘outstanding people’ and nearly 76% also use portraits and stories related to Chinese traditional values to create a ‘moral education environment’ (Ibid.: 18).

Despite chronic insufficiency in education funding, some schools have reallocated resources specifically to serve ideological work. For example, one primary school in Heilongjiang Province, the most north-eastern province whose GDP per capita ranked second to last in 2019 (NBS, 2020), created a ‘standardised rule of law resource classroom’ (*biaozhunhuafazhiziyuanjiaoshi*). This room’s sole purpose was designed to be used as ‘a base to carry out a variety of activities’ to ‘open children’s eyes’ and ‘improve [their] quality of rule of law’ (Yu, 2021). Given Heilongjiang Province’s developing economy, the dedication of an entire classroom towards ideological work suggests reforms have necessitated changes irrespective of financial cost or resource allocation.

3.6.2 Expansion of Party-related activities

The 2019 *Implementation Guidelines for Patriotic Education in the New Era* (hereinafter ‘Guidelines’) was notable for its ambitious scope which aimed to intensify ideological education (CCP, 2019). The Guidelines reorganised patriotic education under the responsibilities of provincial and local Party committees, and expressly stated that youth patriotic education integrated into the entire curriculum should be the ‘top priority’ (Dotson, 2019). The Guidelines also called for innovation in patriotic education and encouraged the development of various forms of patriotic education to enhance its appeal to youth. This call echoes a 2018 report on school quality recommendations that highlighted the need for enhancement of moral education through a combination of ‘in-class, extracurricular, online and offline’ methods (NAEQ, 2018).

The Communist Youth League (CYL), the main youth organisation of the CCP, responded to these calls through targeted ideological propaganda that appeals directly to today’s youth. Examples of new forms of Party-centric education include rap/hip-hop music, Party-supporting boy bands, and catchy videos of fictitious victories for China that have garnered millions of views (Li & Munroe, 2017). At the direction of the CYL, the focus on patriotic activities has grown throughout the

compulsory curriculum. For example, the 2019 Guidelines instruct students to visit museums and ‘martyrdom commemoration sites,’ as well as to have military training (Dotson, 2019; CCP, 2019). Some cities have integrated new nursery rhymes with patriotic overtones (NPC, 2014), while others have instituted speech contests on ‘How to be an outstanding [Party] cadre’ (Wang & Deng, 2021). Notably, one school in Hunan Province has developed ‘emotional confession’ activities for teachers and students to encourage all-around patriotic development (Ibid.), activities which harken back to Mao-era ‘struggle sessions.’ These new forms of ideological education outside the classroom constitute methods of ‘emotional work,’ a form of mass mobilisation that reinforces collective identity (Perry, 2002).

Furthermore, in 2019 the CYL issued a memo aiming to renew Mao’s Cultural Revolution-era policy of sending youth to rural areas (*shangshan xiexiang*) and detailed plans to recruit and deploy one million college-level youths by 2022 to rural areas (CYL, 2019). Students sent to the villages will be tasked with ‘rural youth ideological work’ (Ibid.; Dotson, 2019). Realistically, this policy is not likely to be enacted, suggesting its power lies in its phrasing which reinforces Party-related ideological education outside of school campuses as well as the normalisation of CCP power over young people’s lives. These ‘calls for action’ offer examples of experimental policies by lower-level and regional Party members in response to the broader initiatives set forth in the National Plan and by Xi.

3.6.3 The paramount importance of ideological education

Lastly, the CCP focused on elevating the status of moral and ideological education. While moral education is highly valued on an abstract level, the MOE recognised the disconnect between the propagandised importance of moral education and its actual low priority within the daily classroom experience. One reason for this disconnect is the fiercely competitive examination-based education system. The difficult Senior High School Entrance Exam (*zhongkao*) and the National College Entrance Exam (*gaokao*) usually award the most points to the core topics of math, foreign language, and Chinese literature. Moral education, which is categorised as an elective test worth fewer points than core subjects, is not yet a primary focus of China’s examination-based education system (Zhan & Ning, 2004; EOL, 2018). Students, parents, and teachers usually give precedence to subjects that carry the most weight on the standardised examinations, resulting in moral education’s relatively low prioritisation among teachers, parents, and students.

The 2019 *Opinions on Strengthening Junior and Secondary School Proficiency Tests* (MOE, 2019d) stressed the importance of the examination system and exam questions as a key link between the Party's ideological goals and youth development. The policy urged schools throughout the nation to 'adhere to the correct political orientation' in test composition, organisation, and management as well as strengthen the examination of students' ideals and beliefs, patriotism, moral cultivation' among others (Ibid.). In addition, the guideline underlined the importance of constructing standardised examination questions that 'implement the education system's comprehensive cultivation of morality' (Ibid.).

Changes to the structure of standardised examinations, including the *zhongkao* and *gaokao*, are common (Tan, 2013). However, recent trends indicate specific changes targeted towards increasing moral education's importance. For example, in 2018 the Beijing *gaokao* included moral education as one of five optional exams from which students choose three subject-specific tests. In 2021, the Beijing exam elevated moral education to a mandatory test component and increased the weight of the moral education test grade to roughly 18% of the total examination score (EOL, 2018). Other cities have also amended examinations to increase the weight of moral education scores. For example, the 2022 Tianjin city and 2023 Guangdong Province Zhuhai city *zhongkao* tests will include moral education, whereas previous versions did not include the subject (Baidu, 2021). Lastly, beginning 2024 the Liaoning Province Dalian city test will increase the scoring of moral education by 500% – the largest percentage increase of any subject topic following a comprehensive scoring overhaul (Ibid.).

In addition to adjusting the respective weight of moral education on the examinations, the content of questions has also changed to direct analysis of ideological and political thought. For example, one 2018 Beijing *gaokao* essay question asked students to discuss Xi Jinping's New Era Youth Ideology; students in Zhejiang Province were asked to analyse ideology pertaining to Xi's published works and ideology compiled during his time as Party Secretary of Zhejiang Province from 2002-2006 (CCTV, 2018; Xi, 2013). These examples illustrate how explicit political ideology is being integrated into standardised exams.

In addition, recent policies have instigated ideological requirements for teachers. The 2019 *About Strengthening and Improving the New Era Opinions on the Construction of Teachers' Ethics and Style* policy instated requirements for public respect of teachers and support for education to raise teachers' social status for the first time and called for strengthening teacher respect on campus in textbooks, classrooms, and

campuses, as well as establishing a ‘respect teacher’ month every school year (MOE, 2019c).

3.7 A narrowing focus

Recent policies have narrowed the focus of moral education. Within the context of higher education, the National Plan has led to striking changes. For example, in 2015 former Education Minister Yuan Guiren laid out new rules restricting the use of Western textbooks and banning those sowing ‘Western values,’ going so far as to explicitly demand that universities ‘by no means allow teaching materials that disseminate Western values in our classrooms’ (Zhao, 2016). Official guidelines have commanded universities to prioritise ideological loyalty to the party, Marxism, and Mr. Xi’s ideas (Liu, 2015).

In compulsory education, China’s 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) called to modify moral education by enhancing students’ ideological and moral standards and strengthening patriotism education (CCP, 2016a). In 2017, Xi Jinping Thought became part of compulsory political ideology courses for every pupil in the Chinese education system through a specific design of teaching methods, amendments of textbooks, and teacher training as part of the education sector’s ‘historic task’ (Zhou, 2017).

In 2017, the MOE issued the *Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary Schools* which aimed to ‘improve holistic moral development’ for compulsory education (MOE, 2018a). One month later, a new set of standardised textbooks for compulsory education history, Chinese, and moral education classes were introduced (Ibid.). These textbooks added more emphasis to ‘core socialist values, traditional Chinese culture and the CCP’s revolutionary traditions’ (Ibid.).

In 2020, Xi reiterated education’s role as a ‘fundamental task of the country and the Party’ and the main role of education as the development of socialist values and morality, including fostering strong student patriotism and cultural confidence (Xinhua, 2020a). China’s 14th Five-Year Plan, introduced in 2021, maintained the government’s focus on administration reform as Xi stressed the need for ‘socialist orientation in running schools’ (CPPCC, 2021). The 2020 *Overall Plan for Deepening Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era* expressly calls for stronger Party leadership in schools, strengthening and improving Party-building in schools, and adhere to the ‘correct direction’ of running schools under the guiding ideology of Xi Jinping Thought and core socialist values (MOE, 2020c).

Moral education textbooks have also been revised to reflect ideology's changing role within society. Recent policies have mandated textbooks to increase Communist Party lore and revolutionary war stories; scale back traditional writings of controversial writers; and teach geography in a way that is favourable to China's global ambitions (Hernández, 2017; Lin, 2017). In 2017, primary and secondary school textbooks were ordered to amend the time frame of the Sino-Japanese War by six years (China Daily, 2017). This edit likely aimed to unify national identity and spark patriotism by highlighting historical grievances with Japan. In addition, textbooks for first through ninth grades have been edited to standardise the country's political ideology and increase 'explicit expressions' of socialist values and Party leadership, of which students will be required to memorise (Zhou, 2017).

Lastly, teacher training and 'quality' has amended as part of moral education reforms. A 2018 report by the Basic Education Quality Monitoring Centre of the MOE (NAEQ, 2018) noted that schools must continue to improve the 'working mechanism of moral education and fulfil the fundamental task of establishing morality.' To do so, the report stressed the need to build 'all-around staff education' to 'enhance the effect' of moral education work in primary schools (Ibid.: 22).

Since the 18th Party Congress, teacher development has been a main priority in education development (Ogunniran, 2020). In 2013, the MOE issued the first national *Professional Standards for Compulsory Education School Principals* (Liu et al., 2017). The foremost standard was 'morality first,' emphasising not only the morality of individual principals but also their duties in reinforcing student and teacher moral construction, the 'political core function of the CCP in school policy decisions,' and encouraging the role of political groups such as the CYL and Young Pioneers (Ibid.). According to a 2019 opinions policy document from the CCP (MOE, 2019b), improving the quality of teachers and teacher training is a top government priority. More recently, guidelines issued by the MOE aim to make Xi Jinping Thought the core content for teacher training materials (Bloomberg, 2021).

In addition, policies have called for hiring more moral education teachers and enhancing the 'quality' of all teachers. Remarks by Xi have stressed the importance of teachers with 'strong political integrity' (Mu, 2019). The MOE issued guidelines strengthening the professional 'ethics and virtues' of teachers, aiming to use ethics as the most important criteria for employment, as well as indicating severe punishments for teachers who lack professional ethics, such as a 'lifetime ban on teaching' (MOE, 2019b). The guidelines explicitly stated that teachers should strive to 'enhance the

ideological and political quality and strengthen the professional ethics and morals of teachers' (Zhou, 2019) by calling for strict ideological and political 'ethics inspections' and to incorporate ideological and political teacher ethics into employment contracts (MOE, 2019b). While this policy may be in response to allegations of sexual assault and harassment on university campuses and China's burgeoning #MeToo movement (Sharma, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2020), the policy's semantic ambiguity can be easily extended to ideological oversight.

The requirements for specific teacher ideological training have also been extended to foreign teachers. In 2020, a draft policy regulation regarding the recruitment and management of foreign teachers detailed the circumstances that foreign teachers could be fired, including 'words and deeds that damage China's national sovereignty, security, honour, or public interests' (MOJ, 2020). The report called for the establishment of a 'social credit system' to reward 'law-abiding teachers with convenient entry and exit procedures' (CGTN, 2020a). However, given that entry and exit is an established right for all those with legal documentation under the *Freedom of Movement* clause within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), this reward system is also a warning to teachers that the nation can restrict rights at any time if the teachers' actions threaten CCP ideological conformity.

3.8 Ideological education as institutionalised cultural capital

Ideological education reforms under Xi influence forms of institutionalised cultural capital within contemporary China. Developed by Bourdieu (1986: 16), forms of capital refer to: *economic*, that which is directly related to money such as property; *cultural*, such as education qualifications that are convertible into *economic capital*; and *social*, such as personal connections or the omnipresent *guanxi* within Chinese professional culture.

Using institutionalised cultural capital as an example, the status of moral education teachers and their cultural capital grow in positive correlation, nominally and fiscally rewarding teachers for supporting ideological reforms. However, this correlation also marginalises teachers that do not support ideological reforms. Real-life consequences, such as loss of employment or legal ramifications for teachers or students that do not internally and externally embody prescriptive ideology, create new classes of ideological stratification.

In China, ideological control traditionally is an active process maintained largely through positive persuasion rather than coercion (Schurmann, 1966: 160). The

monopolisation of cultural capital through ideological reforms not only incentivises citizens to adopt prescriptive ideology but also necessitates participation to exist within the developing society, as all forms of institutionalised capital are controlled under the broad spanner of ideological consensus. Hegemony is established through ideological reforms under Gramsci's (1971) views of 'consensus armoured by coercion' and the negotiation of consent and active, outward participation by citizens.

Education is seen as an integral component of upward mobility in Chinese society (Zhai & Gao, 2021). The rigid structure of the education system developed around standardised examinations stratifies academic achievement, cultural competency, and social mobility through ideological conformity by conferring capital to those that contribute to the ruling Party's ideological work. The pervasive integration of ideological reforms into all aspects of the education system necessitate the active participation of ideological conformity to succeed within educational realms and access social mobility.

3.9 Moral education: A targeted response

Ideological reforms justify CCP actions, activities, and practices. Curated ideological propaganda, whether through societal campaigns or curriculum reform, allows the government to respond to and control potential threats to Party's legitimacy by controlling the dissemination of information and ideological narrative (Klimeš & Marinelli, 2018). Controlling and channelling knowledge and values into political expressions through 'cultural governance' is of particular concern for non-democratic nations to maintain legitimacy (Perry, 2013). Through strengthening ideology during a challenging and turbulent time, Xi and the CCP ensure the survival and legitimacy of the Party by reiterating their critically important role in societal success and stamping out any opposition (Brown & Bērziņa Čerenkova, 2018). It is in this sense that ideology can be seen as not merely a complementary component of China's development, but rather as an essential aspect of Party legitimacy and modernisation.

Yet China's strong ideological campaigns and moral education reforms betray the very weaknesses in government and society that it attempts to mitigate. Tightening ideological control and uniformity through the transitive nature of social representations – in this case morality – underlines the reciprocal dependency between the collective society and the authority of the government (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). The moral legitimacy of CCP rule increasingly relies upon a narrowing

definition of morality that stresses systemic homogeneity of values. The CCP's resolute ideological campaigns that focus on youth moral education also suggest that ideological dissent, particularly from the next generation, would be most damaging to China's stability.

3.10 Conclusion

Moral education provides unique and telling insight into the state's current condition and future goals (Lee & Ho, 2005). Contemporary Chinese leaders have learned from China's fractured past that a unified ideology is key within modern times to avoid a repetition of previous destructive times (Brown & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018: 326). Currently, China inhabits a different socio-political and economic space than it did a decade earlier. Data from 2019 recorded the slowest level of GDP growth in almost three decades (Reuters, 2020). This economic slowdown has been felt heavily by the growing number of unemployed higher education graduates whose financial instability and stagnant career opportunities threaten China's societal harmony (Xing *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the country's growing international clout has caused diplomatic friction between many Western nations, and many Sino-Western relations have declined since the mid-2010s (Foot & King, 2019).

Xi's doctrine is a blueprint for consolidating and strengthening Party power within the nation, the party itself, and Xi (Lams, 2018). Central to Xi's ideology is the idea that China must have a decisive leader at the helm to continue its global rise and for the Party to maintain its rule (Garrick & Bennet, 2018). Ideological education reform is an important component to fortify his continued rule and the legitimacy of the CCP while mitigating threats to societal harmony such as unsatisfied youth, economic slowdown, or increased international scrutiny. In response, moral education is transforming to encompass an increasingly narrow ideological space. However, it is unclear how effective or how much public support the changes to moral education reforms receive, or how sustainable Xi's blueprint for ideological legitimacy can be amid ever-changing domestic and international spheres.

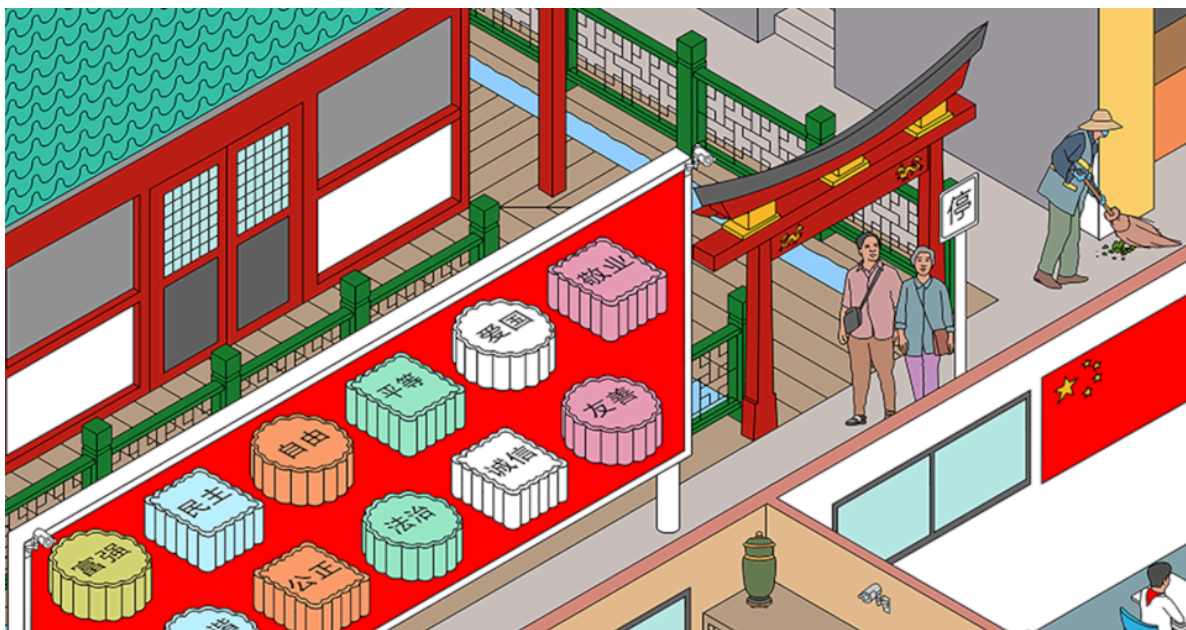
Chapter 4

Literature review: The foundations of Sino-Western moral education

承上起下

Chéng shàng qǐ xià

To follow the past and herald the future



4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed review of relevant literature surrounding moral education theory. It begins by answering two questions: *what is morality?* and, *what is education?* These questions are answered through a discussion of historical, philosophical, and divergent cross-cultural conceptualisations of moral education. The following section outlines Western moral education theory through a discussion of influential 19th and 20th century educators and sociologists, including E. Durkheim, J. Dewey, J. Piaget, and L. Kohlberg. Western theories are used to shed light on the Chinese context through a discussion of philosophical similarities and practical differences between Western and Chinese moral education. The penultimate section reviews cross-cultural ethnographic studies of youth education which provide a framework for this study. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of methods employed by the CCP to establish and maintain legitimacy.

This chapter discusses topics pertaining to ideological indoctrination, censorship, CCP legitimacy, and the moral decline of 21st century Chinese society. As discussed in the prologue (p. xiii), I do not claim that Chinese society is currently navigating a moral crisis or that the CCP is legitimate. Furthermore, I reject broad labels that Chinese education is tantamount to indoctrination or brainwashing. To be clear, components Chinese education do equate to these practices. However, this chapter (and indeed this thesis) should be read with the understanding that Chinese morality is not homogenous. Despite the best efforts of the CCP to promulgate a unified and systemic moral identity for all Chinese citizens, China remains a country with diverse ideologies, cultures, and traditions that should be respected. The adjective 'Chinese' in the following chapter should be understood as representative of the ruling Party socio-normative ethics, and not an argument towards the ideological homogeneity of the Chinese people.

4.1 What is Chinese moral education?

This section seeks to clarify moral education to provide a clear understanding of the theory and purpose of moral and ideological education. This analysis answers two central questions framed within the context of contemporary China: *what is morality?* and, *what is education?* The first question is analysed through a discussion of Chinese moral education theory and development, with a focus on post-1949 conceptualisations. It discusses moral education's roots in Confucian tradition and questions claims of present-day moral crises. The second question aims to clarify the

purpose and practices of ideological education. Following this, the two components of ‘moral’ and ‘education’ are combined in a discussion present-day moral education under Xi. *Lideshuren* is discussed in terms of its definition, implementation, and significance in relation to the changing state of education within China’s ‘New Era.’

4.2 What is morality?

Morals, values, ethics, beliefs; all somewhat synonymous words that are rooted in the questions of *why* we act the way we do and *how* we should behave. In English, the word ‘morality’ is defined as ‘a set of personal or social standards for good or bad behaviour and character’ or ‘the quality of being right, honest, or acceptable’ (Cambridge, 2021). A Chinese dictionary defines morality (*daode*) as:

‘The evaluation of good and evil and the reliance on the power of public opinion, traditional customs and people’s inner beliefs to adjust the sum of the norms of behaviour between people. [Morality] runs through all aspects of social life, such as social ethics, marriage and family ethics, professional ethics, etc. By establishing certain standards of good and evil and codes of conduct, it restricts people’s mutual relations and personal behaviour, regulates social relations, and together with the law, it plays a role in guaranteeing the normal order of social life’ (Zhihu).

At first glance, it is easy to identify the socio-political and cultural influences reflected in the two denotations. While the overall concepts are similar, the English definition suggests morality is an individual act while the Chinese definition is rooted in collectivism. Furthermore, the Chinese definition highlights the intersections of law, governance, traditions, and philosophy in Chinese society.

4.2.1 The Confucian tradition of morality

Chinese morality is rooted in Confucian tradition. Confucianism is a philosophy, ideology, a way of life and a set of traditional values within East Asia (Yao & Yao, 2000). Confucianism remains ingrained in contemporary Chinese society and guides ethical codes for individuals, rulers, and nation states. Confucianism focuses on key ethics such as *xiao* (filial piety), *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), and *li* (propriety) (Wong, 2018). It holds the ideas that the foundation of state policy lies in morality and the people of the state should be led to moral behaviour through virtuous example and education (Hucker, 1959 as cited in Kennedy *et al.*, 2013).

Confucian society was dependent upon the intersections of *li* and *xiao*, creating rigid social hierarchy through the concept of morality. This social stratification centred around human relationships and subordination, requiring individuals to act according to a preordained status within the family and society. For example, the 'ideal' Confucian society required loyal subjects to subordinate to benevolent rulers, just as filial sons should submit to compassionate fathers (Ma, 1971). This concept of 'rule by virtue' (*dezhi*) reflected the moral bond between the state and society (Yan, 2021). This concept remains an integral part of CCP legitimacy and governance today.

In addition to distinct societal structure, Confucianism merges moral characteristics with governance through notions of collectivism. The philosophy centres around family life, filial piety, and the respect and deference to authority that comes with hierarchical societies (Wong, 2017). Filial piety not only refers to reciprocal parent–child dynamics, but also extends to citizen–state relationships and specifies ethical foundations for maintaining social order (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). Some scholars have noted that Confucian ideology values social harmony over individual rights and restrains individual independence and suppresses creativity (Ibid.; Wong, 2017). In this sense, the legitimacy and power of the Confucian state was derived from collective acceptance of morality.

4.2.2 Contemporary morality

While the roots of Chinese societal morality remained grounded in Confucian tradition, the theory and practical realisations of morality have bloomed in response to seasons of socio-economic and political reform. The integration of different political ideologies, from Marxism to capitalism, as well as the waves of change brought on by globalisation and neoliberalism have shifted present-day Chinese morality into a distinct iteration under CCP definitions.

Contemporary morality as defined by the CCP is tied to the state, the society, and the economy. Politically, the CCP governs through 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.' This unique ideology integrates Marxist and Leninist socialism with philosophies and cultural components unique to Chinese rulers, such as Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and Xi Jinping Thought. While it provides the foundation for development goals and strategy (Peters, 2017), Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is a transient ideology that has been adapted for the ideal state in response to socio-economic transformation.

Political pragmatism is a key feature of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Ibid.). Broad policies are designed to benefit society and support state legitimacy. Official narratives of morality from the CCP encourage the collective action of society rather than individual action. The focus on collective management lends itself to the idea of 'community governance,' which has roots within China's historical socialist work unit *danwei* (Bray, 2006). The establishment of urban communities as units of governance allowed the CCP to monitor groups of citizens on a closer level and to mobilise communities to raise the overall 'quality' (*suzhi*) of the people's moral standards (Ibid.).

Contemporary morality as defined by the CCP is embedded in political theory that guides collective societal action. It can be understood through the lens of normative ethics, or clear specifications and defence of how people should act and live (Kagan, 2018). Under the leadership of Xi, morality is clearly defined and disseminated to the public through propaganda. For example, the Core Socialist Values campaign translated political doctrine into clear requirements for societal progress through the propagandisation of twelve 'core values' that society, and by extension all citizens, should imbue. These values combined CCP doctrine and Confucian philosophy into three categories of moral objectives: national moral qualities of prosperity (*fuqiang*), democracy (*minzhu*), civility (*wenming*), and harmony (*hexie*); societal qualities of freedom (*ziyou*), equality (*pingdeng*), justice (*gongzheng*), and rule of law (*fazhi*); and citizen-level moral values that consist of patriotism (*aiguo*), dedication (*jingye*), integrity (*chengxin*), and friendship (*youshan*) (Gow, 2016).

The Core Socialist Values campaign is a subset of Xi's ideological goals of realising the 'China Dream.' The Chinese Dream is tantamount to the CCP's political manifesto for development and modernisation and incorporates narratives of rapid modernisation and economic success merged with strong themes of nationalism, patriotism, and Chinese exceptionalism to uplift the Chinese nation while curtailing ideological discord (Wang, 2014; Peters, 2017). Historical references to China's 'century of humiliation' and revolutionary war support the development of the Chinese Dream (Ibid.) as a political manifesto which calls for China's rightful place on the 21st century global stage. Strong emotional language used in such civil rhetoric galvanises people to action (Stanley, 2015) and reaffirms ideological work under CCP and Xi as the embodiment of Chinese ideals.

Within contemporary China, morality is inextricably tied to political ideology. Morality as defined by the CCP is constructed to support political reform and ruling

Party legitimacy. Broad societal campaigns create a binary sense of morality for the Chinese people, *i.e.*, ‘good’ morality is that which is dictated by the state, while ‘bad’ morals are outside of the preordained political scope. It can be understood that within Xi’s China, morality not only *supports* state legitimacy but *generates* societal reform given the state’s reliance upon ideological supremacy to maintain primacy. However, morality is not a passive quality but an *active* process by the people. The requirement of ‘consent’ for legitimation (Greene, 2016) through morality is a key facet of contemporary Chinese ideological control.

4.2.3 Contemporary CCP morality: Ideology or religion?

Given the overall predominance of political ideology within contemporary Chinese society, as well as the focus on morality, virtue, and ethics, there are many similarities between CCP moral education and religion. While the CCP is formally an atheist organisation, the development of a cult of personality around Xi, the focus on moral guidance, and ‘sacred texts’ suggest it embodies a larger space than a purely political ideology (Bartlett, 2021). In addition, the cultivation of loyalty, nationalism, and patriotism to the State and ruling Party through education, propaganda, and societal campaigns mirrors religious doctrine. Rituals such as mandatory flag raising ceremonies in schools also suggest the construction of contemporary CCP morality as a belief system. Furthermore, the sacralisation of political figures and ideologies (Gentile, 2005), such as the integration of Xi Jinping Thought into the Chinese Constitution and its elevated status as a ‘guiding principle’ of CCP ideology and State development (Xinhua, 2018a), suggests contemporary Chinese moral ideology has been constructed as a supranatural philosophy. The advancement of Xi’s personal power suggests a transformation in governing towards a Mao-era model of personal dictatorship (Wang & Zeng, 2016).

The realisations of contemporary Chinese morality mirror those found in ‘secular religions’ or ‘political religions,’ terms used somewhat interchangeably to denote political ideologies that imbue qualities of religions. Italian historian Emilio Gentile (1946-) describes this concept as the following:

Political religion is a form of the sacralisation of politics of an exclusive and integralist character. It rejects coexistence with other political ideologies and movements, denies the autonomy of the individual with respect to the collective, prescribes the obligatory observance of its commandments and participation in its political cult, and sanctifies

violence as a legitimate arm of the struggle against enemies, and as an instrument of regeneration. It adopts a hostile attitude toward traditional institutionalized religions, seeking to eliminate them, or seeking to establish with them a relationship of symbiotic coexistence, in the sense that the political religion seeks to incorporate traditional religion within its own system of beliefs and myths, assigning it a subordinate and auxiliary role. (Gentile, 2005).

Despite functioning under a self-described ‘multi-Party cooperation and political consultation’ system (CPPCC, 2012), Chinese governance is tantamount to one-Party rule under the CCP. The ‘Sinicisation’ of religions, or the active process of shaping religions to conform to CCP objectives (Bowie & Gitter, 2018), is a main policy priority of CCP modernisation goals (Xinhua, 2017b). Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and other religions have been made to conform to the demands of the state (Madsen, 2021). In addition to religious Sinicisation is the semantic representation of CCP moral supremacy through religious phrasing. For example, the short-lived Deng-era campaign against ‘spiritual pollution’ aimed to maintain socialist ideological primacy amid the growing influence of Western values, media, and culture stemming from economic modernisation in the mid 1980s (Larson, 1989; Wang, 1986). This campaign was followed by the 1986 introduction of a ‘socialist spiritual civilisation’ (*shehuizhuyijingshenwenming*) (CCP, 1986).

This phrasing discursively reaffirms the moral supremacy of CCP ideology and monopolises spirituality into the realm of political ideology. Under present day propaganda, Xi is idolised as a fatherly, God-like figure and national saviour (Trofimov, 2019). Xi’s image and namesake ideology are omnipresent throughout propaganda and media. The increasing use of special honorifics for Xi (Gan, 2017) has elevated Xi’s status to one that extends beyond politics and encompasses the status of a political, ideological, and spiritual leader for the Chinese people.

4.2.4 Morality: In crisis or in transition?

It is widely argued that post-Mao China fell into a ‘moral crisis’ due to rapid societal and economic transformations that were inimical to the CCP’s ideological doctrine (Ci, 2014; Chan, 2018). Some scholars have attributed this ‘crisis of cognition’ (Zhuo, 2000) throughout society to the discordance between Confucian collectivism and capitalist individualism (Yao, 2013), while other viewpoints suggest the incompatibility of ‘economic liberalism and political illiberal authoritarian rule’ (Breslin, 2010: 134) has contributed to moral stagnation throughout society. Moreover,

the CCP's reliance on Maoist/Leninist doctrine and reinforcement of 'traditional' moral ideology has inhibited the integration of more liberal, democratic, and global concepts of morality into societal norms (Ci, 2014; Lee, 2014; Kipnis, 2015). Here I do not attempt to define whether Chinese society is or is not in a moral crisis, but my perspective resonates with Ellen Oxfeld's (2010) evaluation that Chinese moral reasoning is not homogenous in its development or logic, and moral reasoning does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, this section draws on existing literature surrounding moral crises and utilises specific examples to demonstrate how moral crises are propagandised for ruling Party legitimacy.

Narratives of 'moral decline' and 'moral crises' are prominent throughout media and CCP discourse. Yan (2021) identifies moral crises as rooted in temporal and spatial borders and are not shared by all members of a society. Varying perceptions of a moral crisis have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the CCP by creating degrees of ideological separation between society and the ruling Party. Therefore, moral homogeneity across society as well as a clear definition of what constitutes a 'moral crisis' is important for the longevity of the CCP. Although China has experienced many tragedies and crises, here I highlight two tragedies which occurred within three months of each other in 2011 to contrast CCP responses; one claimed the life of one, the other killed 40 people and injured hundreds.

In October 2011, a tragic hit-and-run accident claimed the life of toddler Wang Yue. The death was particularly cruel as the young girl was run over by two cars and passed by at least 18 pedestrians before she was helped, but she sadly died from her injuries later in a hospital. This incident sparked widespread furore and grief by netizens online and throughout media but was also highly propagandised by official accounts and CCP narratives. For example, then Guangdong Province Party chief (and now current member of the Politburo Standing Committee) Wang Yang decried this incident as a moral 'wake-up call' for society and *China Daily* published numerous online articles and public surveys about the moral failings of China in response to this tragedy (China Daily, 2011).

Three months earlier, two high speed trains collided near Wenzhou and claimed the lives of 40 and injured nearly 200; it became the third deadliest global high speed rail collision in history (Railway Gazette, 2011). It was later discovered that the collision was caused by critical design flaws and poor management (BBC, 2011). The CCP responded to the train collision with public criticisms of Party officials responsible amid hasty cover-ups and orders to restrict media coverage of the event

(Bell, 2016: 145-6). This event was widely criticised by the public as a moral crisis, with people accusing the Party of a cover-up, corruption, and prioritising economic development over the welfare and safety of citizens (Branigan, 2011).

On the surface, these two examples demonstrate that the key difference between the CCP's handling of moral crises depends on which parties are responsible (i.e., the Party or individuals) and how they can benefit the CCP's continued legitimacy. While the Wenzhou train collision threatened legitimacy by signalling Party mismanagement, the Wang Yue tragedy provided an opportunity to reinforce legitimacy by spurring a new national dialogue of the CCP spearheading societal moral reform amid moral decay. Furthermore, the CCP seeks to normalise certain events indicative of a moral crisis through a selective and routine process of depicting immorality as being permeated throughout society (Ci, 2014); while the tragedy of Wang Yue is indicative of greater society's immorality, the Wenzhou incident is a one-off disaster of corrupt officials and therefore less helpful to securing CCP legitimacy. Lastly, the Party must be able to channel public outrage so as to legitimate stronger CCP rule. The CCP uses media and propaganda to paint the greater world as morally ambiguous and dangerous while concurrently establishing itself as the superior moral order for the Chinese nation (Thornton, 2007; *Ibid.*).

Political systems are constantly exposed to events that have the potential to threaten ruling Party legitimacy (Schubert, 2014). How the government responds to these events is indicative of its long-term success and survival (Easton, 1967; Ahlers & Schubert, 2011; *Ibid.*). Survival is dependent upon the ruling Party transforming these into outputs in the form of policies that receive widespread approval from society (*Ibid.*: 599). This generates a constant process of reform and development, aptly named by Ahlers & Schubert (2011) as 'adaptive authoritarianism,' that provides opportunities for the CCP to swiftly respond to crises, generates policies aimed at placating or channelling societal perceptions towards a model that reinforces CCP legitimacy, and experiments with different policy outcomes and societal development. However, it is important to note that the CCP does not respond to critical events at whim or through fickle trial and error; rather their responses and policy outputs are indicative of a gradual and systemic grand strategy (Li *et al.*, 2010).

Xi has openly acknowledged the nation's moral decline and used it as an impetus for his far-reaching anti-corruption campaign (Xinhua, 2013). Xi noted that while 'the mainstream of the Party and members is always good,' officials should not 'forget the original intentions' (*buwangchuxin*) of working with pure intentions for the

advancement of the people (Xinhua, 2016a). This narrative framing portrays Party members as morally pure and eliminates potential avenues of dissent against the Party by constructing a binary view of morality that supports CCP supremacy. The use of anti-corruption campaigns as avenues to eliminate ideological discord or competing political factions supports the CCP's efforts to monopolise authority (Ionescu, 2018). Studies have found that Xi's anti-corruption crackdowns have been 'selectively tolerant' of corrupt officials and only publicly advertise indicted officials when it supports Party hierarchy and control (Fan & Grossman, 2001).

The intersections of a moral crisis and ideological hegemony support CCP goals of national rejuvenation and self-strengthening under the banner of China's 21st century 'New Era.' As part of the broad anti-corruption campaign, the CCP introduced initiatives to 'strengthen the faith in communism and guard against the influence of Western morals' (Reuters, 2014) and utilised religious language to promote collective moral supremacy. Unifying values and ways of thinking has been the primary panacea for discourses threatening Party legitimacy (Yan, 2020). However, the omnipresence of narratives by Chinese intellectuals bemoaning the nation's moral decline may also be indicative of a form of ideological resistance. Gloria Davies (2001) suggests that given China's strict political censorship, writing about moral issues is a safer method to criticise the government or social policies than directly discussing them. Therefore, scholars should be aware that the ubiquity of moral decline or moral crisis discourse throughout Chinese media, policies, and scholarship may reinforce Party legitimacy just as much as it aims to criticise it.

4.3 What is Chinese education?

Education is the act of giving or providing systematic instruction (Oxford Dictionaries). Most commonly, education is described within the confines of the formal school setting pertaining to the active process of studying and learning. However, education can also be a passive process through the internalisation of societal or cultural norms (Bojesen, 2018).

Education in China is a cultural process that is intricately involved in state formation (Zheng & Kapoor, 2021). According to Xi, the purpose of education is:

'To train socialist builders and successors with comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, physical education, art and labour, accelerate the modernisation of education, build an educational country, and run education that satisfies the people' (Xinhua, 2018a).

Xi has said that education is the 'key' to national rejuvenation and the realisation of 'two hundred years' struggle' for the realisation of the Chinese Dream (Dai, 2020). Under Xi, education is framed as a political act centred around the overarching goal of State development. Education is not described as an individual endeavour, but as a collective process amongst all youth to construct the ideal society. While the *process* of education is straightforward, its *purpose* is mired in intellectual controversy. Does education emancipate (Freire, 1970; Biesta, 2010), or indoctrinate (Callan & Arena, 2009)? For *whom* does education serve: the individual or the state?

American sociologist Edward Ross (1866-1951) concluded that the education system provided one of the best platforms for imposing social control (Oleksy, 2017). The Chinese education system is no exception to this case. China's diverse cultural background, extensive geographical domain and vast population make societal control an unprecedented task for the nation's government. One method by which social control can be imposed is through the education system. China's compulsory nine-year education system provides a key opportunity to imbue societal, cultural, and political values to Chinese youth. Homogeneity in knowledge production therefore becomes not only a method of maintaining societal control but also a defining criterion of ethnic or cultural identity, in that those that do not experience Chinese education are not fully accepted into society and subject to social exclusion within their own country.

This phenomenon is particularly apparent within migrant children who do not possess household residency status (*hukou*) (Zhou & Cheung, 2017). Unregistered children are unable to attend school and thus cannot integrate into society through the education system. The exclusion of these children exacerbates social disparity and creates 'otherness' through their lack of access to education. This phenomenon occurs despite China's Compulsory Education Law which guarantees the right to education for all Chinese youth irrespective of 'gender, race, status of family property or religious belief' (MOE, 2009a: Article 4). This example suggests that Chinese education functions as a method of social control and social stratification.

4.3.1 Is Chinese education indoctrination?

The targeted development of education as a political process raises questions regarding the distinctions of *teaching vs indoctrination* within the contemporary Chinese education system. Indoctrination refers to influencing students to make them

adhere to a particular set of beliefs (Palmer, 1957). Indoctrination differs from education due to the unequal power relationship, whereas the stronger authority utilises totalitarian or authoritarian methods to 'force' belief upon the weaker (Leung, 1999, *as cited in* Ibid.). Education as a normative process (McCauley, 1970) requires an evaluative standard by which all students are judged and compared. This standard, developed by the ruling Party, can be rationally justified and argued. However, it *requires* belief and *forces* consent by students.

Again, we return to the concept of 'consent,' previously discussed as a key component of ideological legitimisation, this time as a defining trait of indoctrination. Given that indoctrination can occur through teaching methods, curricula, or other methods of pedagogy (Leung, 2004), it is not easily pinpointed to a specific moment in place or time, for example the labelling of a textbook or teaching plan as indoctrinatory. Apple (1996) argues that a main route of the political control of knowledge occurs through a national curriculum. The centralisation of education supports the normative function of education and *forces* participatory consent through standardised curriculum and national assessments, such as the *zhongkao* or *gaokao* examinations. As these examinations are a crucial step in students' intellectual and economic achievement (Huang *et al.*, 2015), they provide an apt opportunity for ideological conformity by requiring students to study and be judged based on their knowledge of ruling Party values.

4.4 The development of morality in education

In the Chinese tradition, morality was not viewed as an inherent trait at birth. Rather, it was meant to be cultivated through education. Confucian ideology held that moral education was the main outlet to improving human nature, suggesting that the success of the ruling Party was dependent upon the cultivation of morality among individuals (Ma, 1971). Thus, the process of formalised moral education became integral to the continued development and prosperity of the State.

Moral education's role as a key component of paternalism has been an essential and malleable tool throughout Chinese governments (Fairbrother, 2004). Most formal education during China's dynastic history focused on the instruction and transmission of Confucian ideology, such as through the imperial examination (*keju*). Those that passed this examination – through memorisation of Confucian texts – would receive official government posts. Therefore, the concepts of morality, education, and government were symbiotic within dynastic China.

The collapse of the Qing Dynasty in the early 20th century created an opportunity for a new wave of intellectualism amongst Chinese scholars. Chen Duxiu, Chen Tanxiu, Zhou Enlai, Hu Shi, and Gao Yihan, among others, brought forth new ideas of individualism, citizenship, democracy, and revolution through publications in *The Tiger* and *La Jeunesse (Xin Qingnian)* (Weston, 1998; Chen, 2008). Many of these scholars were drawn to Western scholarship due to Qing-era political corruption and the bastardisation of Confucian scholarship for political gain (Wang, 2020). Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei, and Lu Xun were instrumental in criticising China's early 20th century nation-state and pioneering a modern education system that incorporated intellectual freedoms and modern aesthetics (Zhu, 2009; Tang, 2012). These scholars made significant contributions to Chinese education and political reform, leading to the May Fourth Movement, the establishment of the CCP, and the New Culture Movement (Wang, 2006; Kuo, 2017).

Notably, scholar Cai Yuanpei contributed significantly to the development of China's modern education system. Cai envisioned moral education as cultivating the perfect character of an individual citizen while acknowledging 'public and private' socio-moral norms. He also felt that moral education should be integrated into all aspects of intellectual and physical education to develop the overall 'moral aesthetic' of citizens and of society (Wang, 2006). These ideas are encompassed in his separation of moral education for the 'material world,' or the functional aspects of morality, and the 'phenomenal world' which refers to morality's characteristics. Cai did not see a place for politics in moral education, arguing that public morality and individual rights would legitimise authority (Ibid.)

John Dewey's (1859–1952) famous 1919-1921 lecture tour through China had a notable effect on the development of Chinese moral education theory. Chinese educators in the mid-1920s were influenced by the role of 'the study of society' within American civics education (Zarrow, 2015). Chinese scholars combined indigenous Confucian philosophy with Western theories on philosophy, politics, and education from scholars such as Dewey, J. Piaget, and H. H. Horne, among others, to develop early 20th century Chinese 'educational science' (Feinberg *et al.*, 1975; Fan, 2007).

The CCP's dependence upon collective morals underlines moral education's importance within the education system. On a foundational level, the ideological base of present day Chinese moral education is Marxist theory (Li *et al.*, 2004). Marx contended that the economic basis of society determines ideology; collective means of production are central to the economic situation of the state, and the role of the

individual is within the collective means of production (Li, 1990). CCP definitions of collective morality align with Marxist theory in that individuals are expected to subordinate their own identity and relinquish individual freedoms to the interest of the group; without such the society cannot function (Dien, 1982). The purpose of moral education is to uphold Marxist values and cultivate patriotism, collectivism, and socialism (Li, 1990; Li *et al.*, 2004). The emphasis in contemporary political discourse on these values, such as patriotism and nationalism, are another means of promoting identification within collective national achievements, goals, and interests (Lall & Vickers, 2009).

4.4.1 Contemporary moral education

Twenty-first century moral education developed into an umbrella concept, consisting of Communist ideology, politics, law, morality, and mental health education (Zhu & Liu, 2004). Within this umbrella, moral education covers topics synonymous with Western civics education, ideo-political education, and citizenship education; it is sometimes called ideological, civic, or political education due to their overlapping identities (Nie, 2008). Moral education remains tightly controlled by the CCP which decides its content and *how* and *if* moral education is offered (Ye, 2014: 39).

Moral education is a mandatory course in the Chinese education system. Outside of class, moral education is also incorporated into almost every aspect of school, from school design to mandatory Party-led extracurricular activities. Teachers responsible for students' moral education undergo strict training (Zhu & Liu, 2004). Moral education is closely associated with politics and is ideological and political in nature (Lee & Ho, 2005). As the education level of the students increases, moral education changes to be more politically centred (Zhu & Liu, 2004). Within primary school, moral education topics are separated into moral characteristics and life for younger students, around ages 7-8, and moral characteristics and society for ages 9-12 (Shu, 2016).

Under the leadership of Xi, moral education has transitioned once again in line with the needs of the State. Xi has not passively continued the trends of his recent predecessors to steer moral education towards a more decentralised model. Rather, within the past ten years moral education has taken on a new identity and role within contemporary society, incorporating select aspects of previous policies to create an educational chimera that combines distinct aspects of holistic ideological development whilst maintaining a hyper politicised focus.

4.4.2 A theoretical perspective of moral education under Xi

Solinger (1986, *as cited in* Sautman, 1991) describes the three 'visions' of educational ideologisation from CCP leaders as: radical, bureaucratic, and reform. Throughout each of these ideals, education would shift between different ranges of a hyper-politicised to depoliticised process (Sautman, 1991: 670). *Radical* refers to a 'temporary hyper politicisation of education' for political goals, often in line with censorship or restriction of academic growth for the needs of the state. *Bureaucratic* focuses on a centralised and standardised model of politicised education, while *reform* encourages the removal of political and ideological education (Ibid.: 670-671).

China's 21st century educational model under the guidance of Xi has leaned heavily towards the *bureaucratic* and *radical* visions of education. The ideal of *reform* has been soundly rejected through the CCP's active calls to integrate more explicit Party ideology into the education system. Reforms mirror *radical* interpretations through strong political ideology designed to mobilise citizens towards modernisation and development (Ibid.: 675). Furthermore, *bureaucratic* education is utilised to build cohorts of strong 'socialist successors' (Xinhua, 2018a). The integration of standardised examinations as qualifications of merit (Ibid.: 674) create structures of social hierarchy determined by political doctrine.

Xi has developed Chinese education as a praxis for political legitimisation. Within authoritarian governments, such as China, ideology is an essential component of legitimisation (Holbig, 2013). The authoritarian constructions of moral education are pragmatic because of the significant changes they constitute to China's platforms for legitimisation. Under China's 'performance legitimacy' model of governance, the state relies on accomplishing 'concrete goals' to maintain legitimacy (Zhu, 2011). However, given China's precarious economic situation and the rising influences of globalisation, legitimacy is not a straightforward task and present-day China does not inhabit the same ideological space of its recent past. Just as China carved its own model of 'Chinese exceptionalism' to develop economically and challenge liberal global governance (Ho, 2014), the Chinese education system must also develop in novel ways that address the reality of the present-day situation.

Gramsci (1994) discusses the necessity of authoritarian governments to educate the masses for revolution or reform, mobilise them into action, and give authorised agency in societal changes. The State maintains hegemony through its adopted status as an 'educator' (Carnoy, 1984 *as cited in* Maglaras, 2013) and as the legitimator and

authority on morality, culture, and collective identity. The construction of a new civilisation through ideological reforms coincides with the development of China's 'New Era,' providing a platform to galvanise society to actively participate in the ruling Party legitimisation.

4.4.3 *Lideshuren*: Ideological 'cultivation'

The changes to moral education are encapsulated within the concept of *lideshuren* (立德树人), an important and newly developed ideology that is central to Xi's ideological reforms. This concept combines four characters: *li*, to establish or build; *de*, morality or virtues; *shu*, to cultivate or establish (also 'tree'); and *ren*, people. Translated as 'strengthen moral education for [the] cultivation [of the] people,' this concept draws upon Confucian ideals to encapsulate the 'fundamental task of Chinese education' (Xue & Jian, 2021). While the words are not new, they were predominantly present in ancient literature as two distinct concepts: *lide* and *shuren* (Chen *et al.*, 2013). *Lide* refers to strengthening moral education, which serves as the foundation by which the people are cultivated, or *shuren*.

Lideshuren has rapidly developed from a philosophical term to an integral part of Chinese education policy and planning within the past decade under the leadership of Xi. Former President Hu Jintao (2003-2013) first raised the central ideology of *lideshuren* as the fundamental task of education in 2006, noting the nation 'must insist on educating the people with moral education first' (Ibid.: 10). The National Plan became the first government policy which integrated the ideas of *lideshuren* into education reform through the explicit focus on elevating the status of moral education as the foremost priority of education (Lin, 2019a). The phrase was first integrated into the Chinese Constitution during the 18th Party Congress in 2012 amid calls to deepen the quality of education through strong moral and ideological guidance (Lin, 2019a).

Since then, the prominence of *lideshuren* has risen rapidly both in public domains and academia. For example, in 2012 there were approximately 200 occurrences of the phrase '*lideshuren*' in Mandarin-language academic literature; eight years later in 2020, that number skyrocketed to 23000 (Figure 4.1). Trends of *lideshuren* have similarly increased amongst public domains (Figure 4.2). Taken together, these trends highlight the increasing recognition of *lideshuren* within public and academic domains. In addition, the significantly high occurrence of *lideshuren* in academic literature suggests the philosophy may be an integral component of academic legitimisation within contemporary Chinese academia.



Figure 4.1 Number of occurrences in Chinese academic literature of 'lideshuren' from 2012-2021
(source: cnki.com.cn)



Figure 4.2 Trends of 'lideshuren' in Chinese online media from 2012-2021 (source: index.baidu.com)

Lideshuren is both an ideology and a goal for Chinese education under the CCP. Its adoption signifies that China has reached a high quality of educational modernisation. This new status allows the nation to shift its focus to the cultivation of education, rather than previous tasks of universalising education and implementing

literacy-oriented education (Lin, 2019a). *Lideshuren* aims to foster 'human-centred and quality-oriented' education as part of the nation's overall development and modernisation goals. The narrative framing of moral education through 'quality education' (*suzhi jiaoyu*) and Xi's Core Socialist Values campaign (Yan, 2020) is reflected in *lideshuren* reforms. Xi has been vocal on his goals of internalising *lideshuren* into all aspects of Chinese education and society. In a 2018 speech at the National Education Conference, Xi said:

We must integrate lideshuren into all aspects of ideological and moral education, cultural knowledge education, and social practice education, running through various fields of basic education, vocational education, and higher education. The course subject system, teaching system, curriculum system, and management system should focus on this goal, teachers should teach around this goal, and students should learn around this goal. All practices that are not conducive to achieving this goal must be resolutely changed. (MOE, 2018a).

The implementation of *lideshuren* has resulted in many changes to the education system. These changes, from revised curriculum and teaching standards (Shi, 2019; MOE, 2015; Zhong & Zhu, 2012), have shifted the overall construction and purpose of education within state educational institutions to a task of moral cultivation rather than intellectual development. Under the scope of *lideshuren*, moral education becomes the focus and defining criteria of all education, from physical education to art instruction (Zhong & Zhu, 2012). For example, Lin (2019) draws on the example of the improvement of labour education under the direction of *lideshuren*. Xi emphasised the importance of strengthening labour education as an investment in China's continued modernisation plans (Fan & Zou, 2020). Labour is defined as a physical task as well as mental and spiritual cultivation, and labour education includes instruction of respecting labour and laborers (Ibid.). It focuses on the requirements of the fundamental task of 'cultivating morality and people,' as well as specific aspects of training socialist builders and successors (Guo *et al.*, 2019). The integration of *lideshuren* into contemporary Chinese educational philosophy gives a clear indication that education is being developed for the needs of the state. Progress and intellect are defined by morals and prescriptive CCP ideology that supports ideals of nationalism, modernisation, and socio-political reform.

4.5 Western moral education theory

Western moral educational philosophy's origins stem from ancient philosophers, religious values, and democratic ideals. Locke's *tabula rasa* argument was held as conventional wisdom for centuries, which argued that infants are born with a 'blank slate' of moral development and various 'imprints,' such as hereditary influences and environment, have the strongest influence on moral development (Cavanagh, 2006). Modern neuroscience and evolutionary theory have taught the importance of learned emotions, such as rationality and emotionality, or Descartes' concept of innate ideas (Al-Rodhan, 2015).

Like China, the correlation between moral education and socio-political identity has influenced Western moral education theory. Notable European contributors, such as Immanuel Kant, Augustus Comte, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and others, laid the foundations for the philosophical development of moral education. I focus on a few select Western philosophers from the 19th and 20th centuries who developed contemporary and critical analyses of moral education to inform my research. Educational philosophers, such as Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), John Dewey (1859–1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980), and Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987), theorised the intersections between societal and moral development within the education system and had significant influence on Western educational theory. Their theories of moral learning surround the development of moral behaviour, moral motivation, and moral judgement in Western European civilisations (Nie, 2008) and are intertwined with social learning theories.

4.5.1 Durkheim and secular morality

French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) produced numerous theories on education in an industrialising and modernising society. He was particularly interested in moral education and the role it played in developing society and as a social process (Barnes, 1977). Durkheim acknowledged each society's own political, moral, and economic systems that were appropriately correlated to that society's social structure – this was true for the education system as well (Ibid.: 212).

Writing during early 20th century France, Durkheim theorised how morality can be taught in a secular education system, and how morality can take on a rational identity (Ash, 1971). He saw morality as a set of rules governing all aspects of life and the functionality of society. These rules included: discipline and submission to authority; attachment to social groups; and individual autonomy to interpret and apply moral guidelines (Ibid.: 111). Durkheim acknowledged that morality within a

society must be regulated, yet the individual should still have the tools necessary and rights to individually judge the prescribed moral rules. Therefore, the education system was an integral part of a modernising society, more important than the natural transmission of morals by family or friends (Ibid.: 112). For Durkheim, morality was practical and purposeful, and the inextricable connections between morality, education, and society were integral for societal progress.

Durkheim's ideas are also logical within the context of Marxist ideology. Durkheim questioned how societies should develop morality within the process of industrialisation and the organisation of labour (Ibid.: 114). Early modernisation gave rise to increased trends in capitalism and individualism, particularly in the West. Durkheim described trends of capitalism as merely a 'reassessment' of individualism into isolated uniformity (Ibid.). Collectivism, such as collective labour or collective ideologies, creates conditions for which the socio-economic order can develop by removing 'the manifestations of contradictions' that comes with individualist and 'inconsistent' societies (Ibid.: 113). Therefore, Durkheim's views of morality were inextricably linked to the development of society in all aspects – politically, culturally, and economically. The cultivation of collectivist morality within the education system was the only way in which Durkheim felt a secular and modernising society could succeed.

CDA theory is applicable to Durkheim's theories of morality and education. Durkheim noted the importance of collective ideas to help construct social consciousness and the 'reification of social norms' (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The Marxist theory of reification, or utilising intangible commodities as trading currency, was reinforced through Durkheim's ideas of the consumption and exploitation of societal norms (Ibid.: 26). The discourse surrounding and pertaining to morality within Chinese society – whether overtly through the education system or propaganda or covertly through collectivist ideology – is actively utilised by the CCP to develop social norms supporting Party legitimacy. The reification of morality throughout contemporary Chinese society is imperative for success. Morality is a social currency; yet only CCP-approved versions of morality, ideology, or thoughts are marketable.

This dichotomy permeates throughout Chinese society and reinforces the discursive power of morality: citizens either have the 'correct' morality, or they are not moral at all. The individual's identity exists in the collective; from this theory stems China's exceptionalism and CCP legitimacy. The dynamic construction of social

representations limits permanence while maintaining a social hierarchy of mutual dependency (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This makes moral education an important and widely applied tool of societal reform and underlines the CCP's use of moral education reforms as a method of consolidating and legitimising power.

Moral education binds a nation through solidarity. This process is first experienced in the classroom and later translates into universal principles upon which the society relies (Ash, 1971). Durkheim acknowledged that the solidarity that moral education creates leads to the bonding of the nation-state (Ibid.: 121). Inconsistent societies, meaning societies without universal morals and those subject to individualism and political conflict, are unstable (Ibid.: 113). A stable and uniform moral order is the strongest precondition for the stable, modernising society the CCP and Xi wish to build during China's 'New Era.'

4.5.2 Dewey and social conduct

The ideas of John Dewey (1859–1952) can be contrasted to those of Durkheim. Dewey was an influential American intellectual and educator who had a significant global influence on political, educational, and psychological theories (Hildebrand, 2018). Best known for his theories on pragmatism, Dewey argued that the 'general theory of education' was at the most basic level a form of social criticism and that education was a social function (Dewey, 1923).

Dewey widely advocated for an 'experimental approach' to growth and moral development. To Dewey, knowledge was never a concrete, infallible fact but rather the result of exploratory hypotheses; answers were not the end goal, but rather in Dewey's words, 'growth' was the paramount goal (Dewey, 1957). In addition, habits were of particular importance in Dewey's moral philosophy. He argued that habits operate below the consciousness of everyday life, resulting in the original rationale for habits to become lost over time while the habit itself remains and strengthens (Anderson, 2005). Dewey's pragmatic approach to habits and moral development echoes ideas of common sense and 'good sense' developed by Gramsci as collective yet flexible patterns of societal thought and action (Kadlec, 2006).

Dewey was also particularly concerned with moral education, noting that education aids intellectual and moral development through stages of morality by supplying the conditions for such movement (Kohlberg, 1975a). Democracy was intertwined in the concept and practice of education according to Dewey, who noted that education should supply citizens with the skills and habits needed to continually

develop morals. While he acknowledged the variance of values and beliefs within each culture, he drew strong distinctions between education that guides moral development and allows self-investigation of situations and beliefs, versus education in dogmatic philosophy that strangles creativity and individual development (Hildebrand, 2018).

4.5.3 Piaget, Kohlberg, and youth moral development

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) developed a theory of cognitive development specific to children that focused on the development (rather than learning) of information and specific behaviours that enable children to go through stages of cognitive growth (McLeod, 2018). Piaget's theory aims to understand how children construct an understanding of the world around them and how they reorganise that understanding based on experiences or education. This research led to Piaget's Theory of Moral Development, separating children's moral discernment into two categories which develops as they age: heteronomous (moral realism or moral heteronomy) and autonomous (moral relativism or moral autonomy) (Piaget, 1932; Fleming 2005).

Piaget found that younger children think in terms of moral realism, and children around age ten transition into his second stage, moral autonomy (Fleming, 2005: 4-5). Piaget relied heavily upon games and story-telling dilemmas to gauge children's moral development. Observations of games led Piaget to develop his stages of moral development based on children's understanding of rules, how children judged the morality of game rules, and social interactions between children during game playing (Ibid.: 4). His theory of moral development centres on the recognition and choice of children to see rules from another perspective, such as another child, an adult, or their society (Ibid.: 5). This recognition is an important factor for the graduation into moral autonomy, suggesting Piaget felt that individualism and egocentrism was immoral.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) built upon Piaget's ideas to develop a more in-depth scale of children's moral development. Kohlberg (1975a) viewed children as 'moral philosophers' who through the cognitive development of interactions with parents, peers, and their social environment develop their own moral standards. He developed a six-stage model of moral development to gauge children's moral maturity, which he deemed as universal because the stages referred to patterns of thinking rather than cultural specifics (Fleming, 2005).

These Western philosophers made significant contributions to Western moral education theory and how children develop morality. Both Dewey and Durkheim advocated for the application of the scientific method within the field of education (Barnes, 1977; Dewey, 1923). A major difference between Dewey and Durkheim was their concepts of what constitutes values. Dewey viewed morals through the lens of a democratic society, similar to Kohlberg who ignored individual cultures and norms within his idea of a 'universal' moral code. On the other hand, Durkheim argued education reflects each society's education system and corresponding needs and felt education is a response to a society's collective needs (Barnes, 1977: 215).

4.5.4 Western theory within the Chinese context

Throughout most theories of moral development, morality is socially adaptive, changing dependent on social and environmental changes for the greatest cohesion and cooperation. All societies have independent ethics, beliefs, and values, some of which are formalised in the laws and regulations, influencing the conscience and moral sentiments of those within the society. Due to different traditions, cultural norms, and histories, Western theories of morality may be uninterpretable or unacceptable to non-Western societies (Carlin & Strong, 1995). This leads to the study of ethical commensurability, or the comparison of moral traditions in terms of how people should live their lives (Wong, 2017). Ethical commensurability therefore allows greater insight into Chinese moral education theory and practice within the contextualisation of Western philosophy.

Numerous philosophical similarities exist between Confucian, present-day Chinese, and Durkheim models of morality. First, there is a clear link between Confucian, Durkheim, Marxist, and present-day Chinese moral theories. Both Confucian theory and Durkheim's model of moral socialisation focused on the process of socialisation and collective responsibility (Nie, 2008). As contemporary Chinese moral education has roots in Confucian ideology, Durkheim's ideas also extend within present-day Chinese theories. In addition, China's status as a secular, modernising society relate to Durkheim's environment of post-war 1920s France caught in the grips of political turmoil.

Durkheim and Marx shared similar theories on the connections between creating a moral order and socioeconomic processes (Ash, 1971). Confucian ideology and Marxist theory are merged to create China's unique socialist political system. Concepts such as social hierarchy, collectivism, and the interrelated role of morality

and political and economic development all reside within Chinese, Durkheimian, and Marxist theories. Durkheim's theory of morality within a secular, modernising state is particularly applicable within the Chinese context.

Morality as defined by the CCP is secular; it does not carry Western religious connotations, and secularism is a key component of the Communist State. Second, both the National Plan and Xi's ideological campaigns have goals to curate specific ideology necessary to meet the needs of the modernising socialist state in the 'New Era' (MOE, 2010b; Mu, 2019). Arguments against Durkheim's ideas of society's role in shaping morality underline the difference between collective and individualist societies, which is an important distinction between Western and Chinese philosophies. Those who disagree with Durkheim argue that if society moulds individual morality to fit its needs, then the individual is subjugated and has no autonomy (Barnes, 1977).

This argument can be countered through Durkheim's theories of moral education. Durkheim stressed the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society. Durkheim noted that regularity (such as consistent and collective ideology) and authority (repercussions against nonconformist or societally damaging morality) were integral components of discipline (Ibid.: 220). Through moral education, discipline is developed for the interest and betterment of society. Durkheim did not view discipline as indoctrination or authoritarianism; rather, the individual's willing participation in prescribed morals and rules makes the individual moral and makes the morals worthy of respect (Ibid.: 220-1).

Confucian concepts of filial piety and social hierarchy reiterate the reciprocal relationships between collective morality, power, and legitimacy. The Chinese education system teaches the student's moral identity and its greater role within the State, thus reflecting Durkheimian and Confucian theories of the interdependence between an individual, the collective society, and the successful state. Chinese students participate in these morals because it is important for the success of their State, as well as because there are real and actual repercussions for veering from the *status quo*. Consequences of publicly showing morality divergent from the CCP-developed *status quo* can range from poor grades for students, which may impact future educational or career prospects, to outright rejection and alienation from Party-controlled society.

Another similarity between Western and Chinese moral education theories is the importance of social interaction. Kohlberg and Piaget both acknowledged the

importance of social interaction in developing morals (Fleming, 2005). In Chinese morality under the CCP, the society takes precedence over the individual, and a goal of moral education is to guide students to recognise the importance of a harmonious society. Games and activities teach children how to behave in society and theoretical situations in textbooks reiterate the collectivist mentality. Mid-2000s Chinese educational theory recognised the need for youth social interaction within moral development and created curricula applicable within children's social environments (Lu & Gao, 2004).

Kohlberg's (1975a) 'Moral Education for a Society in Moral Transition' stemmed from an argument between fellow sociologists on the 'hidden curriculum' within schools. While scholars argued the good and bad of the 'hidden curriculum,' whether it was to strip individuality or to simply prepare students for future society, Kohlberg took a third position, aligning his ideas to Dewey and equating it to moral and civic education (1975b). He argued that political and civic education is the 'stimulation of development' and implementation of advanced patterns of reasoning about political and social decisions, which is a form of moral reasoning (Ibid.). Although Kohlberg viewed political education solely in terms of democracy, his reasoning is largely consistent with the Chinese tradition of moral education, in that there is an inextricable relationship between morals and civics.

However, the CCP's moral education agenda is not 'hidden.' Rather, political and civics education is an explicit component throughout a child's education. Building upon this argument, Kohlberg's reflections on Dewey also link Western educational theory with current motivations for Chinese moral education reform. Dewey held the belief that the aim of education is both intellectual and moral development for the pursuit of progress (Kohlberg, 1975a). Kohlberg identified the inability to standardise the term 'progress' within societies, concluding that the fundamental purpose of education in terms of social progress is through aiding the moral development of individuals within a progressing society (Ibid.). Pragmatism for socio-economic progress is also a central tenet of CCP ideological education reforms.

Despite the above similarities, some Western theories remain inapplicable to the Chinese context. Dewey and Kohlberg's theories present dilemmas when applied to the Chinese context as they focus on democratic and Western values. As a prominent academic in the American liberal tradition, Dewey advocated that America was a unique philosophical and political example that was distinct from European experiences. However, he implied that China, a uniquely different culture and

political system, could draw examples out of the American experience (Feinberg *et al.*, 1975). Dewey advocated for the 'scientific method' and free inquiry as a plea for impartiality in political and scientific affairs, equating such methodology as consistent with democratic values (Ibid.: 366). Dewey stressed throughout his many lectures in China that the scientific method, allowing for public examination and independent judgement, was a precondition of progress (Ibid.). Scholars have argued against Dewey's claims that scientific values support democratic ones; rather, their correlation depends upon how science is used and the ethical and political principles that govern it (Ibid.: 368).

The National Plan includes goals of 'comprehensively promoting the scientific development of education, basing on the basic conditions of our nation at the primary stage of socialism' (MOE, 2010b). Therefore, while Dewey's narrow view of progress in terms of democratic values is not applicable within the context of 21st century CCP socialist-oriented education reform, the focus on 'scientific methods' in education reform are similar. Within that same vein, Kohlberg's theories and testing 'dilemmas' present numerous problems within the Chinese context.

Previous psychology studies have attempted to apply Kohlberg's stages of moral development within China but found that the application of Western values, such as liberalism and individualism as a marker of maturity, were not accurate within the Chinese context. In addition, Kohlberg's standardised system did not allow space for filial piety, resulting in confusion and the conclusion that Kohlberg's system is not universal (Bedford & Yeh, 2019; Snarey, 1985; Dien, 1982). The fallacy of Kohlberg's universal ethical principles reflects a colonialist and Western-centric mindset and does not recognise the uniqueness or value of indigenous Chinese morals and ethics.

Ma (1988) recognised these shortcomings and developed a Chinese model of Kohlberg's theory. He concluded that the first three stages of Kohlberg's model can be used within the Chinese version, but the latter three stages are too intertwined with culture and history to be universally applicable (Nie, 2008). Ma identified the gradual transition of Chinese morality from collectivist, affectionate, and tolerant of compromise (Stage 4) to majority and individual rights (Stage 5) (Ma, 1988; Nie, 2008). Kohlberg's last stage of morality emphasised equal rights and freedom, while Ma concluded Chinese moral development culminated with universal principles of ethical harmony (Ibid.: 17).

Dewey's theories on moral education are particularly interesting when applied to the contemporary Chinese context. He acknowledged that 'the habit of identifying moral characteristics with external conformity to authoritative prescriptions may lead us to ignore the ethical value of these intellectual attitudes, but the same habit tends to reduce morals to a dead and machine-like routine' (Dewey, 1923). Dewey then specified that while this prescriptive method does achieve results, the resulting moral characteristics that make worthy members of society, such as discipline, culture, and social efficiency, are 'morally undesirable' in individualistic, democratic societies (Ibid.: 417).

Yet from the perspective of the CCP, morality is prescriptive and the same traits that Dewey categorised as 'morally undesirable' are in fact the exact goals that the CCP is aiming to achieve throughout moral education. For example, compulsory primary school moral education textbooks specify key moral virtues such as patriotism, solidarity, and law-abidingness, among others (Tse, 2011). Furthermore, many of Xi's ideological campaigns are publicised as a panacea in response to the development of individualism and more towards a collective society. In 2019, Xi spoke to the importance of 'rejuvenating' and 'upgrading' ideological and political theory courses throughout the education system as an 'important guarantee for training future generations who are well-prepared to join the socialist cause' (Mu, 2019). For Xi, the 'individual' is replaced with the society, where collective morals are curated by the ruling Party for legitimacy and progress of the state. Therefore, when Dewey stressed the importance of pragmatism in education, his theory is best applied to democratic, Western individualist-societies.

4.6 Cross-cultural ethnographies of schooling

This section provides a brief review of cross-cultural ethnographic studies of schooling in global and China-specific contexts, with a specific focus on pedagogy and culture. It highlights the key texts that have contributed to the field of cross-cultural ethnographies of education in China, in turn providing the methodological and theoretical frameworks for my research in Nanjing primary school moral education classrooms within Xi's 'New Era' ideological reforms. This section helps to situate my research in the larger and well-researched field of ethnographies on childhood and youth education.

Ethnographic study provides an established methodology to investigate the complexities of situated knowledges and their cultural nuances (Kajanus *et al.*, 2018).

Many seminal works of ethnographies of schooling come from cross-national assessments. Globally, ethnographies of schooling have typically been conducted by White middle-class researchers who were unfamiliar with the circumstances and socio-economic complexities of the groups they were researching (Beach *et al.*, 2013). Many studies of ethnography in the early 20th century involved spending time immersed in a culture or group of people to collect illustrative accounts of ways of living that were alternate to Western norms and the norms of the researchers (Eisenhart, 2018).

Robin Alexander's *Culture and Pedagogy* (2001) provides a complex comparative discussion of education in five countries: India, France, Russia, England, and the USA. Alexander's (2001) extensive analysis probed deeply into education, culture, and governance in those countries marked by fundamentally different values and traditions. While *Culture and Pedagogy* does not analyse Chinese education, it does offer valuable insights into what an ethnography of primary schooling might look like, and the complex dialectical relationship between education and national development. Notably, Alexander recognises that pedagogy, regardless of the nation or culture, is a dynamic and fluid process (rather than a passive response), with classrooms viewed as microcultures (Nicholls, 2006). He also identifies universal themes across the five nations, including the power of language and the 'relationship between classroom language, pedagogic control and cultural transmission' (Osborn *et al.*, 2003: 652).

With regarding to China, Joseph Tobin's *Preschool in Three Cultures* (1989) and his sequel *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* (2009) present fascinating comparative cross-cultural ethnographic studies of the roles of preschools on youth socialisation and cultural transmission in China, Japan, and the USA (Tobin *et al.*, 1989; 2009). The focus of Tobin's work, in his own words, is 'eliciting meanings' of culture (Ibid.: 4). The anthropological study pioneered a unique methodological approach by video-taping preschool student-teacher interactions in one country and playing them for interviewees in other countries to elicit their response, a methodology they termed as 'video-cued multivocal ethnography' (Ibid.). Tobin's follow-up work (Tobin *et al.*, 2009) addresses a criticism of his earlier work (and of ethnography in general) that tends to locate groups and phenomena outside of history in a 'timeless ethnographic present' (Bjork, 2009). His updated study revisited earlier sites and situated the changes at each school through a new diachronic positioning. His sequel of Chinese preschools nearly two decades later demonstrated significant change, noting that education transitioned from rote memorisation in the 1980s to independent and

playful pedagogy in the early 2000s. Tobin (1989; 2009) also discusses the hesitancy of some Chinese participants to verbalise their opinions to foreign researchers when engaging in self-evaluation or public criticism (Bjork, 2009).

Ross' (1993; Nie, 2008: 33) ethnographic study on secondary school students in Shanghai revealed a hierarchy of teaching and learning that compelled students to learn and behave in a prescriptive manner. However, Ross (1993) also found that students and teachers developed unique and 'theatrical' practices to fit their specific pedagogical and cultural needs, despite rapidly changing policies. In Bakken's (2000) study of Chinese education, he labelled Chinese moral education as an instrument of CCP control. Bakken described Chinese society as an 'exemplary society,' quoting high-ranking Party officer Hu Yangbao's 1982 speech that called for a 'planned economy of moral order' through social engineering (Ibid.: 54-55).

Stig Thøgersen's (2002) detailed ethnography studied modernisation and development through education in rural Zouping County, Shandong Province. Thøgersen (2002) details the turbulent history of education within this rural community and the various streams and tributaries of socio-political ideology that wove their way into the education system. He found that numerous times throughout Zouping's recent history, the goals of political reformers to educate the community to build a 'county of culture' in Zouping clashed with the people's desires to pursue education as a means of leaving Zouping. Thøgersen's account also recognises the failure of many educational initiatives through the formal school system to meet the needs of the rural community.

Andrew Kipnis (2011) also researched Zouping County and wrote an illuminating ethnography on the root causes of educational desire in the community and the unique relationships between governance and education. His analysis explores cultural, social, and political reasonings behind high educational desire in Zouping, and by extension, China and the greater East Asian region. Despite Zouping's recent industrialisation and parents' low levels of formal education, parents demonstrated strong 'intensity' towards educational desire for their children and were willing to make significant sacrifices for the sake of their children's education (VanderVen, 2012). Kipnis (2011) demonstrated that the foundations for Zouping parents' high educational desire related to the intersecting theories of culture, governance, and 'emplacement,' a term Kipnis uses to describe the other two theories and their 'attempt on the part of the governance of education 'to install a particular

cultural process in a particular place' (Kipnis, 2011 *as cited in* VanderVen, 2012: 386; Weng & Lin, 2011).

A central concept that Kipnis introduces in his monograph is the idea of 'recombinant' transformation. Kipnis uses this term to describe social and economic transformation (particularly urbanisation) as the recycling of existing parts in addition to the integration of new parts (Kipnis, 2011; 2016). He rejects the idea that modernisation or urbanisation is characterised by replacement, i.e., substituting the old for the new, but rather is a process of reconfiguration. In *Governing the Souls of Chinese Modernity* (2017), Kipnis views Chinese modernisation as a process of recombinant development that restructures existing ideology, economic practices, and socio-political politics.

Kipnis' (2011; 2017) analysis is particularly useful to view reforms to Chinese moral education and youth moral ideology, as well as future directions of Chinese education and governance. Moral education reforms under Xi represent a specific and highly curated amalgamation of history, culture, language, and values that supports CCP legitimacy. The 'new' iteration of moral education is new in its composition, but not in its components.

In a review of Kipnis' monograph, Yochim (2011) offers an interesting criticism: he suggests that more research should highlight the lack of evidence of *low* educational desire among Chinese families. Kipnis (2011) suggests that a future lack of inter-generational socio-economic status and class mobility may result in the development of countercultures or subcultures with educational desires distinct to those he observed, such as low interest or low engagement in education. Yochim (*Ibid.*) extends Kipnis' idea that the future of Chinese educational desire might include an 'anti-school subculture.' He writes:

What if—and here I put forward a not entirely speculative possibility—the relevant counterculture expresses itself not as overt defiance but, rather, as non-expressive withdrawal? (Yochim, 2011: 57).

Yochim's writings, published exactly a decade earlier, foreshadow a growing trend in modern-day Chinese education. In mid 2021, a new phrase began popping up in Chinese social media: the 'lie flat' movement (*tang ping*). This nascent counterculture movement describes overworked and overstressed Chinese youth, particularly those ages 20-30, who forego the established socio-cultural norms of the gruelling work culture, marrying, having children, and consumerism (Chen, 2021).

This movement stems from the growing disillusionment of young people in China who may be the first generation who are less wealthy and less successful than their parents (Ibid.). The practice of 'lying flat' stands in direct opposition to current reforms under Xi which aim to mobilise, energise, and rouse Chinese youth to 'struggle' for the Party and continue the nation's drive for innovation and national development (Bandurski, 2021). The phrase 'lie flat' was removed from Chinese media by censors just as quickly as it gained popularity (Chen, 2021), highlighting the substantial threat this movement represents to the CCP's narrative of unrelenting struggle towards development, unyielding patriotism to the Party, and collective values of Xi's China Dream.

The idea of withdrawal as resistance is not new to education. During the forced colonised education of Indigenous peoples, such as the First Nations peoples in Canada, Native Americans in the USA, Maori of New Zealand, and Aboriginal people in Australia (among others), withdrawal from the education system was a means of resistance and survival (Welch, 1988; Deyhle *et al.*, 2008). At colonial institutions that forced linguistic assimilation, universalised Western-centric curricula constituted a form of 'psychological imperialism' (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Indigenous students engaged in forms of resistance by 'playing dumb,' remaining silent throughout lessons and the school day, and even dropping out (Nathani Wane, 2009).

At its core, the 'lie flat' movement demonstrates a clear limit to the 'monolithic command' of the CCP's broad socio-economic propaganda campaigns (Bandurski, 2021). Considering the significant threat levied by the 'lie flat' movement, how will the CCP mitigate future threats of resistance from the next generation of youth? The longevity of the 'lie flat' movement may have limits, as its strict censorship on Chinese social media makes ascertaining its popularity difficult. Yochim's (2011) call for further ethnographic research to explore trends of countercultures thus highlights the importance of acknowledging diverse ways of knowing, distinct cultures, and emerging patterns of being that stand independent to standardised and universalised knowledge by the ruling Party.

This section reviewed global and national cross-cultural ethnographic studies by Western researchers 'looking in' to foreign contexts. These ethnographic studies caution the reader to avoid making broad cross-cultural generalisations or comparisons that lack diachronic or cultural positionings. They also serve as a reminder to researchers to avoid 'characterising culture' at a national level (Bjork, 2009). These studies also highlight the well-researched question of what society is to

a school, but do not yet engage fully into the question, as Columbia University professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi ponders, what is school to society (Ibid.: 273)?

China's opening-up and the influence of globalisation over the past few decades has improved the quality and quantity of ethnographic research on schooling in China. Although there is a significant amount of research from Western scholars studying secondary school moral education (Schoenhals, 2016; Ross, 1992, 1993; Meyer, 1990; Nie, 2008; Parry, 1998; Li, 2012), the CCP did not elevate the status and importance of primary school level moral education until the early 21st century moral education reforms (Tang & Wang, 2020). Hardly surprising, then, ethnographies of Chinese moral education in primary schools remain an under-studied field. More significantly, despite the abundance of research on Chinese curriculum reform, there is also a dearth of studies that focus upon, and highlight, the student perspective (Nie, 2008). My research aims to use methods of ethnography to identify the unique and varied voices, perspectives, and experiences of students and teachers within the moral education arena.

4.7 CCP methods of legitimacy

The question of CCP legitimacy – namely, how CCP rule is secured and maintained – is an ongoing topic of scholarly debate. Modern CCP frameworks of legitimacy are highly nuanced. Conventional wisdom of the CCP's performance legitimacy (Zhu, 2011) has been challenged by waves of economic growth followed by recession and growing socio-economic inequalities. Zeng (2014) reminds us that it is important to note that the 'performance legitimacy model' of governance is not a simple equation of positive economic performance equals ruling Party legitimacy. Rather, legitimacy is generated by economic performance transformed into material benefits for the people's welfare (Ibid.). These benefits are central to most communist states' modern social contract of trading economic benefits for civil rights (Holbig & Gilley, 2010).

Given the instability of performance legitimacy models, the CCP has developed other methods to secure legitimacy, broadly drawing upon Confucian philosophical and cultural foundations to develop unique models, such as 'Chinese exceptionalism' (Zeng, 2014) and 'Harmonious Society' campaigns (Mohanty, 2012; Guo & Guo, 2008; Geis & Holt, 2009). For example, Hu Jintao's 'Harmonious Society' campaign was a modern interpretation of Confucian doctrine applied to contemporary economic models (Tang, 2007). These modernisation campaigns are an attempt by the CCP to

strike a balance between seemingly contradictory liberal economic policies and authoritarian governance (Zhao, 2010).

The immediate goal of the CCP is securing legitimacy. Legitimation, or the act of securing legitimacy, is a two-way process: those *governed* must consent as much as those *governing*. However, legitimacy is not measured in absolutes, but rather varies throughout different spatial, temporal, and political realms. Crises test claims of legitimacy. The 2003 SARS epidemic, the Kuomintang's defeat in Taiwan's 2000 presidential election, the 2008 Chinese milk scandal, the 2014 & 2019 Hong Kong protests, and the 2008 financial crisis (Zeng, 2014), among other dramatic events, threatened the CCP's stability and claims to legitimacy by eroding the power relationship between the ruling Party and the people.

To mitigate tensions from the emergence of the market economy and the effect of economic activity on social moral norms (Hanafin, 2002), the CCP has relied upon a continuous process of ideological adaptation and mobilisation to maintain legitimacy (Schubert, 2007; Shambaugh & Brinley, 2008). This 'experimentation' has been a beneficial component to CCP regime stability via a pragmatic and incremental approach to reform, such as Deng-era experimentation of allowing select regions to experiment with capitalist reforms in the formation of special economic zones, without abandoning established ruling Party doctrine (Rubenstein, 2021).

Schubert (2007) identifies 'zones of legitimacy' at different levels of Chinese society to measure the society's acceptance of CCP legitimacy. Drawing from David Easton's (1965) political systems theory, one zone identified by Schubert (2007) is ideological, referring to the people's moral consent of ruling Party values. Sandby-Thomas (2014) extends Schubert's (2007) ideas of ideological legitimacy by arguing that major CCP ideological campaigns, such as the 'Three Represents' campaign, represent a 'formal' version of ideological hegemony which is narrowly confined to promulgating ruling Party doctrine to Party elites. An 'informal' version of zones of ideological hegemony also exists, which is mainly concerned with justifying CCP rule throughout all levels of society (Ibid.: 584). Schubert (2007) and Sandby-Thomas' (2014) analyses also highlights the multiple layers of ideological legitimacy through different ideological versions intended for different classes of people. The CCP has maintained legitimacy through strategically selective policies whose ideological orientation speaks to national discourses regarding various socio-economic and temporal situations or creating 'formal' and 'informal' messages for different groups. Policies

are thus framed to secure legitimation and supplemented by ideological discourse that targets the values of specific social groups (Schubert, 2014).

The idea of 'formal' and 'informal' zones of legitimation echoes an earlier argument by Wang Huning, a leading Chinese political theorist and current Secretary of the Central Secretariat of the CCP since 2017. Wang (1988) identified key reasons that China's political system developed independent to Western liberalism and Soviet-style Marxism. He argued that Chinese political culture, deeply rooted in Confucian values, has always been a 'political culture of the axis of culture' (*wenhuazhongchoudezhengzhiwenhua*) unique to Western definitions (Ibid.). Wang (1988) categorises this unique combination of traditional values and culture with Marxist ideology to identify two streams of political culture: 'hardware' of institutions, systems, and norms; and 'software' of values, feelings, and psychology. Hardware is just as effective in shaping political culture as software, and both represent crucial components of China's political structure.

Ramo's (2004) provocative 'Beijing Consensus' theory of CCP legitimacy, derived from the Western 'Washington Consensus' (Williamson, 2009), highlighted three common characteristics of governance: a focus on technological innovation and constant experimental reforms; a shift towards measuring progress by sustainability and equality, rather than economic performance; and self-determination, nationalism, and patriotic discourse (Zhao, 2010). Although Ramo (2004) recognised that Chinese models of hegemony cannot be adequately characterised by the Western *status quo*, his analysis fails to accurately capture China's political model. Kennedy's (2010) rebuttal to Ramo's (2004) framework highlights China's lack of global technological innovation, growing socio-economic inequality, and economic growth policies not unique to China as reasons to reject Ramo's (2004) 'Beijing Consensus' theory.

The 'Beijing Consensus' attracted significant debate from Chinese and Western scholars. In 2005, the *People's Daily Online* published a dialogue by two well-known Marxist scholars, Prof Wu Shuqing and Cheng Enfu, who discussed the merits of the 'Beijing Consensus' and its foundations in the 'Washington Consensus' framework. Both scholars criticised the Western-based approach of the 'Washington Consensus' and failed neoliberal reforms by Western nations that had resulted in a decade-long recession (*People's Daily*, 2005). They also drew distinction between Soviet style neoliberal reforms and Chinese models of socialism, reaffirming their belief that Socialism with Chinese characteristics is superior due to its fundamental goals of self-improvement (Ibid.).

Contemporary CCP ideological hegemony differs from previous models of socialist authoritarian governments, such as the Soviet example. To maintain legitimacy, many Soviet-style regimes relied upon paternalistic claims to legitimise their rule through government performance (Fehér, 1982 *as cited in* Holbing, 2008). However, China's economic performance has eroded claims of paternalism by creating conditions for social mobility and shifting the responsibility of national development and progress from the Party to the people (Ibid.: 28). For example, moral ideological campaigns by the CCP (and particularly those reflected within Chinese primary school moral education textbooks) call on the Chinese people to realise the 'China Dream' of modernisation and national development. The 2013 'Realize Youthful Dream' speech directly connected youth ideological homogenisation with the nation's development:

I firmly believe that if the people of all ethnic groups unite under the Party's leadership, stand on solid ground and forge ahead with a pioneering spirit, we can certainly build a prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious modern socialist country by the middle of this century. And all our young people will surely witness and share in the realization of the Chinese Dream along with the people of all ethnic groups. (NPC, 2013).

The fall of the Soviet Union and other Soviet-style authoritarian regimes may also have had an impact on the CCP's deployment of methods of governing and their concerns about maintaining power (Holbig, 2011). The 'China model' (Zhao, 2010; Bell, 2016) framework of legitimacy represents a more ideologically focused strategy of separating Chinese socialism from Soviet comparisons (Kennedy, 2010).

Authoritarian states are inherently fragile (Nathan, 2003). The CCP's established model of performance legitimacy is tenuous, particularly given China's slowing economic growth and growing socio-economic inequalities. Vickers (2008) suggested that when the performance legitimacy model ceases to operate, the CCP may turn to its nationalistic claims of global superiority to maintain legitimacy. Many China scholars identify a clear pattern of the CCP turning to nationalist and patriotic education campaigns to justify legitimacy after a crisis (Fairbrother, 2008). Gore (2020) argues that under Xi's leadership, the CCP is developing a new social contract that relies upon cultural heritage, CCP historical claims to legitimacy, and select aspects of liberalism, to support its legitimacy amid global transformation.

Nationalist education and propaganda, positive economic growth, and limited political reforms are methods by which the CCP generates legitimacy, underpinning

their claim that the CCP is the only viable political power that can guarantee a stable and 'harmonious' society (Nathan, 2003; *Ibid.*). Political education of CCP values pertaining to nationality, law, and individual rights further support claims to legitimacy (Fairbrother, 2008).

Holbig (2008) notes that rapidly transitioning societies threaten ruling Party claims to ideological hegemony due to the uncertainties of economic reform and their outcomes and shifting socio-cultural norms. Ideological reform can serve as a basis to legitimising political power amidst socio-economic change by providing clear frameworks to view change (*Ibid.*: 16). However, a dominant, inflexible ideology by the ruling Party can also be a threat to the legitimacy and longevity of the ruling Party. For example, a contributing factor to the downfall of the USSR was the contradictions between state-sponsored dominant ideology and the reality of an authoritarian state with deep-rooted problems such as widespread corruption, abuse of power, and economic stagnation (Gore, 1993; *Ibid.*: 17).

Su (2011) applies Western theories of hegemony to the Chinese context to understand the nature of contemporary CCP politics and ideology. Su's (2011) detailed analysis makes clear distinctions between prevailing Western and CCP interpretations of hegemony, ideology, and mass consciousness. However, Su (*Ibid.*: 314) agrees with Gramsci by rejecting the idea of a unified, homogeneous ideology throughout the Chinese people, noting that complexities and pluralities of thoughts and beliefs exist throughout all layers of society and the CCP has found that it needs to develop policies that secure the peoples' consent to retain legitimacy.

Drawing on Raymond Williams' ideas of hegemony, Su (2011) categorises revolution and reform as systems of beliefs developed by the CCP for mass distribution. Su (*Ibid.*: 315) notes that Mao-era and Deng-era reforms created and deployed specific ideologies in political struggles and social movements yet draws a distinction between hegemony defined by Mao and Gramsci. Revolutions and social movements under Mao called for the proletariat social class to overthrow the bourgeoisie, while Gramsci viewed the securing of hegemony as all classes co-existing albeit unequally in society. Su (2011) suggests that Mao's concept of hegemony, i.e., the ruling Party using revolution to capture political power, is a prelude to the hegemony realised by Gramsci which would be best suited for maintaining socialist transformation. Securing consent for the legitimate right to rule is a top priority for CCP; however, ideology does not have to be internalised by the entirety of society to be effective. Rather, 'effective' ideology can serve as a symbolic framework for the

ruling Party's 'socio-political construction of reality' (Herrmann-Pillath 2005; Wohlgemuth 2002 *as cited in* Holbig, 2008: 15-16).

We see that the CCP's current model of ruling Party legitimacy is characterised by constant change, a distinct separation from Western liberalism, and patriotic claims to global superiority and the supremacy of traditional culture. While history tells us that authoritarian states are fragile, Xi strongly disagrees (Tsang & Cheung, 2021). He has developed a new system of political governance which centres on adapting historical models with 'strongman rule' and equating personal power with Party legitimacy (Ibid.). Ideology is at the core of Xi's model of legitimacy, particularly patriotic narratives of global superiority and updated Leninist and Maoist ideology to reinforce claims that CCP control is the only means for Chinese modernisation (Ibid.).

However, this rigid model of ideological unity is at odds with the CCP's penchant for rapid social change in response to crises. While China's economic growth has created varying social classes, traditional Chinese culture forces conformity to one specific ideology of political leadership, which in turn alienates certain social groups and restricts the government's ability to meet the needs of all members of society (Fewsmith, 1996). Tang & Cheung (2021) argue that Xi's methods of governance strengthen his own personal power in the short run at the sake of long-term legitimacy. Xi's choice to focus on short-term individual strength over long-term Party legitimacy undermines his efforts for sustained modernisation, such as China's education modernisation by 2035 plan (MOE, 2019). It also raises questions about the longevity of his current model of leadership, particularly given the removal of term limits (Global Times, 2018). Furthermore, his model of governance suggests his claims to undisputed leadership may be more fragile than they appear.

4.8 Conclusion

This analysis provides a useful description of numerous interconnected aspects of contemporary Chinese and Western moral education theory and development and CCP methods of legitimacy. While aspects of Chinese education correspond to Gentile's (2005) ideas of political religion as well as those of totalitarian education which restrict individual freedoms and transform schools into 'regimes of authority' (Dewey, 2009; Spector, 2016), contemporary Chinese moral education is complex. Chinese education is an extension of the Party state, and educational standards are guided by criteria developed for state legitimation. Students, teachers, curricula, and schools all function under the purview, as well as for the benefit of, the continued

modernisation and development of the state. Moral citizens within China's 'New Era' imbue prescriptive values that centre around patriotism, collectivism, and political ideology. Individual integration into the standardised education system is a social requirement for Chinese youth. The development of participatory consent amongst students and teachers not only authorises the co-option of the education system as a political realm, but also justifies citizens' good moral standing. *Lideshuren* has become both a description and a defining quality of contemporary Chinese education.

The philosophies of many influential Western scholars can be applied to the Chinese case while keeping in mind the cultural, temporal, and linguistic differences between their theories and contemporary Chinese moral education. There are strong correlations between Confucian, Durkheimian, and contemporary moral education philosophy and its role in socioeconomic progress through discipline and regulation by the State. Theories of the socialisation of youth postulated by Durkheim, Kohlberg, and Piaget all can be applied to the contemporary Chinese classroom. Dewey's theories concur with current reform justifications that posit moral education reforms are for the pursuit of societal progress. *How* progress is defined, and *who* defines progress, are major points of departure between Western and Chinese moral education theory.

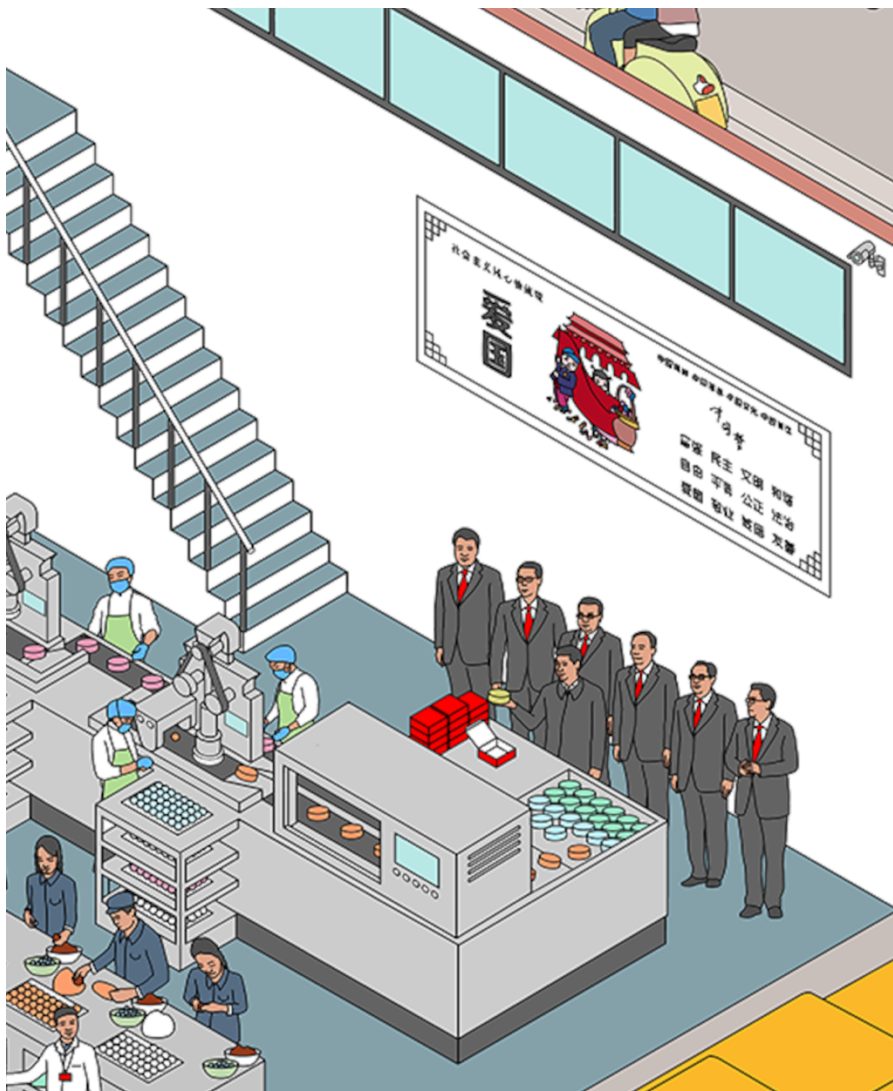
Chapter 5

A macro-level perspective: A critical study of Chinese moral education textbooks

程门立雪

Chéng mén lì xuě

Snow piles up at Cheng Yi's door (To honour the master and respect his teachings)



5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a macro-level perspective to moral education reforms within the Chinese primary school setting. It can be broadly understood as an examination of the *prescribed* knowledge curated by the CCP and directly presented to youth. It examines the construction of China's 21st century 'New Era' ideology through the recontextualisation of moral education within official curricula. It also questions how moral education textbooks represent ideological reform.

I begin by reviewing literature pertaining to ideological work in the Chinese education system and the role of moral education textbooks as political doctrine. Then, methods of critical discourse analysis (see Chapter 2 for methodology) are employed to analyse the 2019 iteration of upper primary school (fourth, fifth, and sixth grade) moral education textbook 'Morality and Rule of Law' (Lu, 2019). Data analysis of the textbooks reveals three themes which are explored in relation to their purpose within 'New Era' socio-economic and political goals.

5.1 How is moral education presented?

Amid ongoing societal, political, and economic change, Chinese moral education curricula have been discursively shifted to incorporate more nationalist, patriotic, and ideo-political ideology. Youth moral education has been a focus of reforms that aim to guide the next generation's ideological development to support ruling Party doctrine and legitimacy. Xi has directly called for the revitalisation and prioritisation of ideological work in schools (CCP, 2017: 37). He emphasised the 'strategic development' of youth ideological cultivation to support societal and political modernisation within China's 'New Era' (Zhang, 2013; MOE, 2019g).

Moral education is a key platform for youth ideological work. The course comprises of a 'three-in-one' connotation of citizenship, political, and ideological education (Lee & Ho, 2008). At primary and secondary school levels, moral education is aimed at legitimising Party leadership, ensuring societal harmony, and continuing socio-economic progress and growth (Peng *et al.*, 2019). Ongoing moral education reform incorporates salient issues of the Party, society, and state into the curriculum. Ideological discourse created by the CCP acknowledges 'approved' societal flaws and provides uniform and sanctioned responses to the flaws to improve individual, societal, and national conditions.

The highly centralised and standardised nature of the Chinese education system (Huang *et al.*, 2015) allows top-down curriculum reform to create a direct line of

knowledge distribution between ruling Party ideology and youth ideological development. Despite the significant investment in youth ideological reform, there is still little clarity regarding what 'New Era' youth morality entails or how this ideology is constructed and represented within the curriculum. This chapter aims to answer these questions through a critical discourse analysis of the construction of 'New Era' youth moral ideology within updated primary school moral education textbooks amid ongoing social change.

The construction of cultural discourse within Chinese textbooks has been widely studied (Liu, 2005; 2008). Scholars have focused on topics such as nation-building and ethnic representation (Wang & Phillion, 2010; Chu, 2018; Zhao, 2020), curriculum reform in response to 21st century challenges (Guo-Brennan, 2012; Law, 2014), globalisation (Xu, 2005; Yin & Li, 2012; Yin, 2013) and political reform (Huang *et al.*, 2015). There is a significant body of literature analysing the role of textbooks as vessels for political ideology (Apple, 1993; You, 2005; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Likewise, the role of textbooks in legitimising ruling Party ideology is widely studied (Apple, 1995; Fairclough, 1989; 2003; da Silva, 1999).

5.2 Curriculum reform as ideological work in China's 'New Era'

Throughout the thesis chapters so far I have been using the term ideology. I want to further clarify the term 'ideology' within the Chinese context. Ideology is a dynamic and open-ended term that evolves in response to social, political, and economic situations within China (You, 2005). To this end, ideology is a representation of the ruling Party, or CCP, values. However, the CCP is not static; it is a dynamic group whose members, organisation, and values are similarly influenced by socio-economic developments (Ibid.: 636). Ideology is constantly reinterpreted and reformed, both *shaping* and *shaped by* institutional change (North, 1990). Ideological reform is determined by an internal cost-benefit analysis. Two factors balance the cost-benefit analysis: ideological continuity, which can provide stability and relieve societal tensions; and, ideological adaptability, a process which shifts ideology to meet the needs of a changing state (Holbig, 2008). Ideological work within the contemporary Chinese state can be understood as the Party's purposeful efforts to support ruling Party doctrine, construct coherent and collective values, and guide behaviour to support legitimisation (Li, 2011).

Da Silva (1999) argues curriculum is an empowered representation of authority that implicitly authorises ideology. Continuous curriculum revision acts as a

'gatekeeper' to imbue prescriptive ideology and values aimed at fostering societal consent targeted towards youth and the greater society (Law, 2014). Constructed discourses of cultural values and beliefs within the moral education curriculum serve the interests of the government by transmitting desired behaviours and ideology to youth (Liu, 2005). According to Law (2014), curriculum reform and other economic, political, social, and cultural forces are inseparable. Ideational work on populations and their subjectivities is essential to the CCP's model of maintaining political order and securing power (Brady, 2009).

As curriculum reform is the CCP's primary manpower development response to 21st century challenges (Law, 2014), recent changes to China's curriculum indicate that the CCP is relying heavily on ideological conformity and nation-building to continue societal and economic development. Curriculum reform constructs the ideal citizen and society through a curated depiction of reality presented within the curriculum. Reforms consolidate ideological authority to the ruling elite by shifting moral identity to fit the needs of an evolving state through a process that both *generates* and *curtails* societal reform. As ideopolitical moral education curriculum reform in the primary and secondary schools transitioned in accordance to evolving CCP doctrine, moral education has become more politically focused (Law, 2011; Chen, 2018: 58). Xi has designed education reform to take a new direction within the 'New Era,' including promoting the 'right political direction' and upholding moral education (MOE, 2018b).

5.3 Moral education textbooks as political doctrine

Textbooks are physical representations of curriculum knowledge. They are constructed by the intersections of economic demands, the need for legitimation regarding social orders, and the necessity for social cohesion (Naseem *et al.*, 2016). Textbooks are an important means of brokering ideology within society and shape people's knowledge of the world, ideologies and shared values (van Dijk, 2015).

Textbooks act as ideological tools to convey dominant values and societal beliefs through subjective culture (Liu, 2008). Knowledge present within textbooks is constructed to represent dominant values in a natural way (Ibid.), constructing 'common sense' narratives (Apple, 1993). In line with the 'two faces' of education theory developed by Bush and Sartarelli (2000), textbooks can be tools of peace as well as conflict (Naseem *et al.*, 2016) through the targeted use of language and representation. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), language is a form of social

practice, both constructing and naturalising ideologies (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 3). The language of curriculum is inextricably linked to power dynamics, as it can actively promote certain ideologies whilst silencing or excluding concepts outside the *status quo* (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015).

Textbook revisions have shifted moral education to an exercise in 'New Era' Party-building. Recent guidelines have called for strengthening ideological and political theory in schools to teach students to 'love the Party, the country, socialism and the people' (Xu & Zhao, 2019). The MOE also announced plans for stronger and more explicit integration of patriotism education into textbooks (Xinhua, 2019b). The revised 'Morality and Rule of Law' textbooks were designed to integrate a strong emphasis on Core Socialist Values and rule of law (MOE, 2016). They also mark a noticeable change from previous editions due to the integration of civic awareness, Chinese 'excellent traditional culture,' and legal and national sovereignty claims (Chen, 2019).

The manipulation of temporal and spatial settings is also prevalent. Textbooks have been rooted in a 'new historical starting point' (Ibid.). Historical events have been changed to support the narratives of nation-building and national rejuvenation. One example of this change is the extension of the Second Sino-Japanese War in teaching materials. While the internationally recognised timeframe of the War is eight years (1937-1945), revised textbooks extended the War to span fourteen years (1931-1945). The purpose of this change was to 'fully reflect the crimes of Japanese aggression' within teaching materials (Xinhua, 2017a).

Furthermore, textbook maps, text, and visual imagery were revised to support CCP narratives of geographical claims. For example, textbooks were revised 'based on historical fact' to highlight the 'historical origins' of China's sovereignty in Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and its affiliated islands, the Diaoyu Islands, and the South China Sea in efforts to 'strengthen national sovereignty education and promote [the] national spirit' (MOE, 2016). The commodification of time and space within textbooks relates to cultural and temporal acts of hegemony (Mayes, 2005) in that it further underlines the integral role of textbook representation in achieving socio-economic goals.

5.4 The corpus

This chapter uses frameworks of CDA (detailed in Chapter 2) to analyse upper primary school (fourth, fifth, and sixth grade) moral education textbooks (first and second semester). The title of the textbooks is 'Morality and Rule of Law', and they

were published by the People's Education Press in 2019 (Lu, 2019). Textbooks were purchased during the ethnographic period in China. In total, hard copies of six textbooks were analysed.

References from the textbook are coded numerically by grade, semester, and page number. For example, an image found on page thirty (30) of the fourth grade (4), second semester (2) textbook would be labelled as follows: 4:2:30. Textbooks are written in Mandarin. All quotes and phrases from the textbooks were translated by the researcher.

5.5 A purposeful presentation of the ideal

5.5.1 The front cover: A reflection of the idealised student

Front covers are the first image that students see and set the overall tone for the textbook. The three textbook covers for fourth, fifth, and sixth grades show strong similarities. On all three textbook covers, students are depicted happily working together to improve their community or their studies. Students wear the red Party scarf and sometimes are drawn upon a background of bucolic fields and lush trees. The landscape depicted on the front covers differs from the reality of most Chinese urban cityscapes. Illustrations are depicted in subdued colours that have a familiar, calming effect on the reader.

Taking the first semester fourth, fifth, and sixth grade covers as an example, they show a progression of students transitioning from helping their community to fostering self-cultivation. A photo of the textbook cover pages is below in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1 Fourth-grade (left), fifth-grade (middle), and sixth-grade (right) textbook cover pages in *Morality and Rule of Law*

The fourth-grade cover page shows students planting a young sapling, with another group of students planting more trees in the background. Smiling and happy, they are working together in cohesion with the environment. No adults are in the picture, suggesting that the children have taken initiative to plant the trees by themselves and to improve the environment.

The fifth-grade textbook cover page transitions to a scene inside a classroom. Four students, wearing the Party scarf, write calligraphy; the classroom is neat and tidy and again, no teachers are present. The student holding the brush is writing a four-character idiom, *zhiqiangbuxi*. Roughly translated, this phrase means to strive unremittingly for self-improvement. This idiom is originally from an excerpt in the *Book of Changes (yijing)*, an ancient text regarded as one of the earliest Chinese classics. Given that students in fifth grade would likely be around nine to ten years old, it is unlikely that young students would be familiar with this philosophical phrasing.

In the background of the fifth-grade textbook cover page, two phrases are framed on the classroom wall. The framed quote on the right is a phrase attributed to Zhuge Liang (181-234 AD), a general from the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 AD) in China; he is widely known as a military mastermind and political sage. The framed quote, *zhidangcungaoyuan*, means to set lofty and ambitious goals for oneself. To the left, the second quote is from a Song-dynasty (960-1279 AD) poem 'On Yueyang Tower' by Fan Zhongyan written in 1045 AD. The phrase translates to, 'The first concern is the affairs of the state, then come the pleasures of life.' Again, these phrases are likely to be recognised only by those with a high level of education and would not be common knowledge in the fifth-grade curriculum.

Lastly, the sixth-grade textbook cover page depicts students outside on a sunny summer's day. Three students sit underneath the shade of a verdant tree. There are no adults, and it appears that students are not in the classroom or school but in a public setting outside of class. All students are engaged with the book held by the student in the middle, titled 'A Reader in Education of the Rule of Law' (*fazhijiaoyuduben*). The book does not appear to be a textbook and lacks images or colours.

The front covers offer an idealised version of primary students through the eyes of the CCP. From the textbook covers, we can learn that the ideal student is one that shows their Party affiliation in all scenarios by wearing their red Party scarf. In

addition, they wear neat and clean clothes and keep a tidy space around them. Yet more importantly, the ideal student is eager to engage with and learn more about the rule of law, whether through ancient Chinese texts or contemporary readers. Without adult supervision, young students independently choose to read law books or write political philosophy in calligraphy during their free time.

In an analysis of Chinese language textbooks for heritage learners, Chiu (2011) found that the construction of the 'ideal' Chinese child was distinct from their actual identities. These findings are consistent with the illustrations depicted on the textbook cover pages. During my ethnographic research (detailed in Chapter 7), I did not see any students writing calligraphy or reading law books during their free time. In contrast, students would run around, either playing sports or playing with their friends in the short breaks between classes. Considering most textbook editors were once teachers, it can be assumed that textbook editors were aware that the illustrative depictions of students in textbooks were not a true reflection of Chinese youth.⁶

Fyfe and Law (1988: 1) note that images often contain social hierarchies, and a 'depiction is never just an illustration... [but is also] the site for the construction and depiction of social difference.' The front covers of textbooks construct hierarchical relations for students by reinforcing cultural hegemony. The 'ideal' child is defined by their consent to engage with patriotic or nationalist discourse that reaffirms the overarching power of the CCP, such as the quote from Zhuge Liang reminding students that 'the affairs of the state come first.' The idealised student acts independently to better themselves, their community, and their country. The absence of teachers or adults from the textbook covers conveys a sense of responsibility for students to practice self-cultivation through CCP doctrine. Homogeneity of cultures and ethnicities is reinforced through the illustrations that lack ethnic or cultural distinctions and convey a Han-Chinese collective identity.

5.5.2 Building the patriotic collective

The first theme throughout the textbooks is the construction of a patriotic and collective ideology. Moral education textbooks are tangible representations of CCP discourse that encourages homogeneity of values and identity through a specific version of national and cultural identity. As Chinese culture remains rooted in Confucian tradition (Wang & Liu, 2010), collectivism is an important aspect of

⁶ Based on interview notes from Ms. Z in September 2020

contemporary society. Collective ideology, based on the ruling Party narrative, is an integral component of authoritarian legitimation (Holbig, 2013). The focus on the collective reaffirms the moral superiority of the *status quo* and discourages individualist or discordant ideology outside CCP narratives. Collectivist narrative constructions maintain a positive image of the group and its ideology which can mitigate ideological opposition that may occur during societal change (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998).

Semantic representation within textbooks illustrates the importance of collectivism. Textbooks contain significantly more plural pronouns than singular, with frequent use of *us, classmates, a group, class collective, everyone, organisation, and class*, among others. Chapter titles such as ‘Our Fourth Grade Class’ and ‘We Decide Our Class Rules’ frame curriculum and moral identity through the lens of the collective. There are more illustrations and photographs of groups rather than individuals throughout the textbooks.

The dual focus on patriotic and collective ideology is made to appear natural and common sense through seemingly casual statements of embodied values. For example, one section begins with the broad statement, ‘We all love our parents, and also share [responsibilities] with them’ (4:1:29); fifth grade textbooks tell students that personal goals should focus on recognition and acceptance into society (5:1:10). These phrases reinforce a collective and unified ‘teleology of Chineseness,’ a theme which has also been identified in secondary school moral education textbooks (Vickers, 2021).

Other sections stoke national pride and frame collective values as inherent traits. For example, the sixth-grade section titled, ‘I’m Proud: I Am a Chinese Person,’ asks students, ‘What things make you realise the pride of being a Chinese citizen?’ (6:1:29). In this example, students are not asked *if* they are proud, but *how*, bypassing individual judgement and suggesting that patriotism and national pride is an inherent quality. In addition, the reinforcement of traditional Chinese values, such as filial piety (*xiao*) and familial love, construct ideological coherence through ethnic identity. For example, chapter seven of the fifth-grade textbook, titled ‘The Chinese People, One Family’ (5:1:54), stresses the familiarity and strong relationships with other Chinese through phrases such as, ‘all nationalities in China converge into one big family’ (5:1:55) and ‘in the big Chinese family’ (5:1:54, 60).

Students are told explicitly what patriotism entails and how to embody its values: ‘patriotism is loyalty and strong love for the motherland. If the country is prosperous, then the people can be happy; if the country is weak, then the people will

suffer accordingly' (5:1:89). The fifth-grade section titled 'The Patriotic Feelings of 'The Rise and Fall of the Nation Concerns Everyone' highlights the importance of patriotism for the benefit and continued progress of the country (5:1:89). The narrative of the 'Chinese Dream' reinforces the patriotic collective identity through phrases such as 'the Chinese dream is the dream of the Chinese people and is every Chinese person's dream' (5:2:93); and 'we must use the Party's strong leadership and tenacious struggle to inspire all Chinese children to continue to forge ahead, and to unite together to build the Chinese dream' (5:2:93).

These examples establish a collective identity of patriotic and ethnically homogenous youth. Within the textbooks, the CCP is portrayed as an extension of a student's immediate family, humanising the CCP and requiring students to love and respect this 'family member.' This narrative is an important foundation in the transition from 'blind patriotism' to the task of 'constructing' positive group identity. Framing the CCP as a family member of all Chinese youth attaches patriotic ideals to children's natural tendency to create 'us' vs 'them' social constructions (Staub, 2003). The 'us' is constructed as the homogenous and patriotic Chinese 'family,' while the outsider 'them' group is an unpatriotic and immoral (and potentially dangerous) stranger.

Patriotic collective moral identity is also established through reinforcement of the CCP's moral authority and student integration into the Party. Strengthening the Party and 'student work' in primary schools has been a key aim of the CCP (Chen, 2018) to strengthen Party legitimacy and longevity. Within the textbook, the presence of the CCP is both subtle and explicit. Examples of fictitious schools in the textbook are given patriotic names, such as 'Red Scarf Primary School' (6:1:20). The school's name is a reference to the mandatory uniform of the Young Pioneers branch of the CCP, an organisation in which all students are members. One fourth-grade illustration details students wearing the Young Pioneers red scarf and saluting during a flag ceremony (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2 An image of a flag-raising ceremony in the fourth-grade textbook

The passage states: ‘Remember the day we established the Young Pioneers League, we took a solemn oath under the League’s flag, gaily coloured red scarves fluttering on our chests, and we became glorious Young Pioneers. . .’ (4:1:2). Portch *et al.* (2015) argue that ‘emotion words’ derive meaning based on the emotional response they invoke through grounding linguistic narratives in situational experiences. The linguistic choices in the passage, such as ‘take a solemn oath,’ ‘gaily coloured red scarves,’ and ‘glorious Young Pioneers,’ evoke strong patriotic emotions. This phrasing encourages strong emotional responses, such as pride, nostalgia, or patriotism, to the Youth Party and the CCP.

Lastly, historical and geographical real-life examples are framed within patriotic and emotional narratives. Students are taught to admire the Opium War martyr Lin Zebu’s patriotic spirit (5:2:45). When describing the Long March (1934-1935), the text encourages students to, ‘embody the strong will of the People’s Army to victory and the Chinese nation [to] not fear sacrifice, perseverance, or bloody

fighting' (5:2:65). Similar phrasing is used when describing the Second Sino-Japanese War by telling students to embrace the 'patriotic spirit that erupted like a volcano' during the War (5:2:70). Hong Kong and Taiwan are described to students with emotional phrasing, such as 'Hong Kong returned to the embrace of the motherland...the joy of Hong Kong's return is written on everyone's face, and the dreams of many years have finally become a reality' (5:2:47), and 'Taiwan [Province] has been an inalienable part of our territory since ancient times' (5:1:47). The strong focus on rejuvenating traditional culture is an attempt to promote patriotism and collective identity in the face of globalisation and change (Cheng, 2019).

5.5.3 An education in mobilisation

The second theme is the mobilisation of youth for Party-building. Textbook narratives support the construction of the ruling Party's ideal societal development and mobilise youth to correct existing flaws within society. Explicit phrasing delineates acts that are moral (good) and those which are immoral (bad). Moral actions depicted in the textbooks are described using wording such as correct (*zhengque*), proper/reasonable (*zhengdang*), and good/favourable (*lianghao*). Examples of good moral instructions include teaching students 'the correct way to address conflicting opinions' (5:1:10) and how to 'cultivate favourable study and lifestyle practices, and practices of obedience to follow the rule of law' (5:1:25).

In contrast, negative morals are described as bad/unfavourable (*bu lianghao*) and wrong/incorrect (*cuowu*). For example, smoking and drinking alcohol are described as immoral and can 'trigger unfavourable behaviour,' 'incorrect understanding,' (5:1:19) and 'unfavourable habits' (5:1:22). Students are warned not to become 'little emperors' (*xiaohuangdi*) (4:1:46; 5:2:5), a colloquialism for a pampered son or daughter in single-child families. The 'little emperor' discourse stems from unintended consequences of the One Child Policy and has been labelled a contributing factor in China's moral decline (Xu, 2017).

Furthermore, textbooks mobilise youth to take initiative and 'correct' flaws within adult society. Examples of students correcting immoral behaviour include: asking parents to consider the environment when choosing to drive their car (5:2:14); making sure adults respect traffic rules (5:2:15); and reminding parents to always ask for an official receipt to ensure taxes are paid (5:2:31). In those examples, students gently reprimand parents based on the moral truths they have learned in school, and parents acknowledge their wrongdoings and feel embarrassed by their regressions.

These examples draw parallels to Mao-era ‘Little Red Guards’ who acted under the guise of ideological supremacy as ‘educated youth’ to ensure political legitimacy (Clark, 2012).

Lastly, the frequent use of the word ‘persevere’ (*jianchi*) targets youth mobilisation. This word becomes a rallying cry for continued societal progress and prepares students for a potentially turbulent future society in which they will have to ‘persevere’ or ‘eat bitterness’ (*chiku*). In the fifth-grade textbooks, students are told they ‘must persevere [to uphold] fairness and justice’ (5:1:37). Another section describes the Second Sino-Japanese War and war crimes committed in Nanjing. The passage states, ‘No matter how hard the conditions are, how dangerous it is to wake up, and how cruel the war, the Chinese Communist Party has always persevered against aggression, kept fighting despite all setbacks, and held the tenacious and unyielding belief of certain victory’ (5:2:71).

5.5.4 Heteronormative gendered roles

Gendered roles are common in Chinese textbooks, and subtle references to gender norms may strengthen existing gender stereotypes and lead towards discrimination (Wang, 1998). At first glance, it may appear that textbooks depict an egalitarian representation of two genders: male and female. There is a general balance between the proportions of males and females in illustrations, photos, and text. The exception to this is photographs or drawings of historical or governmental figures, such as Confucius, Lei Feng, or soldiers, which are almost all men. The textbooks generally allow two genders, male and female, to possess unique qualities, characteristics, and personalities. However, textbooks facilitate the reproduction of gender stereotypes and heteronormative values. This suggests a prescriptive, rather than descriptive, depiction of gender roles for Chinese youth.

The reproduction of heteronormative values is prominent throughout the textbooks. These images provide evidence as to how the authors, *i.e.*, the CCP, portray gender and gender roles beyond the classroom. Within nuclear families, parents are displayed as one father and one mother, often with grandparents (one male and one female) (5:2:2,14). No images from these textbooks showed a LGBTQ+ family, and there was no mention of non-traditional gender identities. Children are usually in the centre of illustrations of families, reinforcing the parental role and prominence in children’s lives. Figure 5.3 depicts three different examples of a family throughout the textbooks.



Figure 5.3 Different examples of the heteronormative nuclear family

At times, female mothers are portrayed at home doing housework or out shopping (5:2:65), while male father figures are dressed like businessmen carrying a briefcase (4:1:26) (Figure 5.4). Other examples show both parents working, with child-rearing falling onto the grandparents (5:2:66).



Figure 5.4 (Left) A mother is depicted wearing an apron and waking up her son; (right) a father walks with his son wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase

Throughout the textbooks, parents and grandparents are closely involved in children's lives (5:2:39), conditioning students to maintain strong familial bonds. Families are given explicit instructions of how to be 'excellent.' One section in the fifth-grade textbook states, 'outstanding family traditions that contain the Chinese people's moral excellence include respecting the old and loving the young, being industrious and thrifty in running the household, well-educated and reasonable, having a united neighbourhood community, respecting the rule of law' (5:2:19). Within that phrase, the individual cultures, traditions, and family dynamics of students are homogenised under the broad umbrella of 'Chinese people's moral excellence.'

Families are depicted with both one child and two children, a direct reflection of the government's ongoing campaign to control the growth of the population through direct CCP ideological leadership (Alpermann & Zhan, 2018). The targeted depiction of heteronormative and traditional 'family values' is a key part of the 'China Dream' narrative of nationalist rejuvenation (Deng & Qi, 2021). This narrative supports Xi's goals of reshaping the nation under the guise of hetero-patriarchal 'neofamilism' (Hird, 2017). These sections are a targeted response to the realities of China's declining birth rate and aging population, both of which threaten CCP legitimation under the nation's 'performance legitimacy model' (Zhu, 2011).

5.5.5 Education towards economic development

Lastly, textbooks appear to supplement Chinese economic development and varied socio-economic statuses. In many examples, textbooks depict various standards of living, from students in modern mega-cities to families against a

backdrop of rural landscapes. The variation in student living circumstances may aim to normalise diversified socio-economic status and familiarise urban students with rural lifestyles. For example, one activity shows parents completing chores (4:1:24). While three of the four illustrations show modern homes and appliances, one illustration shows a father feeding livestock in a rural location (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5 Illustration from the chapter titled 'Don't let my parents worry about me so much' in the fourth-grade textbook, page 24

A similar example shows a student who is feeding goats after school to help with family chores (4:1:32); another encourages cleanliness by ensuring the neighbour's 'chicken, duck, pig, and dog do not come into [their] yard and create a disturbance (4:1:49), and a pitchfork in the house entrance (4:1:43).

One section encourages students to help with household chores. It reads, 'even though we might not be able to do all types of chores, we can study' (4:1:39). An illustration of two starkly different scenarios is below (Figure 5.6). To the left, a young boy is squatting outside with his grandfather preparing vegetables. The house in the background looks dilapidated and rural. A telephone wire in the top right of the image hints that although this area is rural, it is developed. The image on the right young

girl is preparing a dish in her living room. In front of her is a large TV, and she appears to be following along to a cooking show. Decorative swan statues are next to the TV stand; to her right is a knife and cutting board, and to her left is a TV remote.



Figure 5.6 Students completing chores, page 39

While both these examples may not be relatable to the majority of Chinese youth who live in urban areas (World Bank, 2018), they normalise socio-economic diversity and may serve to remove discrimination and prejudice based on social class or economic status. The two illustrations are designed to equate different socio-economic status as the same; despite different living situations, both students are doing the same task of helping their families and taking responsibility for household chores. This textbook activity normalises the different homes, families, and lives of children throughout the nation. Despite the lack of economic status by the boy and his grandfather, they appear happy and content with their chores, suggesting to students that family and helping with chores is more important than material wealth.

Second, labour is portrayed as a moral and patriotic activity through the integration of labour education. Within the 'New Era,' labour education has been declared equally important to moral education for the continued modernisation of the country, including a strong focus on technology and innovation (Fan & Zou, 2020). Xi stressed the importance of labour education in primary and secondary schools, as well as its integration into the 'whole process of talent cultivation...to help students cultivate the right worldview, outlook on life, and values we should embrace (MOE,

2019h). Sections of the textbook are devoted to praising the countryside and farmers (4:1:57) and elevating the status of low-skilled workers, such as those in factories and street cleaners (4:1:59).

For example, one fourth-grade chapter, titled 'Our Life Is Inseparable from Them,' praises hard working farmers, laborers, and textile workers for their contributions to society (4:2:64). A fifth-grade activity begins with a story of how a student's father is a hotel porter. At first, the student thought his father's job was unremarkable, but after realising his hard work and essential contribution to society, he is labelled as an 'industry red person.' His father is praised for his hard work and contribution to society. He is described as 'red,' a common metaphor to socialism, revolution, and Party cadres that has a positive connotation (Qiang, 2011).

Third, scientific study is encouraged and portrayed as a responsibility and duty for students. Textbooks praise Chinese innovation and discovery (5:2:86, 87). In the chapter, 'Technology Makes Dreams Come True,' students are taught that, 'in order to realise the [Chinese] dream, more people need to learn scientific knowledge, promote the scientific spirit, and spread scientific thoughts' (6:2:65). The section goes on to explicitly tell students how they should feel about science by stating, 'We should talk about science from an early age, love science, learn science, use science, and let technology help us turn dreams into reality and make the world more beautiful!' (6:2:65).

Students' responsibilities are identified in relation to the greater collective Chinese family, equating a good and moral citizen as one that contributes to society in specifically delineated ways. Examples of how students can contribute to society in morally excellent ways include: by studying technology to help the country progress (6:2:65); working diligently in their future careers (6:1:3); and actively participating in social activities and taking initiative in social affairs (5:2:39). Sixth-grade students are taught that making their own contribution to 'the prosperity of the country and national rejuvenation' is their 'mission' as a Chinese citizen (6:1:28).

5.6 Conclusion

Cui *et al.* (2018) ask the poignant question: for whom does the curriculum exist? Given China's ongoing 'New Era' ideological education reforms, a better question may be: for whom does the curriculum change? This chapter presents in-depth analysis of the construction of 'New Era' moral identity in the key demographic of upper primary school. Discursive analysis revealed that ideology is imbricated in

textbooks through the targeted representations of the 'ideal.' The focus on building the patriotic collective, mobilising youth, and targeted discourse supporting economic development reflect not only the *desired* ideal state, but also the *necessary components* to realise the 'New Era.' This analysis suggests that the success of CCP legitimacy and economic modernisation in the 'New Era' is heavily reliant upon investment in youth ideological work.

The purposeful blurring of distinctions between moral, ideological, patriotic, and nationalist education indicates that *totalitarian nationalism*, or education that demands obedience and love of the nation, party, and its ideology (Leung, 2004), is actively being constructed within primary school moral education textbooks. It is likely that compulsory moral education will continue to be developed in response to the needs of the changing state. The CCP has already announced plans for the improvement and continued standardisation of compulsory moral education, Chinese, and history textbooks for 2022 (MOE, 2020d). As curricula is a textual representation of CCP ideology, continued textbook revisions may suggest that CCP ideology is dynamically changing through experimental versions of textbooks because 'New Era' ideology is not yet firmly established.

Chapter 6

A meso-level analysis: Perspectives of the moral education curriculum

哪壺不開提哪壺

Nǎ hú bù kāi tí nǎ hú

To pick the kettle that is not boiling (to touch upon a sore spot)



6.0 Introduction

In contrast to the previous chapter's macro focus, this chapter analyses moral education reform through a meso-level approach by engaging with student and teacher perspectives. It represents an important contribution to the existing literature surrounding individual experiences and understandings of moral education reform. This chapter examines the dynamic links between the prescribed vs lived realisations of morality, education reform, and societal development. Following the generalised findings from student and teacher perspectives, the discussion offers a critical perspective linking quantitative and qualitative results to broader structures of social power and control (Ho *et al.*, 2011).

6.1 Three levels of analysis

In analysing the prescribed vs lived of moral education reform, I have formulated three levels of analyses: the prescribed expectations, the lived realisations, and the intersection of the two levels. While a comparative study of the prescribed and lived would likely elicit clear differences between the two categories, I understand moral education reforms are not clearly black and white. Rather, the grey area, or where the idealised 'prescribed' meets the realities of the 'lived,' was also an integral component of my research. Therefore, this chapter undertakes a meso-level analysis of the 'grey area' of moral education reforms. I hoped that this approach would also create space within the research project for students, teachers, and school administrators to describe the phenomena in their own words and express autonomy.

This chapter engages with the following questions: How 'prescriptive' is student moral orientation? Is there any significant variation in moral orientation between primary school grades? Like moral education textbooks, does student moral orientation become increasingly political from third to sixth grade? In researching teachers' perspectives, I posed the following questions: How are moral education reforms received by teachers and school administrators? Is moral education valued at a similar level as government reforms suggest? How has moral education changed over the past few decades? What changes have new reform packages such as the National Plan and Xi Jinping's 'New Era' introduced? Lastly, how do students and teachers describe their understandings of moral education reform in their own words?

6.2 A review of methods

As outlined in detail in Chapter 2, I sought to answer these questions through a mixed methods empirical study. Data was collected using a two-step process: 1) quantitative questionnaires with teachers and students, and 2) qualitative interviews with fourteen 'experts' in moral education. This methodology helped to gauge generalised feelings, perceptions, and understandings of moral education amongst a diverse group of students and practitioners. This dual staged approach allowed for a broad and generic understanding of moral education reforms as well as a narrow, more personalised view of its manifestations in daily life.

During my ethnographic studies, I observed that only some aspects of moral education were openly discussed, analysed, and critiqued, while others seemed to be 'off limits' and socially unacceptable to discuss. I aimed to explore this dichotomy throughout my interviews through the 'emotional performance' of interviews (Ezzy, 2010). Emotions, which can be reflected in intonation, word choice, or speed of speech, convey important information about how people view and understand the world (Ibid.). While my questions were in no way purposefully designed to elicit uncomfortable situations for participants, they did revolve around topics that I observed to be 'sensitive' during my ethnographic research.

There is a dearth of studies that incorporate student feedback, perceptions, and personal development within the moral education field (Liang, 2016). Some empirical studies have focused on junior secondary school moral education (Hofstede, 2001; Zhan & Ning, 2004; Pan, 2011; Zhong & Zhang, 2015; Liang, 2016), while most studies have viewed moral education reform (Lee & Ho, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2004; Law, 2014). Studies on primary school moral education reform have focused on theoretical (Lu & Gao, 2004) and textbook analysis (Wang & Phillion, 2010; Tse, 2011; Tse & Zhang, 2017; Zhao & Sun, 2017). However, few studies have directly analysed primary school students' perspectives. This chapter attempts to fill the existing gap and provide unique and timely insight into real-life perspectives of moral education reform.

6.3 General findings: *Lived vs. prescribed realisations*

The following section discusses the generalised findings from the qualitative and quantitative studies. The section is categorised into two groups: 'student perspectives,' detailing the student quantitative survey response, and 'teacher perspectives,' which contains findings from quantitative teacher surveys and qualitative teacher interviews. Together, these two groups constitute an important

meso-level analysis into the intersection of the lived vs prescribed realisations of moral education reform.

6.3.1 Student perspectives

The empirical findings reveal two significant trends: 1) overall, students have a highly politicised view of morality; and 2) from grades three to five, students grow increasingly political in their moral orientation, while sixth-grade students express more variation and less rigid alignment of values. Findings were investigated within the framework of ongoing Chinese moral education reforms and state-wide moral and character campaigns. This study engages with broader questions such as the role of ideology in socio-political reform, youth moral autonomy and agency, and the impact of formal schooling on moral orientation.

6.3.1.1 Enjoyment and perceived importance

Questions 2, 3, and 4 analysed student enjoyment and perceived importance of moral education class. Only 16% of all respondents reported moral education as their favourite class. There was an incremental increase in the number of students ranking moral education as their favourite class. Eleven percent of third grade students, 23% of fourth grade students, and 29% of fifth-grade students selected moral education as their favourite class. However, this trend did not continue with sixth grade students, as only 7% of sixth graders chose moral education as their favourite.

There was a similar trend in terms of students enjoying moral education class. From third to fifth grade there was an incremental increase in the percentage of students who reported they 'greatly enjoy' the class, from 41%, 57%, to 65%, respectively. However only 24% of sixth-grade students selected 'greatly enjoy,' a sharp decline from fifth grade.

While class enjoyment varied between grades, there was wide consensus as to the importance of moral education class. Ninety-seven percent of all respondents rated the class as important; no respondent rated moral education class as 'not important.' Fifty-seven percent of third-grade, 77% of fourth-grade, 68% of fifth grade, and 43% of sixth-grade students identified moral education class as 'very important.'

The preliminary analysis of these results indicates an emerging trend: an incremental increase in students enjoying and acknowledging the importance of moral education between third and fifth grade. However, this trend did not continue with sixth-grade students who recorded less enjoyment and interest in moral

education class than their peers. The recognition of student enjoyment in class is important and has been shown to influence participation and knowledge retention (Parker & Lepper, 1992; Hernik & Jaworska, 2018). This data suggests the success of mid-2000s reforms to primary school moral education classes that aimed to make moral education more enjoyable (Lu & Gao, 2004). These conclusions are bolstered by students' feedback, as numerous participants of all grades said they liked moral education class because it was interesting, fun, and they enjoyed the stories and activities in class.

6.3.1.2 Moral development and moral exemplars

Questions 5, 6 and 7 aimed to identify youth moral idols and exemplars. In Question 5, parents were most influential in teaching morals, followed by moral education class (Figure 6.1). Most third-grade students selected 'other,' with 83% of 'other' responses being related to school, such as from teachers, Chinese class, morning Youth Party meetings, and textbooks. These answers may reflect the dual nature of moral education as both an intrinsic value guided by cultural heritage and an external discourse conveyed through the education system. This data suggests that most students view moral education as imbued via familial bonds and cultural heritage. This view echoes the Confucian tradition of strong family bonds and filial piety. However, formal State-sponsored moral education remains influential in developing youth moral orientation.

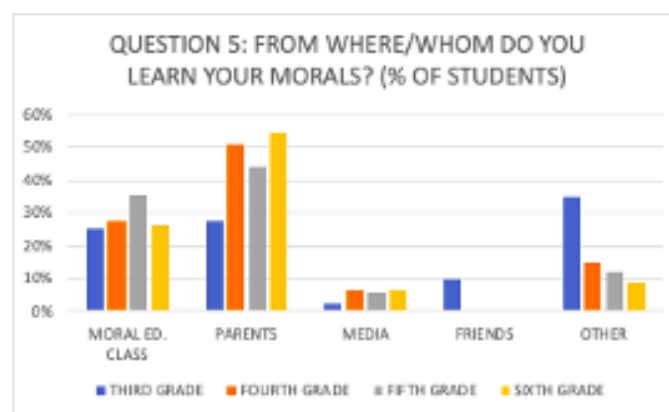


Figure 6.1 Student questionnaire question 5: From where/whom do you learn your morals?

The sixth and seventh questions aimed to assess students' perceptions of moral idols (related to their lives) and exemplars (unrelated to their lives). In Question 6, results among all grades were split relatively evenly among parents, teachers, police

or military, and Party members as the most moral person in their lives (Figure 6.2). Among all grade levels, Party members received the largest majority (20%), with teachers (19%), parents, and police or military (both 18%, respectively) as subsequent top choices. This illustrates a wide range of moral idols among youth perceptions. People in professions related to the government, such as police and Party members, were regarded as highly moral amongst all students.

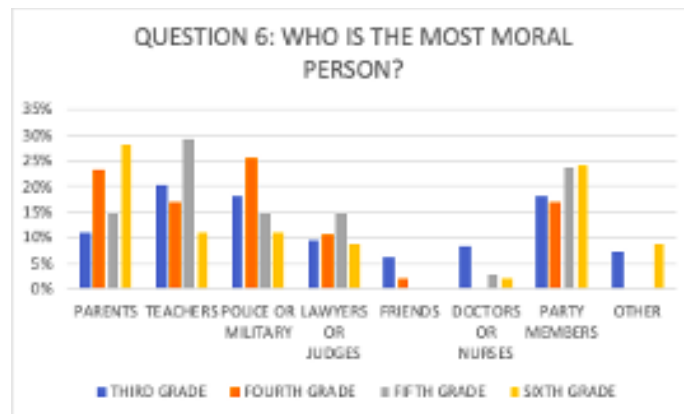


Figure 6.2 Student questionnaire question 6: Who is the most moral person?

In Question 7, nearly equal percentages of students chose Lei Feng and philosophers (such as Confucius or Mencius) as their moral exemplar (24.3% and 23.8%, respectively). Twenty-one percent of students selected national leaders (such as Mao Zedong or Xi Jinping); 9% stated they did not have a moral idol (Figure 6.3).

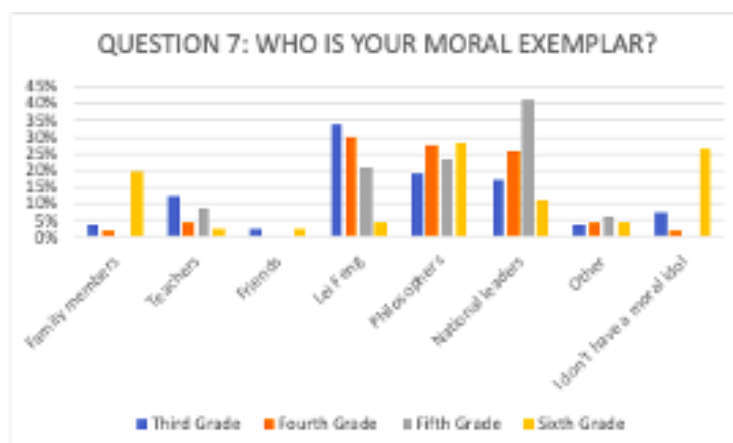


Figure 6.3 Student questionnaire question 7: Who is your moral exemplar?

Interestingly, only three third-grade students (of 83), one fourth-grade student (of 47), and zero fifth-grade students (of 34) selected family members as being their moral idol, which contradicts to the previous question in which these groups rated

parents highly in terms of being the most moral person in their lives. This suggests a distinction between students' recognition of moral idols related to their lives versus historical or celebrity moral exemplars. However, sixth-grade students' trends differed yet again from younger grades, as 20% of sixth-grade students selected family members as their moral idols, and only two (of 46) chose Lei Feng.

Yet fewer sixth-grade students (11%) indicated national leaders as their moral exemplar. Likewise, only 4% of sixth-grade students chose Lei Feng, a significant departure from third, fourth, and fifth-grade students that rated Lei Feng highly. A large percentage of sixth-grade students said they did not have a moral idol, a possible reflection of their maturity and moral agency development in rejecting prescriptive ideology.

6.3.1.3 Ideo-political campaigns in moral orientation

My final section here aimed to examine the influence of ideo-political campaigns in moral orientation. The eighth question relied upon word association, derived from textbook examples, to examine how students would categorise the Chinese nation. The results indicate a strong political tilt when describing the nation and clear variations throughout grades (Figure 6.4).

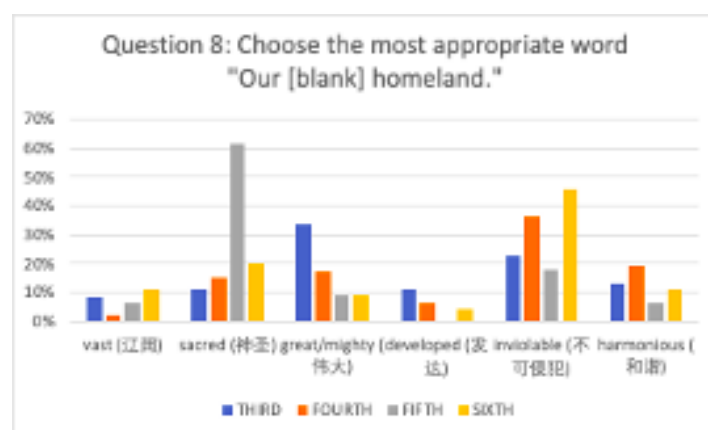


Figure 6.4 Student questionnaire question 8: Choose the most appropriate word: 'Our [] homeland'

Overall, very few students selected the adjectives 'vast,' 'harmonious,' or 'developed' to describe China. The majority of fourth and sixth grade students (thirty percent of all respondents) chose 'inviolable' (*bukeqinfan*) as the most appropriate adjective to describe China. In addition to its prominent place within textbooks, the phrase 'our inviolable homeland' has been echoed by Xi through speeches and in revised textbooks that quote him directly (Lu, 2019: 47). This phrase has a pro-CCP

political connotation and has been used as a rallying cry to describe the CCP's claims to Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Furthermore, more than 60% of fifth-grade students chose the adjective 'sacred' (*shensheng*) to describe their homeland. This phrase is directly pulled from the fifth-grade textbook chapter titled 'Our Sacred Homeland' (*womenshenshengdeguotu*) (Lu, 2019: 44), suggesting that students internalise textbook knowledge and language. In addition, the strong nationalist and patriotic connotations of 'sacred' and 'inviolable' suggests most students have strong emotional connections to China.

In Question 9, participants voted overwhelmingly that the concept of 'cherish the homeland' (*aihuzuguo*) was the most important Social Ethical Guideline value (Figure 6.5).

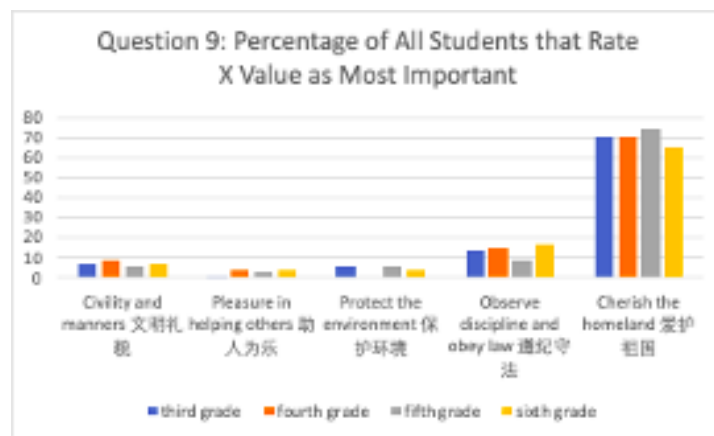


Figure 6.5 Responses from student questionnaire question 9

In Question 10, patriotism (*aiguo*) was selected as the most important Core Socialist Value (Figure 6.6). Other values such as integrity (*chengxin*), harmony (*hexie*), and equality (*pingdeng*) were consistently rated highly amongst all grades.

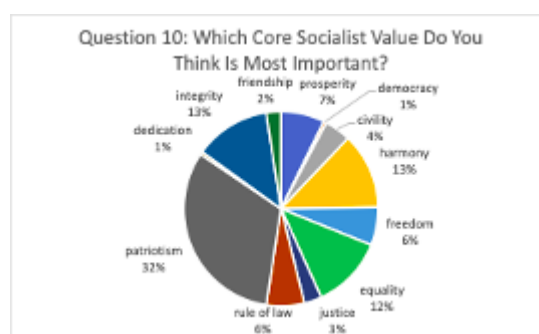


Figure 6.6 Responses from student questionnaire question 10

When asked to explain their choices, many students elaborated on the importance of patriotism within Chinese culture and society. Students felt it was their responsibility to love their country and that patriotism was a precondition of individual rights such as safety, freedom, or wealth. One fifth-grade student who rated patriotism as the most important Core Socialist Value described their answer as:

Because the most important thing...as a Chinese [citizen] is to be patriotic. Only if you love your country can you make a sincere contribution to the country.

(excerpt from student survey November 2019)

Some students wondered about how ‘crazy’ (*luanqibazao*) or ‘weak’ (*ruo*) the nation would become if they did not love China. These answers suggest students might feel threatened or fearful of repercussions if they were to develop moral ideas outside the borders of prescriptive ideology. In addition, these statements suggest students feel responsibility or pressure to support or ‘provide’ for their country. This draws parallels to the familial relationships depicted in the textbooks that reinforce family values and collectivism. Several students described familial and intimate ties with the nation. One sixth-grade student said:

As Chinese citizens, we should love our country. One only has a home if you have a country; our country is our home.

(excerpt from student survey November 2019)

While most sixth-grade students rated patriotism the most important value, significantly fewer sixth-grade students rated patriotism as most important in comparison to fifth grade (22% and 53%, respectively). Sixth-grade students rated prosperity (*fuqiang*) and freedom (*ziyou*) higher than any other age group.

6.3.1.4 Two trends identified: Conformity amidst burgeoning autonomy

The quantitative results from students illustrate the homogeneity of youth moral orientation among the sample of primary school students, affirming the salient reproduction of dominant knowledge perpetuated through ideological reforms in moral education classrooms. Overall, students consistently equated ‘morality’ with patriotic, Party, or political ideology, suggesting the ongoing reforms to impart more political and State-sponsored ideology in moral education classes have had a realised impact on youth moral orientation. These results suggest there is an ongoing shift

away from the 2000s trend of 'regulated individualism' within Chinese moral education (Cheung & Pan, 2006) towards a focus on collective and patriotic State-sponsored moral ideology.

A trend was identified where students in grades three to five increasingly enjoyed moral education class and internalised patriotic values, as demonstrated in questions 2, 3, 4, and 7. However, sixth-grade students expressed more varied answers and did not follow the same trends as previous grades. Previous studies have found that youth acceptance of diverse personal preferences increases with age (Smetana *et al.*, 2014). This indicates sixth-grade students experience more moral autonomy and independence, raising questions as to the sustained influence of ideo-political content on moral orientation in maturing youth.

Youth moral orientations showed clear preference towards nationalist and patriotic values, such as ranking national leaders highly as moral exemplars and describing their homeland as 'inviolable.' These concepts are key features of China's New Era which focuses on elevating the status of current Party and national leaders, such as portraying Xi Jinping as a familial, uncle-like figure. Describing China as 'inviolable' draws clear links to the nation's recent policies on anti-separatism in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea. China's 'New Era' also constitutes a new temporal realm designed to demonstrate CCP strength and power on the global scale.

Conformity may be an influential factor in student survey results, such as how conformity to perceived majority opinion influences those hoping to avoid isolation (Fung, 2007). The majority opinion of students surveyed was similar to the prescriptive moral orientation presented in textbooks. This similarity reinforces prescriptive morality's adoption as 'neutral' or 'common sense' knowledge among youth.

6.3.2 Teacher perspectives

6.3.2.1 Eagerness followed by apprehension

My initial assessment of interview participants' reactions after first contact was that most participants were very willing and eager to participate. I believe this was due to the *guanxi* I had established with potential participants during my ethnographic studies. In addition, participants whom I had never met were equally happy to help my research, likely because they trusted the person that referred them and believed that I was genuine and sincere. Most participants responded to my initial

inquiries within a few hours and used very friendly and respectful language in our conversations, such as the formal you (*nin*) and emojis such as the red rose or handshake. While the formal language showed respect for myself and my project, the emojis ‘broke the ice’ and were the initial steps in building rapport with participants prior to their interview.

Following the initial reaction of eagerness, most participants, particularly the ones I had not met during my ethnographic research period, were somewhat apprehensive. Prior to the interviews, I engaged in numerous online conversations with participants and clarified my credentials, my research topic, and the questions that would be asked. Many participants asked to see the questions beforehand so they could prepare the ‘correct answers.’ While I encouraged participants that I was interested in their opinions and there was no right or wrong answer to my questions, many remained apprehensive.

Ms. D, a primary school teacher from a prominent school in Beijing, was jovial and polite. We connected via a mutual friend, and she was happy to be interviewed. After respectfully introducing herself to me and engaging in polite conversation via WeChat, she sent me the following message prior to scheduling our interview:

I would like to know if [my] name and school name can be concealed, because the school has a certain influence in the country, and I am worried that there will be misunderstandings caused by language omissions. 😊

(interview notes from Ms. D August 2020)

I quickly assured Ms. D that the entirety of the interview was anonymous, and any identifying information would be deleted. However, her inquiry suggested two points. First, it suggested that there is a prescribed ‘script’ for discussing education and moral education reform, and any deviation from the script may harm the reputation of the country, the school, or the teachers. From this point, I sensed that partaking in my interview posed a potential threat to her livelihood, reputation, or teaching career if her words or meaning was not conveyed in the ‘correct way.’ Second, her question suggested that teachers are eager to discuss somewhat ‘sensitive’ topics with foreigners as long as it was anonymous. This suggestion contradicted Gramsci’s (1971) idea of ‘spontaneous consent’ within societies governed by authoritarian governments. Instead of openly demonstrating their prescriptive knowledge and

support for the state, some participants felt threatened by voicing their opinions and would only do so anonymously.

Mr. Y, a primary school moral education teacher and my contact for S2, was happy to be interviewed. After sending him the information sheet and consent form, Mr. Y sent me a message expressing his concerns and hesitation. His messages were slightly uncharacteristic, as he had been very eager and willing to help me with whatever I needed in the past. He said:

Frankly speaking, I still have some concerns. Moral education is a relatively sensitive topic, especially under the current circumstances, the relationship between China and the United States is declining.

(interview notes from Mr. Y August 2020)

I listened and acknowledged his concerns, assuring him that the purpose of the interview was not to ask sensitive questions and that he could speak with my local advisor at any time to clarify issues or concerns. I asked if he would like to see the interview questions beforehand, to which he readily agreed and noted that he needed to ‘understand the interview outline in advance’ and to prepare the ‘correct answers.’ After my assurances, he then said:

As long as it does not involve sensitive topics, I am willing to help you complete this interview.

(interview notes from Mr. Y August 2020)

Mr. Y’s concerns echoed those expressed by Ms. D that moral education can be a very sensitive topic. They also clearly conveyed that neither educator was willing to discuss controversial topics. Mr. Y’s remarks also highlighted the political power dynamics at play, particularly how our cross-cultural discussion as Chinese and American citizens might be sensitive. Taken at face value, the link between a domestic Chinese primary school course and Sino-US international relations might not be abundantly clear. However, Mr. Y’s hesitation suggested moral education is a highly political topic and that my inquiry, as a foreign American citizen, might present a threat to his safety, career, or reputation.

I understood both Ms. D and Mr. Y’s ‘embodied responsive reactions’ (Knapik, 2006) as resources to understand the *prescribed* and *lived* influences of moral education reform. The reactions of both teachers suggested there is a prescriptive ‘status quo’ in terms of discussing moral education or political reform. In addition, their hesitancy

and concerns suggested that the prescriptive understandings of moral education had a significant influence on their understanding, emotional response, or discussion of their *lived* experiences. These pre-interview scenarios suggested a complex power dynamic present in teachers' daily lives, as well as one that would be highlighted during the interview. I took extra care to manage participant concerns and mitigate any signs of discomfort during the interview, as I felt that participant comfort and safety was more important than asking certain questions.

Lastly, I found that the more elevated the social status or job title of participants was, the less apprehension they expressed. For example, university professors, school administrators, and head teachers did not ask for a lengthy discussion prior to the interview or for any clarification on my research, credentials, or ethics. Many of them seemed to approach the interview in a more casual manner than newer and younger teachers. This suggests the existence of a social hierarchy within education that governs who can speak freely and what can be discussed. Head teachers, professors, and experienced educators were also more likely to be CCP members, suggesting that Party membership affords more freedom and autonomy compared to non-members.

6.3.2.2 Humility as a social clue

Another theme I noticed during interviews was humility. Humility and modesty are an indelible component of Chinese culture; CCP doctrine also describes these qualities as important 'virtues' to be cultivated by educators and leaders (Li, 2016). I found that most interviewees were honest yet humble when describing their achievements. During interviews, I also noticed that humility was selectively used to avoid answering a question, suggesting that use of humble language was a social clue indicating discomfort or sensitivity towards a topic.

For example, Ms. G was a highly experienced moral education teacher and national moral education textbook editor. At the time of our interview, she worked as a professor who trained moral education teachers in a populous and wealthy central province. Ms. G's accomplishments were very impressive, and she was highly knowledgeable in terms of contemporary primary school moral education. Halfway through our interview, I commented on the significant number of changes to moral education within the past few years which coincide with the introduction of China's 'New Era.' I asked Ms. G her opinion on this observation. In response, Ms. G politely deferred the question and advised me to ask my advisor, saying:

I think you [should] interview your mentor for this. He knows the weather better because he is in the sky, and I am on the ground. Because it is the new era above, why did this new era make such a change? I really think you should interview your mentor, because this will compare with some of the above ideas. It will be more accurate, but I think what I said may not be accurate. So, from my point of view, I just think, he sees the clouds and knows the weather, I feel on the ground, and my feeling is why [is] so much attention paid to it at this time? I think it might be. What should I say about this reform? I should say yes.

(interview notes from Ms. G September 2020)

Ms. G's circuitous answer did not suggest a lack of awareness towards this topic, but rather a lack of social status that limited her from fully understanding the reforms and giving the 'correct' answer to my question (i.e., she is on the ground and my advisor is in the heavens). I gauged that she did not think it was best for her to answer my question as she did not have the 'right' answer or was not in a position to provide her opinion. When I pressed her further, reiterating that there is no right or wrong answer, Ms. G provided some further clarification, but remained humble in her understanding and awareness of issues despite her expert knowledge and experiences.

This exchange highlighted the interplay of numerous social, political, and cultural factors occurring 'behind the scenes' of each interview. If the interview transcript was taken at 'face value' (Phillips & Mrowczynski, 2021), I would have assumed Ms. G did not know the answer to my question or was so unfamiliar with the topic that she could not even venture an educated guess. However, to use her own metaphor, Ms. G's extensive professional knowledge and skill in moral education meant she was 'in the heavens' and very much aware of the 'weather' of moral education reforms. Drawing upon ethnomethodological ideas (Heritage, 1984), I sensed hesitation and slight anxiety in her answer, suggesting this question made her feel uncomfortable and she was using humility to deflect. Ms. G's statement helped me to understand that discussions of China's 'New Era' and moral education's connections to political and social movements might be a sensitive topic.

My interactions with Ms. G and Mr. Y reflected a common strategy among qualitative interview participants of contributing what they consider to be 'proper knowledge' (Knapik, 2006). The focus on the 'quality' of the information within the interview reflected a similar theme identified throughout my ethnographic and textual data analysis of reforms targeting the 'quality' of moral education. Their

responses suggested that the 'quality' of education may be measured based on its adherence to prescriptive knowledge and understanding.

6.3.2.3 The 'cultivation' of society via youth

All interview participants defined moral education as the cultivation of students' moral qualities. Teacher responses suggested that moral education is an important and necessary part of society in order to live harmoniously. Ms. D, a moral education teacher at S1, viewed moral education with rigid logic when describing its purpose. She said:

The purpose [of moral education class] is to teach the correct way of life. If there is a right way, it can also be said that there is a wrong way.

(interview notes from Ms. D August 2020)

Ms. D's definition of the purpose of moral education was intriguing and further highlighted its political function. In mentioning the 'wrong way' of life, she was not referring to crime, drugs, or illegal activities. Rather, the 'wrong way' meant outside the prescriptive set of moral qualities dictated by the textbook, and by extension, the CCP. Ms. D's description reflected rigid logic within discussions of Chinese moral education and its goal of developing society as well as individuals.

Almost all interviewees used the word 'cultivate' to describe the purpose of moral education, echoing official language used within government documents and speeches by Xi Jinping. The idea of 'cultivation' is central to moral education and CCP socio-political culture. Self-cultivation (*xiu*) was an important ideological concept within the Confucian tradition (Peters, 2020). The practicality of Confucian education focused on students learning texts and integrating those learnings into their daily lives, thus connecting one's internal cultivation with the greater society. Marx also focused on the idea of cultivation by arguing that socialist consciousness must be cultivated within the education system (Li *et al.*, 2004). The formation of the PRC also focused on ideas of cultivation, as in the late 1940s and early 1950s Mao Zedong overhauled the nation's existing education system to cultivate citizens 'capable of building' the socialist nation (Ibid.: 451).

Interestingly, most survey respondents viewed moral education as a societal tool, as opposed to a tool of childhood intellectual development. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents agreed that moral education classes are helpful to correct the

shortcomings of Chinese society. This finding suggests that self-cultivation, via moral education and ideological ‘cultivation,’ is not solely an individual exercise but rather a crucial step in social and political development. Confucianism, contrary to its colloquial understanding, focused on two strands: the political and philosophical (Tu, 1998, *as cited in Tan, 2017*). Tu (1984) describes this variation as follows:

Political Confucianism focuses on the politicisation of Confucian ethical values in the service of other non-ethical purposes; philosophical Confucianism, on the other hand, centres on the Confucian intent to infuse politics with morality through cultivation of the self. (Tu, 1984)

Confucian education, morality, and politics centred around concepts of self-cultivation. This interwoven ideology helps to explain why contemporary Chinese culture under the CCP, which has roots in Confucian ideology, places similar emphasis on self-cultivation through moral and political education.

For many participants, moral education was understood in two ways: the practical and the philosophical. For Mr. F, a university professor, moral education could be viewed in two different scopes: as a narrow, practical topic and as a broader, abstract social movement.

Moral education is divided into big moral education and small moral education. In other words, moral education in the broad sense and moral education in the narrow sense. Moral education in the narrow sense is small moral education, which means moral education. In a broad sense, moral education includes political education, ideological education, legal education, traditional culture education, mental health education, life education, environmental education, and so on.... It is aimed at cultivating moral literacy. Then we say that moral education does not include ideological and political aspects. Moral education is education that cultivates students’ moral qualities and develops good behaviour habits.

(interview notes from Mr. F September 2020)

Ms. Y, a university professor, described the goal of moral education as cultivating good citizens. She said:

Our goal [of moral education] is to cultivate good citizens to cultivate a good moral person, a good citizen of this country and society, and a good person at the same time. Very kind people. We have this goal. However, there are many problems with moral education in the process of making the list. Therefore, this goal may not be fully achieved. Our education is in the aspect of knowledge, in the school and in the classroom.

(interview notes from Ms. Y September 2020)

Observational data showed a clear link between moral and ideo-political education, which was supported by the interview data that moral education is a political endeavour. Throughout the interviews and surveys, the idea of the ‘cultivation’ of youth and society was prominent. Data also suggested that the role of moral education may be targeted towards societal development via youth moral cultivation.

6.3.2.4 An important course marred by daily realities

Teacher and student survey data revealed a strong belief in the importance of moral education courses, with over 98% of all survey participants ranking moral education classes as ‘very important’ (Appendix F). The importance of moral education class and its integral role in the education system was reflected in interviews. For example, when asked why moral education is important for primary school students, Mr. F, a university professor, responded:

[Moral education in primary school is] very important... The elementary school stage is a critical period for a person’s moral development, personality development. In the passage from General Secretary Xi Jinping, he said that adolescents are the ‘jointing and booting’ stage of life. Jointing is when the wheat is growing... the jointing is very important. After jointing, you can pick up wheat ears and then you can grow them into full fruits. This period is when a person is mentally unhealthy, and the primary key of thinking is most active. But his thoughts are not mature, so he needs meticulous guidance... Moral education is the most important thing for elementary school students at this time. If a person’s personality and values are formed in college, the role of moral education is not as good as in elementary school. We often say that elementary school is the base period for growth in life. This is very important.

(interview notes from Mr. F September 2020)

Mr. F was quoting an August 2020 speech by Xi at a national forum for moral education teachers. His speech, titled ‘Ideological and political courses are the key courses to implement the fundamental task of *lideshuren*,’ stressed the ‘responsibility’ of irreplaceable moral education teachers to teach moral education and build the next generation of socialist successors (Xinhua, 2020b). Xi acknowledged the current shortfalls of moral education class, noting that ‘some...schools are not fully aware of the importance of ideological and political courses; classroom teaching effects need to be improved, teaching and research efforts need to be increased, and ideas need to be

expanded; teaching materials are not fresh enough, targeted, readable, and effective' (Ibid.).

Many teachers echoed the sentiments expressed by Xi in his speech. While moral education is highly valued on an abstract level, observational data indicated that moral education was often overlooked or disregarded by parents and teachers. For example, teachers told me that moral education class was sometimes pushed aside for 'more important' classes that have more weight on the *zhongkao* and *gaokao* examinations. Teachers noted that sometimes moral education class time is used as supplementary study time for a 'more important' class. This suggests that China's test-based education system, which values core classes such as maths, English, and Chinese, is impeding the realised importance of moral education reforms.

Mr. Y, a moral education teacher at S2, expressed doubts about the significance and real impact of moral education classes on youth ideological development, despite also acknowledging its importance. When Mr. Y was asked about the importance of moral education, he responded:

I think it is necessary for moral education, including legal and ethical education, to be taught when the child is young, because it allows children to distinguish right from wrong, know what is right or what is wrong, and what should not be done. But then I think the role, value, and significance of moral education are very limited. It's true that moral education will make children have a better moral character... but the role played by moral education classes is very limited.

(interview notes from Mr. Y August 2020)

Ms. Z, a professor at Nanjing Normal University, acknowledged the contradictions within the perceived importance of moral education and its lived realisations. When I told Ms. Z about my observations of moral education class not being taken seriously, she responded by saying:

What you said is very realistic. In our country, the lack of this curriculum is a real problem. We ourselves emphasised that there [was] a joke about this. We said, 'In speaking, we say that moral education is very important, but in acting upon it....' But can this class adhere to the curriculum if students only have moral education class twice a week? For example, this Chinese teacher thinks that they haven't finished their Chinese class...they might take over the moral education class to finish the Chinese class. So, we said [moral education] is very secondary... [When we speak of moral education] it is very important, but when we do it we don't place importance on it...So it is also a very contradictory thing.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

The discrepancy between the idealised version of moral education and the reality within classrooms suggests that moral education may be most impactful as a method of social control on the abstract level. The highly centralised and rigid examination-based structure of the Chinese education system inhibits teachers from fully implementing the idealised version of moral education because of the necessity for students to perform well on the standardised exams. Given that students and teachers pay more attention to subjects based on their weight on the standardised examinations, allocating more weight to moral education on the *zhongkao* or *gaokao* could theoretically help bridge the gap between the idealised and realised learning of moral education. While some changes are being made to the *gaokao* in terms of increasing the focus and weight of moral education, these changes are slow and varied throughout provinces.

Moral education usually does not have a mid-term or final exam during the school year. It was explained to me that individual schools or provincial districts can choose whether to have a midterm or a final examination for primary moral education class. Based on the feedback from teachers, it appears that most public primary schools do not test moral education, likely because they do not have the resources (such as time or full-time teachers) to appropriately prepare students for a moral education test. Ms. D, a moral education teacher at S1, described the current situation of moral education testing as:

[The primary school moral education test] is not very rigorous. In middle school, [moral education] ranks less than Chinese, mathematics, English. For example, English may have 120 points but [moral education] may be 50 points or 100 points.... I think this concept [of a moral education test] is a little bit new. For example, [the test] might ask students to write down what the name of our country is. Or sometimes it tests the geographical aspect, [for example] what is the highest plateau in our country.

(interview notes from Ms. D August 2020)

While a moral education mid-term or final exam or allocating more weight to moral education on the standardised exams, would increase its perceived importance among students and teachers, developing a moral education test is not straightforward. Many interviewees acknowledged the somewhat satirical notion of

‘testing morality.’ When asked if students will only pay attention to moral education if it is on the examinations, Ms. Z, a university professor, responded:

I know what you mean, is there a test? I personally do not agree that this course, especially at the compulsory education stage, should be on the entrance examinations. An exam may be able to make everyone value this course on the surface... but in fact, this course cannot be tested because the exam may not really encourage the child, for example, to learn this course well. [A test may] even hinder this course. Because we think that this course is for the social development of students, it cannot be tested by exams. Because the test will test deterministic knowledge. ... For example, at the end of the question, there is a standard answer to whether you should choose honesty or not. This is inconsistent with the moral problems faced by this student in real life. Trying to simplify the morality and make it knowledgeable is not conducive to the growth of their character. Therefore, I do not agree with an examination...and without an examination will only lead to a superficial attention. [A test] is actually very unfavourable for the development and growth of students in this course.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Another method that would encourage moral education to be taken more seriously in the classroom would be to increase funding for full-time moral education teachers. There are contradictory funding practices for moral education teachers. A 2010 study found that while education spending in China is comparably high, there is unequal fiscal distribution that overly benefits urban, elite, and higher-level institutions (Kipnis & Li, 2010). While teacher pay remains low and moral education is under-funded and under-staffed, funding allocated for ideological education remains high.

During the past few decades, teacher wages in urban cities have fluctuated. For example, a recent study found that urban teacher salaries have decreased significantly; in 1988 teacher salaries offered a 13% wage premium, which over time regressed to the equivalent of a 11% wage penalty in 2013 (Liu & Xie, 2021). Since 2006, compulsory education teacher salaries have consisted of the base salary, performance pay, and allowances and subsidies (An, 2018). Teacher salaries have purportedly increased during Xi’s tenure, but official data is not available to the public. Categorized as low-level civil servants, primary and secondary teachers typically receive a small salary but have numerous tax relief incentives such as mortgage rebates and child support benefits (Long, 2021). However, recent reports stated that in the wake of the global pandemic, cash-strapped local governments are cutting teacher salaries and bonuses; some provinces have even ordered teachers to pay back bonuses (Ibid.).

In contrast, spending on teacher ideological training is well-documented and highlighted throughout CCP media. According to official reports, from 2013 to 2019 the central government spent roughly 13.5 billion yuan (1.9 billion U.S. dollars) on teacher training programs (CGTN, 2020b). Many of these training reforms include strengthening Party building in primary and secondary schools and implementing long-term mechanisms for ‘improving and supervising teachers’ moral standards’ (Ibid.; Xinhua, 2019c). It is an interesting contrast that knowledge pertaining to ideological reforms is widely broadcast and publicly available, while reports concerning real-life fiscal and budgetary statistics is hidden. This discrepancy mirrors this thesis’ initial observation of substantial reporting of ideological and moral education reforms amidst little follow-up or data on its *realised* impact.

My ethnographic observational data confirmed that most schools have very few moral education teachers, most of whom are on a part-time basis. Ms Z explained how the rigid institutional framework of compulsory education stymies the development of moral education teachers. She said:

There is a fixed ratio for the number of teachers in each school.... Therefore, it is very difficult to say that more moral education teachers will be added under the existing proportional framework.... There are more [teaching] places for Chinese (yuwen), English, and math classes, as they are the more important subjects.... Some [moral education] teachers may teach this year but may not teach the next year. They might teach first grade this year but might not teach first grade next year. The teaching is intermittent, which I think is detrimental to the development of the teacher and students.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Altogether, the highly idealised concept of moral education does not match the realistic daily actualisations. While the government places significant emphasis on moral education, it does not provide enough resources to schools to enact desired top-down reforms. This creates a paradoxical ‘Catch-22’ situation that stymies the importance and influence of moral education amongst students, parents, and teachers.

The conflicting situation of the differences between ‘idealised and realised’ moral education may help explain its tepid perceived impact. Only 66% of survey participants agreed that moral education classes have a great impact on children’s moral behaviour. Furthermore, an equal 66% agreed that children’s moral education and values should be shaped by teachers (Appendix F). In contrast to the overwhelming majority of participants (98%) who agreed that moral education is very

important, these data suggest that moral education only has a measured influence on student moral development. In addition, data suggest that teachers view themselves as having a positive, but not overwhelming, influence on developing youth moral behaviour.

Mr. F, a university professor, suggested that the lack of perceived impact of moral education classes on students is due to poorly trained teachers. He said:

Many of the moral education teachers are part-time, so they do not conduct special studies [or training]. Maybe the teacher's [teaching] quality in this area is not very high, so they will not have much influence on the students.

(interview notes from Mr. F September 2020)

Ms. J, a primary school teacher from Beijing, echoed similar sentiments as the survey participants but acknowledged that moral education class has a limited scope of influence. She said:

[Primary school moral education class] is focused on conveying positive energy and propagandising aspects of right and wrong. [The goal is to] influence instead of solving problems...the child will definitely accept what he thinks is right and or what he thinks is good for him.... Moral education is a mid-to-long-term process rather than a single class. It is not one lesson or one lecture but a foundation; this is why primary school moral education is so important... [moral education] should penetrate every moment of the student's life through a long-term process.

(interview notes from Ms. J July 2020)

Ms. J's comments suggest a 'greater plan' for youth ideological development, of which moral education is simply one component. Her answers also suggest that the existing flaws of moral education class, such as lack of teacher funding or low perceived importance, are widely recognised yet not important enough to merit change because primary school moral education is not designed to have a significant impact on students. Rather, it is designed with the intention of laying the foundation of ideological and cultural awareness among students in a casual manner that encourages ideological collectivism as 'common sense.'

The development of mass common sense is a key tenet to Gramsci's theories of hegemony. Ms. J's description of moral education suggests that the education system is developing 'common sense constructivism' (Hopf, 2013) as opposed to 'common sense structuralism.' The loose academic requirements within moral education class

and the lack of significant financial resources show that moral education is purposefully designed to be casual, fun, and relaxed compared to other classes. Furthermore, teachers acknowledge that children retain autonomy in developing their moral orientations and are influenced by numerous factors, such as parents, friends, socioeconomic status, etc. – school is just one of the influencing factors in a student's moral development.

Under the constructivist pedagogy developed by Piaget (1964), it is recognised that students develop their individual knowledge based on their experiences. Knowledge is not a status but an adaptive process, similar to evolutionary biology wherein organisms must adapt to their environments to survive (Steffe & Gale, 1995). Moral education class provides an opportunity for students to learn, experience, and adapt to the ideologically prescriptive environment. By framing morality and ideology as 'common sense' knowledge, students retain autonomy as if their acceptance of prescriptive moral ideology is an adaptive choice rather than a strict requirement. The use of 'common sense constructivism' legitimises the knowledge presented within the school and classroom environments and encourages student moral development that is in line with the state-designated *status quo*.

6.3.2.5 Social conditioning as hegemony

Textbooks were designed to mimic societal interactions, with the classroom depicted as a microcosm of greater society. Following the 2001 *Guidelines for Curriculum Reform of Basic Education (Trial Implementation)* policy (MOE, 2001), the pedagogical methods and content of compulsory education moral education class was redeveloped to be more relatable to children's lives. Discourse analysis of the textbooks revealed that many sections, chapters, and exercises are directly related to the 'idealised' society depicted throughout the moral education curriculum, and that the 'idealised' society was not always synonymous with the current society (Chapter 5).

Interview analysis revealed that moral education curricula construct the classroom, student interactions, and student moral development in ways that mimic an idealised society. In this sense, the purpose of moral education was not limited to 'cultivating' student moral orientation but extended further to conditioning and preparing students for integration into the 'idealised' society. While socialisation in the classroom encourages students to inherit existing ideologies or norms, this process of 'social conditioning' goes further than socialisation by training students to respond

within the classroom and society in approved ways (Hull, 1942; Weil, 1994). Factors such as the control of information, repetition of specific acts or knowledge (such as singing the national anthem), and the propagandisation of culture (Bernays, 2005) indicate social conditioning is actively constructed in the classroom.

When asked about the relationship between moral education and societal development, Ms. Z, a university professor, identified a strong link. Ms. Z indicated that children must assimilate into prescriptive societal norms and values, and the goal of moral education is to condition students to the 'special requirements' of the 21st century 'New Era.' She explained:

Of course...we think that because you are a child, you are a person who wants to live in this [Chinese] society. For example, children cannot come into this society and break away from it. It's impossible. Just on the basis of this bottom line, we think that [children] have to observe some of the special requirements that we have in this era.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Ms. T, a moral education teacher from S1, understood moral education and societal development as a reciprocal relationship. When asked about the role of moral education, she described it as a dual-pronged strategy of national, societal, and education development. She noted:

These questions, 'What effect does the country have on society?' and 'What effect does the country and society have on moral education?' are very related. Actually, moral education has two purposes. The first is to cultivate good behaviours in children. Another one is to allow children to smoothly participate in your future social life. It teaches the two aspects of personal and public ethics.

(interview notes from Ms. T August 2020)

Much of the Western academic literature regarding education facilitating children's integration into society focuses on *outsiders* or those outside the *status quo*, such as students with disabilities, refugee or migrant students, or those with criminal records who have been excluded from the traditional education route. However, Ms. T's response suggests that children are also considered outsiders, and moral education facilitates their 'smooth' integration into society. From this, we can conclude that integration into society is determined not solely by nationality or origin of birth, but by the adherence to collective ideology. In this sense, children are not yet accepted

members of society because they have not yet embodied or expressed consent to the prescriptive moral ideology.

Mr. Y, a moral education teacher at S2, agreed that moral education socialises and conditions students to fully understand their identity and responsibilities as a Chinese national. He said:

Moral education class reflects the will of the country. It is a required subject at public and private schools because compulsory education is standardised in our country. In other words, as a country, China is also a multi-ethnic country.... So, if moral education is a place to cultivate children's awareness of being Chinese, and to cultivate children's sense of identity in their own country, then it also passes on moral and legal education... It strengthens the child's national identity, such as 'I am Chinese, and I also recognise this kind of Chinese culture.'

(interview notes from Mr. Y August 2020)

Ms. Z, a university professor, echoed Mr. Y's sentiments regarding the role of moral education in social conditioning. She said:

Moral education must be useful. Moral education is the development of all kinds of natural things for children, [such as] morality, law, mental health, nature, etc; it is for the overall development. This is also the development of sociality. Not only are you moral, but you also have a pure and profound understanding of what is being taught. It is a very big task, a bit like social education. We think that the moral education course is very useful for cultivating a child's social awareness. Children can be influenced by the good atmosphere in school and have a good life.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Ms. D, a primary school teacher from Beijing, described the moral education content as educating students as to their duties and responsibilities as a Chinese citizen. She said:

[The moral education system] is progress in teaching [citizenship and the rule of law] areas of education. It is the duty and responsibility of a citizen to integrate into the rule of law, including the right to integrate into a citizen. These are mostly considered to be a kind of happiness in the content of the rule of law.

(interview notes from Ms. D August 2020)

Responses from interview participants indicated that children born in China are not yet fully integrated into society. Rather, the integral factor in societal

integration is the acceptance of moral and ideological collective values. Therefore, the path to becoming a 'citizen' within Chinese society begins with the socialisation and conditioning in moral education class. Following ideas introduced by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, the successful integration into society occurs when students observe, assimilate, and reproduce prescriptive collective values that society, in this case the CCP, has deemed appropriate. This reproduction of values thus cements children's identity and status as a Chinese citizen.

Social conditioning within education is closely related to theories of hegemony. In addition to a requirement of social acceptance, social conditioning within the moral education class also asserts social and political hierarchies and ruling Party power. Through 'moral and intellectual leadership,' the ruling Party secures the voluntary consent of the masses (Conley, 2013). This process, reflected in Gramsci's ideas of hegemonic 'spontaneous consent' (Maglaras, 2013), reaffirms ruling Party power and dominant ideology. While moral education does not have comparable weight on the standardised examinations to 'more important' classes or sufficient funding to meet teaching goals, it is designed as a required passage for full integration into society in the 'New Era.' The process of social conditioning via student observation and cultural reproduction reinforces the ideological *status quo*, suggesting that moral education class serves a greater purpose for the CCP than for youth.

6.3.2.6 Moral education as a reflection of China's rapid development

The moral education of today's youth is significantly different from that of their teachers. According to teacher survey data, only 20% of respondents agreed with the statement that current moral education classes are exactly the same as the moral education they learned as a child (Appendix F). Most interviewees described stark differences between current moral education classes and the classes of their childhood. Many described their experiences learning moral education as tantamount to indoctrination, describing teachers directing readings from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* or dense political theory that children could not comprehend. They also noted the lack of activities or holistic content within past moral education curriculum. Sautman's (1991) review of moral education textbooks showed that curriculum and State ideology are aligned. Furthermore, Sautman (Ibid.; Tang, 2021) found that Chinese moral education textbooks are largely characterised by 'hyper-ideologicalisation and politicisation.'

Mr. Y's description of the moral education he learned when he was a child indicated obvious differences from contemporary moral education. When asked if today's moral education was the same or different from his childhood, he said:

[It is] different. [There is a] dramatic change. When we were young, the content of moral education class was probably more macroscopic. Now, moral education class is more life-like, you can see in the textbooks that things are very life-like. It is particularly closely related to the life of the child, such as doing housework. Another example is the inclusion of some environmental protection education that he or she is going to change.... For example, if you are shopping on the supermarket street with your parents, did you buy a small cloth bag or buy the plastic bags in the supermarket to hold the things you bought? The moral education textbook we use now pays special attention to the connection with children's lives. I think this is the kind of character I thought I learned when I was a kid, but the thought character of 'Thought and Character' (a previous edition of moral education textbooks) was very different. Now we call textbooks 'Ethics and Legal System.'

(interview notes from Mr. Y August 2020)

Ms. Z, a university professor, echoed similar sentiments to Mr. Y about the difference in moral education classes. She said:

When I was young, I was probably in the first grade of elementary school in 1990. At that time, this course was not called 'Morality and Rule of Law;' it was called 'Ideology and Morals'. When we were in class, the teacher just asked everyone to take out the textbook and then everyone read the textbook from beginning to end. There are a lot of words in the textbooks. Now, there are a lot of pictures. At that time there was a lot of writing. The teacher asked us to read each of the textbooks in order. Class was over after you read the textbook. Generally speaking, classes now are a big change from when I was younger.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Mr. J, a primary school teacher from Shanghai, described current moral education as a broader and more diverse discipline than its earlier versions. When asked about the differences between current moral education and his moral education as a child, he said:

The content now is definitely more than the previous content, that is, the more scope is wider, and the content is richer. At that time [when I was a child], I remember that we were educated to love patriotism and love to work. We talked a lot about the five loves. So, we just accepted the love for labour, love for study, love for the motherland, etc. But I think the moral education

class now has a broader scope, that is, history, politics, including some laws and psychological help. The textbook is richer in this form.

(interview notes from Mr. J August 2020)

Ms. G, a professor from Hangzhou, agreed that there was a sharp contrast between the moral education of her childhood and contemporary versions. She reflected on her experience as a child during a turbulent political time in China.

[There is a] very big difference. This shows that this society is still progressing. Because I was in primary school in 1976. The Gang of Four had just been crushed in 1976. The Cultural Revolution had just ended, so at that time I remember whether there was a special moral education class when I was young. At that time, our moral education class was like politics class. I was in the first grade of elementary school. I reported that I didn't know any words on the first day, but our teacher asked us to buy Chairman Mao's third article in the Xinhua Bookstore. This was [the bookstore] for the people. Anyway, we didn't know anything in the first grade, and then the teacher made us memorise the texts.

(interview notes from Ms. G September 2020)

Ms. G's account provides an interesting glimpse into China's recent history. Mao's death and the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 created a power struggle at the top echelons of the CCP. Despite this period of turmoil, Ms. G's testimony shows that moral education continued with a strong focus on Mao's works. Ms. G noted that although she did not know how to read, she was required to memorise dense political manifestos for moral education class. At the time of Ms. G's childhood, moral education had not yet developed into a pragmatic source of social conditioning. Rather, it remained an exercise in hierarchical political education that served no real benefit towards youth (Pepper, 1980).

However, not all interviewees viewed the current moral education model as different from their childhoods. Ms. H, a primary school teacher from Shenzhen, felt that although there are many differences, the core of moral education has remained consistent throughout its many iterations. She felt that moral education has always shown students how to interact in society. When asked if moral education had changed since her childhood, she said:

There are big differences, but I think it's actually the same. You've grown up and others will tell you what's feasible and infeasible. In fact, now [children] are also told what is feasible or infeasible, but the way students are told is different. Because the media plays a big role in

children's lives. Moral education research is based on stories or [other research] and tells the truth to the children. For example, students will watch the news, WeChat, Douyin, or read some things. They will be influenced by what this media is conveying. Moral education will instil in the child everything that the child needs to know. Moral education will gradually increase to educate the child about all aspects of life.

(interview notes from Ms. H July 2020)

Ms. H saw moral education as a necessary endeavour to show students the 'feasible' and 'infeasible' ways to act in society. Her choice of words indicates that she views Chinese society through a rigid binary, suggesting no variation or flexibility in how students can behave or integrate into society. She also said that moral education 'tells the truth' to students, equating political ideology with truth and media or non-CCP sponsored information as potentially harmful. In the eyes of Ms. H, moral education is an important process for the overall safety and success of students.

Altogether, most teachers saw moral education as a transitional discipline that adapts to societal needs. Many interviewees viewed the current form of moral education, with a mix of child-centred pedagogy and legal education, as a positive development. The stark differences in Chinese society are reflected in moral education, reaffirming the suggestion that moral education is a representative example of the CCP's methods of governance. While moral education has become more developed, it remains an important method of social conditioning for youth.

6.3.2.7 Law school for children

I was interested to find that law and legal education had a prominent place within the primary school moral education curriculum. I questioned whether young students could comprehend such abstract topics, and why law education did not begin in later grades when students could fully appreciate and understand the concepts.

Mr. D, a teacher from Shenzhen, acknowledged the difficulty of teaching law to children, but viewed legal education in moral education as an important part of students' behavioural development. He described moral education as the precursor to students' 'legal awareness' within society. He said:

Knowing the law, understanding the law, and observing the law is actually the implementation of the law. When you are teaching a young child, you cannot tell them the law. In fact, children's behavioural habits and awareness of rules are the initial stage of the germination of legal

awareness, which means that moral education is taught in a way that teaches them to follow the law...It can be said that morality is the same as saying that it is from the inner law, but students need [to learn] the outer law... Observing the rules also requires proper external rules and regulations to find a balance between the two. I think [moral education] is still developing in a society under the rule of law. Teach [the law] to the children, let them have a basic understanding of a budding state, and more importantly, how you practice Core Socialist Values as a primary school student. This is our real intention.

(interview notes from Mr. D August 2020)

Mr. D's remarks reflect Party-sponsored education reform that designs morality to appeal to people's 'conscience' and 'inner moral beliefs' (Luo, 2019). The designation of moral education as tantamount to students' consciousness equates political ideology with students' moral development. Moral education makes no distinction between personal morality, for example that stealing is bad, and societal morals, such as that not loving one's country is equally as immoral as theft.

The importance of rule of law education for children was reaffirmed by Ms. Z, a university professor. She related the new content with the 'New Era,' suggesting that the two are interdependent. Ms. Z also referenced Xi as the top architect of moral education and the 'New Era' education policy. She said:

[Xi Jinping] believed that in this era, we now need to promote the rule of law, which is very important. It is very important to promote the rule of law literacy of the students who govern the country according to law. Therefore, in our courses, we think that we should increase the content of highlighting legal education and increase the content of law. There will be changes to the [moral education] course. This content originally existed, but [Xi Jinping] has now enhanced it. This may be his requirement to meet the requirements of this era, and then he made an adjustment to this content.

(interview notes from Ms. Z August 2020)

Mr. J, a Chinese (*yuwen*) teacher from Shanghai, explained the gradual introduction of legal education within moral education classes as a process that encompasses children's' all-around physical and mental development. He said:

For us, we seem to put moral construction first. In fact, the moral and legal system [we teach children] actually contains a lot. It's not just a moral aspect, it actually includes some psychology, including some safety education; they are infiltrated into the class. In addition to those disciplines, such as self-protection, there are mental health, hygiene, and the rule of law in our country. The education is different according to each age, that is, each grade. Then, bit

by bit, [the moral and legal education] will get deeper and deeper, and it will become more and more biased when it comes to national laws and policies... The legal point of view is combined with the age characteristics of children. In fact, some of our children's legal knowledge is how our children should abide by the laws and regulations. Some of them are things that children don't understand; children think [law and legal education] doesn't matter. But it is for long-term knowledge.

(interview notes from Mr. J August 2020)

Mr. J echoed words of the National Plan and Xi in emphasising the 'morality first' approach in education. He noted that moral education is a comprehensive and diverse discipline that teaches children everything they need to know to survive in the world and contemporary society. Mr. J's statements regarding the gradual approach of moral education in primary school curriculum reflected my findings of the critical discourse analysis of moral education textbooks that showed an incremental increase in ideo-political and legal education from grades third to six.

However, Mr. J noted that many students do not fully understand the legal concepts they are being taught, or think such education is not important. This contradicts the student-centred pedagogical approach of moral education classes that aims to relate information to students' lives. Yet Mr. J thought that despite the lack of student awareness and interest in these topics, they are necessary for students' long-term success and integration into society. This indicates that moral education's core purpose is to integrate students into society through specific ideological and legal education, in which the *process* of conditioning is more important than student understanding or interest.

Ms. T, a primary school Secretary from Nanjing, suggested changes to the legal awareness education in moral education class. When asked if she thinks cultivating children's awareness of the law is important, she responded:

The awareness of the legal system is changing. For example, in the past, relevant knowledge of the law was carried out in middle schools. Now, it has already begun to infiltrate [primary schools]. There is a special chapter in the sixth grade on the rule of law. If morality is soft, law is hard. On the one hand, law has to tell the children where they are now and what they cannot violate. If you violate the relevant laws of public participation, you may be punished accordingly. On the other hand, children also have a requirement for themselves, not only to abide by laws and regulations, but at the same time, have higher requirements for themselves.

(interview notes from Ms. T August 2020)

Interestingly, Ms. T frames the legal content within the moral education curriculum as showing students what they *cannot do*, rather than what they *can do*. Ms. T and Mr. J both used the word ‘infiltrate’ (*shentou*) to describe the integration of law and legal education into the primary school moral education curriculum. Additionally, Ms. H, a moral education teacher from Shenzhen, also used the word infiltrate to describe the gradual introduction of moral education into children’s’ lives. The connotation of ‘infiltrate’ pertains to a surreptitious yet gradual process to encroach upon a certain group, social sphere, or ideology to influence or take control (Cambridge, 2021). All three teachers’ use of the word ‘infiltrate’ suggests that legal education has not always been a component of moral education, but recent reforms have aimed to integrate law into the curriculum through a gradual and somewhat secretive process.

6.3.2.8 Dissatisfaction and areas of improvement

Most interviewees expressed positive approval towards the moral education curriculum and ongoing reforms. However, many participants identified key areas that the curriculum and pedagogy could be improved. A common criticism of present-day moral education was the lack of funding for full-time teachers, which they felt contributed to a poorer quality of moral education. When asked how moral education can be improved, Mr. F, a university professor, listed three key points: faculty, pedagogy, and student actions. One example he offered was:

At present, I think there are still several issues that need us to change. One aspect is to strengthen the construction of the faculty of the ethics and legal system courses in elementary schools. The teaching staff is relatively weak at present. In many places, there are no full-time teachers of ethics and legal system courses. The professional level of these teachers in this subject is not high. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasised that the key to a good ideological and political course lies in the teacher. But our teachers don’t have this teacher who specialises in this moral law. Even with these part-time teachers, their level is not high.

(interview notes from Mr. F September 2020)

Despite the overall positive nature of suggestions for improvement, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of moral education. For example, Ms. Z, a university professor, pushed back against the political influence in moral education reforms. She said:

From the perspective of our education, I think that the development of our education itself should not be completely controlled by the changes in this political era to make a very big adjustment. We should still stick to our own logic of educational development to do this. For example, I say this that because whoever is the leader of [China] will put forward a political slogan that might be from another country, but still our entire education system must be reformed. I don't think it should be this way. I think our education should have its own internal and developmental logic.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Although Ms. Z used carefully measured words, she alluded to the practice of the ruling Party monopolising the moral education curriculum to achieve ideological reforms. Instead of abiding by a consistent process of moral education development, she felt that the course was manipulated and revised based on CCP socio-political requirements. Her comments on the influence of political slogans on education reform were likely in veiled reference to the integration of the Core Socialist Values and China Dream ideology that has been the focus of moral education curriculum reform under Xi's leadership. Ms. Z's comments indicated that there is discord between the moral education put forth by Party officials and the moral education that teachers and practitioners feel is in the best interest of children.

Mr. J, a moral education teacher from Shanghai, expressed concerns about the quality of the moral education curriculum and the real influence of moral education reforms. He said:

Anyway, I feel that my school alone feels a little bit powerless. The writing [of the textbook] is a bit weak. Moral education stands on the opposite side of school education. It [should be] organically integrated with the school, where it does not stand on the opposite side of school education... I am afraid that this kind of atmosphere [of moral education] will become more and more unpleasant; then it will be quite annoying.

(interview notes from Mr. J August 2020)

Mr. J was referencing the recent moral education reforms that integrate political and legal ideology into the curriculum. His criticisms suggest that recent moral education reforms have not seamlessly integrated into the curriculum, but rather stand apart from the natural 'atmosphere of school education.' He also indicated that he feels a stronger camaraderie with his school than with Party officials who design the curriculum, separating himself and his school from the moral education curriculum.

He also felt that moral education might develop into a negative aspect amongst students and teachers.

While Mr. J's comments were more critical than most interviewees, they highlighted an important sentiment within teachers' mindsets that suggests moral education reforms are not always a positive thing. In addition, he illustrated a social hierarchy within moral education, separating the *us* vs. *them*, i.e., the Party vs. the teachers. While official dialogue describes a seamless transition between these two social statuses, Mr. J's account suggests existing friction.

Mr. D, a moral education teacher from Shenzhen, had similar criticisms of moral education reforms. He described the faults of the contemporary curriculum as follows:

I think it is still developing in a society under the rule of law... First of all, I think the name [of the Morality and Rule of Law class] can reflect a possible editing. The feeling of using a handful of moral and legal phrasing is that the ideological character feels a bit like brainwashing ideological education. I hate the teacher's experience and teaching methods. In other words, the motherland will give you a unified platform to give you the core socialist values, but [require] your differences to assimilate. You must understand the core socialist values based on your actual situation. For example, what should be done in the public security department are the core values of socialism of the public security department. What should be done in the Core Socialist Values in the bank staff should [for the bank staff]. There should be independent values of how our teachers should practice the core socialist values [in the classroom].

(interview notes from Mr. D August 2020)

Mr. D's response was surprising due to his strong language. He noted that the ongoing reforms within the moral education class, specifically in terms of the integration of legal education, felt 'a bit like brainwashing.' He also criticised what he described as the forced homogeneity of Chinese people. Mr. D felt that while value systems, such as the Core Socialist Values, were a positive aspect of Chinese society, they glossed over the unique differences and individualities between members of society. To Mr. D, the benefits of collective values were undermined by their oppressive presence within education.

Mr. D's analysis echoed survey data that also noted pushback against homogeneity of values. Only 9% of survey respondents agreed that all Chinese people have the same values (Appendix F). These data indicate a failure of social campaigns to assimilate and homogenise the Chinese population through shared value systems.

Mr. D and Ms. Z launched similar complaints about the integration of legal jargon into the moral education curriculum. Both felt that the new reforms created a rift between traditional and current moral education. Their comments suggest that in implementing moral education reform, the CCP focused more on youth and the future society than on appealing to adults and existing education practitioners. Despite mandatory teacher training, some teachers do not fully agree with the revised curriculum, and little effort has been made to ameliorate this friction.

These comments also reinforce the social hierarchy of the education system, in the sense that the Party, consisting of the CCP and MOE, maintain complete control and work for the benefit of students. A 2010 study of Chinese principals in Jiangsu Province (where this study took place) found that principals perceived their role not as a teacher or educator, but as a government officer who was accountable only to higher-level Party officials (Yang & Brayman, 2010). Teachers, on the other hand, are judged based on student performance and overall school examination scores. For example, in 2009 the MOE implemented the *Teacher Performance Pay* policy, which mandated that nearly one third of teacher salaries be directly dependent upon the academic performance of their students (MOE, 2008). While the goals of the policy aimed to incentivise teachers (Chang *et al.*, 2020), the policy further exacerbated teacher stress and left them in a difficult position with pressure from principals and parents alike.

The National Plan called for educators throughout China to shift focus away from exam-driven education and towards an educational model more focused on 'quality education' (MOE, 2010a). However, some teachers are not given sufficient resources and support to fully enact reforms. Within the social hierarchy of top-down moral education reforms, teachers are subordinate to the Party and students. Furthermore, teachers are expected to not only agree with top-down reforms, but also seamlessly facilitate their reproduction within the classroom.

These factors place teachers in a difficult position. On one hand, teachers have pressure from principals and Party officials to integrate ideological reforms into the curriculum. On the other hand, teachers' salary is based on student performance (MOE, 2008) which forces teachers to focus on the 'important subjects' on the standardised examinations. Since moral education is not weighted as highly as other subjects on the examinations, teachers allocate less time to moral education despite believing in its importance as a discipline and cultural component. There is also not sufficient funding for full-time moral education teachers, meaning the quality of

teaching is inconsistent. Therefore, teachers are in a difficult position to fully enact moral education reforms despite the lack of institutional support.

6.3.2.9 New education for a 'New Era'

A prominent theme throughout the interview data was the strong focus on education reform as a key factor of China's continued development and progress. Interviewees drew a clear connection between moral education reforms and 21st century 'New Era' socio-political reforms. Ms. Y, a university professor, explained the relationship between socio-political propaganda campaigns, moral education, and national development. She said:

[Moral education] conveys the main values of the country. Our country puts all the values that [have been] passed on to permeate into the moral education class. So moral education is the foundation for the country to train qualified citizens. The country hopes that the slogan proposed by the CCP is for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation... We want the Chinese nation to rise because we used to be very backward. We have experienced many wars. We have been at war for half of the time for 200 years, and then the whole country is very backward. Since the liberation in 1949, especially since the reform and opening up, the road has changed. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, our development has been getting better and better. Therefore, the government believes that we have now reached the time for the rise of the nation. This is the role of moral education because it will convey this concept of the country, telling everyone that the country has become stronger, and everyone needs to become better.

(interview notes from Ms. Y September 2020)

Ms. Y drew clear links to China's 'great rejuvenation' and the education system. She explained that prior to 1949, China was 'backward' and that moral education is a supplement to social and economic development. Interestingly, Ms. Y used specific phrasing to separate the CCP as a separate entity to the Chinese nation, for example by describing moral education reforms and propaganda as, 'the slogan put forth by the CCP.' She also clearly differentiated between 'the government' and 'we' as the Chinese people, creating distance between the Party and Chinese citizens. This phrasing contradicts CCP propaganda and discursive narratives in moral education that aim to create ideological homogeneity with the Party and the Chinese people (see Chapter 5).

Ms. Y also described reforms as entirely by virtue of the government and not initiated by the people. Moral education was also personified within Ms. Y's statements similar to a parent figure who would guide and support students through

their journeys to improve the nation. Ms. Y also placed urgency on the importance of moral education reforms, saying that all members of society ‘need to become better.’

Ms. Y expounded on her position by elucidating the requirements that citizens, and by extension youth, must develop the Chinese nation. In addition, Ms. Y described moral education class as ‘for society,’ rather than for children to integrate into society. Her phrasing suggests that societal development is the utmost goal of education reform, and that children are a tool for progress rather than viewing the next generation as progress themselves. When describing China’s 21st century ‘New Era,’ she confirmed the importance of students and all members of society to embody the Core Socialist Values and described moral education as a class ‘for society.’ She said:

In this era, we are getting stronger and stronger, and it can even be said that we have become a very powerful country in a certain sense. So, if our society wants to become better, of course our society needs to become better, but we need each of us to become better, to become more ethical, to abide by public rules, to abide by the law, and to become a free and equal person. Become an honest and friendly person. Therefore, when our Core Socialist Values talk about freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, this refers to society. Our society must become a society under the rule of law, a just society, a free society, and an equal society. Each of us must become patriotic, dedicated, honest and friendly, love our country, dedicate ourselves, and do our work well, and so on. So, these are all concepts that we want to convey in the [moral education] class. These values will be put into the teaching materials to teach the children. This [class] is for society.

(interview notes from Ms. Y September 2020)

Ms. T, a moral education teacher from Nanjing, explained that the integration of legal jargon into the moral education curriculum was because of China’s embrace of the rule of law. She described the role of education as central to a prosperous and harmonious society.

In our impression, Western society is a society under the rule of law. That is, all citizens have a strong sense of the legal system, and the law is the criterion for everything they encounter. We now also hope that our society can also [be] ruled by law... in fact, we have always had laws. But now [we aim to] really let the law come and dominate our entire lives. In fact, people can live very easily and simply [under a rule by law system].

(interview notes from Ms. T August 2020)

Ms. T raised an interesting point of comparing China's development with that of Western countries. Her language, using phrases like allowing the law to 'dominate our entire lives' and hope that Chinese society can be 'ruled by law' indicates that law is taking on an omnipresent personality. Instead of being guided by the law and abiding by its tenets, Ms. T hoped that society would become fully integrated with law through a seamless transition. Ms. T's statements raise questions concerning the difference between *rule of law* and *rule by law* for Chinese society, as well as the differences between morality and law in the education system.

Ms. Z, a university professor, reflected on these differences when asked about the role of moral education in China's 21st century 'New Era.' She said:

[Xi Jinping] will rule the country by virtue... the country is governed by virtue, which is in the traditional Chinese culture. Now he wants to build a modern country, but to promote the construction of the current country under the rule of law. So, he can't rely solely on wisdom and morality alone, and he can't talk about morality in everything. That won't solve many problems. Therefore, [Xi Jinping] proposed that we need to govern the country according to law, and this is in harmony with morality and law, and to deal with the rule of morality, we must govern the country according to law.

(interview notes from Ms. Z September 2020)

Ms. Z described reforms as solely at the discretion of Xi, bypassing the MOE or CCP to describe education as a product of Xi's ideology. She noted that 'wisdom and morality alone' cannot rule a country, therefore setting the stage for the integration of the rule of law. Ms. Z proposes an interesting theory between *rule of law* and *rule by virtue*. Xi has addressed these two concepts directly in his opus titled, 'Xi Jinping: Governance of China II' where he described law and virtue as two separate platforms of governance to regulate people's conduct and maintain social order (Xi, 2018). Law pertains to 'a set of virtues in writing,' while virtue (or morality) 'represents the law in one's inner world' (Xi, 2016).

Xi also noted that 'effective law' is dependent upon the collective society's practice of virtue, while virtue is dependent upon legal restraints (Ibid.). This places law above virtue in terms of importance, suggesting that ineffective law is the result of society's lack of virtue and not the fault of the government or leadership. However, Xi and top CCP leadership are moral paragons and that upholding the law and prescriptive values is the responsibility of Chinese people. Given China's hierarchical governance structure, this ideology indicates that Xi and top CCP leadership is above

society. The intersection of *rule of law* and *rule by virtue* within the Chinese state creates a reality whereas virtue is a tool that allows for the creation of a *rule by law* state. This reality gives Xi and the CCP more power to dictate the law and the societal moral code, as well as reinforces socio-political stratification within society.

Xi has developed this method of governance by urging society to ‘fully understand’ moral ideology, thus illustrating the role of education within *rule by law* society. In a speech given in a 2016 CCP study session, Xi described how ‘ethical education’ should be implemented. He said:

Ethical education should be carried out with a view to fostering the public’s faith in the legal system and enhancing their understanding of the rule of law and rule consciousness. We should guide the public to develop their consciousness to fulfil legal obligations and responsibilities towards society and family, developing a culture of respecting and following the rule of law.

(Xi, 2016)

Again, Xi places himself and CCP leadership above the general population. He describes the role of himself and CCP leaders as ‘guiding’ citizens to ‘develop their consciousness,’ a phrase which suggests that the public has underdeveloped consciousnesses. This phrasing echoes a paternal or saviour complex from the top echelons of leadership, suggesting that the CCP must guide, correct, and save the public via rule of law and virtue. The CCP’s development of a saviour complex provides legitimacy and moral supremacy and is often deployed as a tactic for Party-building activities. For example, during an event celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Xi gave a speech that cast the CCP as a saviour in a metaphorical war against foreign and domestic oppression (Bradsher *et al.*, 2021). The discursive construct of ‘othering’ throughout media and official narratives, in this case separating a moral CCP with an immoral domestic and international faction aiming to sow discord, creates a process of reification and legitimation (Lams, 2017).

Influential postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1935-2003) described the ‘Other’ as a form of cultural projection (Ibid.; Said, 2003). In the context of education, Xi and the CCP use discursive narratives to foster cohesion amongst those that abide to prescriptive morals while using ‘Othering’ to portray people, whether Chinese or foreign, that maintain ideologies outside the *status quo*. Chinese moral values are culturally constructed and projected within the confines of socio-political ideology that legitimises the ruling Party.

Mr. F, a university professor, reflected on the connection between China's 'New Era' socio-economic reforms and moral education. He first mentioned that in the past, moral education was not very important, but at the direction of Xi it has become very significant. He said:

General Secretary Xi Jinping said the key path for ideological and political courses to realise morality and cultivation. His first goal is to fully understand the importance of ideological and political courses. Among them, he came up with a very important point of view. As we look at the course of morality and the legal system today, we can't just look at it from the perspective of personal character cultivation. What does it matter if my personal character is improved or not? If you look at it this way, its significance is not very big. But General Secretary Xi Jinping produced a purely high position, that is, he did it from the development of the country and the development of society. ... If you want our country to be built into a country that depends on the citizens, what kind of citizens do we need? This is actually the responsibility of moral education courses. Xi said, 'Our Party's consciousness, the Chinese nation must train generation after generation to support the leadership of the Communist Party of my country and our socialist system, who are determined to fight for the cause of socialist construction.' This requires us to make the next [moral education] textbook well and cultivate it well. [Moral education] is an important guarantee for cultivating generations of socialist builders and successors.... Therefore, the course of ethics and rule of law is a key course in cultivating the builders and successors of socialism.

(interview notes from Mr. F September 2020)

Mr. F described the increased importance of moral education as purely based on the development of the country rather than to facilitate personal character development. He viewed the construction and development of China as in the hands of its citizens yet extended his opinion to describe citizen ideology as being engineered by the CCP. This somewhat contradictory statement suggests that citizens might have the appearance of autonomy to collectively decide societal values, but societal values are dictated via top-down socio-political hierarchy. Furthermore, these prescriptive values exist as a requirement to integrate into society as well as to facilitate societal development. For Mr. F, Xi was the guiding hand of ideological and national development, two areas which Mr. F viewed as the main purposes of moral education.

6.4 Toward a more nuanced understanding of moral education

Are the *prescribed* understandings of moral education reform compatible to their *lived* realisations? Do the values of students and teachers align, and are they consistent with top-down ideological narratives? This chapter analysed a meso-level

approach to the *prescribed* and *lived* experiences of moral education reform through student and teacher questionnaires and qualitative interviews. The analysis revealed that overall, teachers and students have similar understandings of moral values when surveyed. However, in-depth interviews revealed many nuances throughout teacher understanding and their *lived* experiences of moral education.

Questionnaire data revealed that students have a highly politicised view of morality. In addition, from grades three to five, students' moral orientation grows increasingly political in-line with top-down CCP political narratives. This trend stalls at sixth grade, where students have a more varied and less rigid view of moral identity that does not fall strictly in line with CCP ideology. However, most primary school students consistently equated 'morality' with patriotic, nationalist, or Party-centred ideology. Students were aware and knowledgeable of many societal ideological propaganda campaigns conveyed through moral education.

Teacher questionnaires revealed a strong belief in the importance of moral education and the value it has on societal development. However, not all teachers felt that the values of all Chinese people were homogenous in line with CCP ideology, contradicting the goals of ideological education that aim to create a unified and collective set of values and beliefs that support CCP legitimacy. In addition, most teachers thought that the moral education classes of their youth were starkly different from contemporary versions. Lastly, there were mixed feelings about the impact of teachers on student moral orientations, which suggested a tepid acceptance of the ongoing ideological campaigns that aim to raise the status and importance of moral education in primary schools.

IPA analysis of interviews revealed that many teachers were happy to give prescriptive answers during the interview, *i.e.*, the 'correct' answers, but were nervous or hesitant to offer their opinions or answer questions that might be construed as criticism despite my promises of anonymity and confidentiality. Interviews revealed a myriad of unique opinions and perspectives that was not visible in questionnaire data. Most respondents were knowledgeable and well-versed in ideological narratives, often citing speeches or phrases directly from Xi or Party leaders. Teachers reflected on the importance of moral education for national development and the integration of legal education in primary schools.

However, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction or veiled unhappiness with the reality of moral education. For example, while teachers agreed that moral education was very important, they felt its efficacy has not been fully achieved due to

logistical and fiscal constraints. Teachers faced a heavy workload in the classroom as well as time-consuming ideological training on their weekends or during free time. While most teachers believed that moral education was important, there was an air of frustration towards the methods of implementation which placed significant burdens on teachers.

6.4.1 Comparing teacher and student perspectives

In comparing student and teacher perspectives, students expressed prescriptive knowledge *as* common sense. On the other hand, teachers thought that moral education reforms *were* common sense. The majority of teachers agreed with reforms and recognised their importance for the developing society but did not necessarily agree with prescriptive knowledge. This suggests that in terms of students, ongoing reforms have somewhat achieved their goals of integrating prescriptive political ideology into students' moral orientations. However, as students mature, their moral orientations become less prescriptive, raising questions as to the longevity of prescriptive moral education. The commonality between the two groups was the sense of responsibility they felt to continue socio-economic development, and the role of moral education and collective values on national development, societal harmony, and prosperity.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the functional understanding of education developed by Durkheim (1972) is applicable to contemporary China. Durkheim theorised that education instils a sense of societal homogeneity and responsibility within youth and prepares them for 'membership' into future society (Ibid.). Within the Chinese classroom, moral education has a clear functional role for the future of societal development, including not just creating the 'ideal' society but also correcting existing faults. Both students and teachers are required to integrate into the 'idealised' society to function within existing society. For example, students must learn and embody ideology to achieve good grades and test scores, while teachers must reproduce ideology to earn a sufficient salary or maintain employment.

6.4.2 Relating to Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse

In addition, British sociologist Basil Bernstein's (1924-2000) theory of pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1977; 1990; 1996) is a useful tool to understand the complexities between discourse and education. Bernstein recognised that discourse functions in society through various means, such as maintaining social order and structural

inequality (Bernstein, 1990; Clark, 2005). To Bernstein, the term 'pedagogic discourse' pertains to 'a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into special relation with each other for the purposes of their selective transmission and acquisition' (Clark, 2005: 34). Moral education is a 'pedagogic device' which, following Bernstein's theories, is distributed, recontextualised, and evaluated within the classroom (Bernstein, 1990). Moral education is regulated by the upper echelons of the Party who curate curriculum; it is then recontextualised and evaluated by teachers. However, teachers and their performance are also evaluated by a hierarchical system of governance that links their livelihood to prescriptive values. Therefore, not only is knowledge distributed throughout the classroom, but economic mobility is also distributed and regulated. This process reinforces both the ideological legitimacy and socio-economic control of the CCP through the education system.

The moral education classroom is the site of ongoing cultural reproduction that aims to legitimise the ruling Party and construct a new, idealised society. Using the logic described in Clark (2005: 36), moral education pertains to knowledge of 'social facts.' Moral philosophy, law, and socio-political ideology are not subjects suitable for primary school education. This is because although children of primary school age are capable of understanding legal knowledge, it is usually on a superficial level as they have not yet fully developed requisite mental capacity (Kohlberg, 1975a; Watkins *et al.*, 2018). Despite this, these difficult concepts are reformulated, regulated, and sequenced in a pre-determined manner to benefit social and political conditions (Bernstein, 1990; Clark, 2005).

6.5 Conclusion

This meso-level analysis engaged with broader questions such as the role of ideology in socio-political reform, youth moral autonomy and agency, and the impact of formal schooling on moral orientation. This section revealed that the 'grey area' of the *lived vs. prescribed* moral education reforms differed from the prescriptive ideals depicted in official documents (macro-level) and the lived realisations experienced in everyday life (micro-level). This chapter suggests that prescriptive moral education reforms are achievable to some extent, as seen through the collective values of third to fifth grade students and strong political rhetoric by teachers. However, the longevity of prescriptive values conveyed through reforms is tested by students' individual moral development and lack of sufficient institutional support for teachers to fully implement the desired changes within the moral education classroom.

Chapter 7

A micro-level analysis: An ethnography of the lived representations of moral education in schools

兵随将令草随风

Bīng suí jiànglìng cǎo suí fēng

Soldiers follow the general as grass follows the wind



7.0 Introduction

This chapter moves our analytic lens to focus on the *lived* experiences of students and teachers through a micro-level perspective using auto-ethnographic narrative and comparative case study methodology. My aim here is to bring the reader into the fieldwork setting alongside my visual and sensory experiences through ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 2008). Building upon the initial descriptions in Chapter 2, S1 and S2 are described and compared through different angles to analyse how moral education is *lived* in two comparable settings. I also evaluate key distinctions between the physical, social, and temporal descriptions of the schools that may contribute to differentiations in students’ moral education experiences. I then take a broader angle to analyse Chinese youth moral education through four identified themes of the lived experiences of youth primary school moral education.

7.1 The merits of a ‘small picture’ view

Charmaz (2006) encourages researchers to let the research problem shape the methodology. To remind the reader, my research aimed to analyse the *prescribed* vs *lived* realisations of moral education reform within contemporary China. Chapter 5 discussed the overall structure of prescriptive and official narratives of moral education through a critical discourse analysis of textbooks. Chapter 6 focused on the ‘grey’ area between official knowledge and lived experiences. This chapter delves into a specific time and place to focus on the latter half of my research question: the *lived* experiences of students and teachers.

van Maanen (2011: xvii) describes ethnographies as ‘portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogenous world.’ Given the constructed ideological homogeneity within official Party narratives of youth moral education, I wondered: how is ideological homogeneity enforced, and to what result? There is often a large gap between policy and implementation, and often an even larger gulf separating abstract ideo-political doctrine and individual ideological development. Therefore, this chapter studies the emergence of descriptive contrasts from prescribed notions of moral education. This chapter views the student and teacher as the epicentre of knowledge. I explore not only *what* experiences students, teachers, and administrators have, but also the meaning of those experiences (Seidmann, 1991).

7.2 School 1 (S1)

7.2.1 S1: The school and classroom atmosphere

S1 was founded in the first half of the 20th century. S1 has an established presence in Nanjing and the surrounding areas. The school has been designated as a 'key school' and 'experimental primary school' in Nanjing multiple times throughout its history. China's 'key school system' separates public schools into two categories: key and ordinary schools. Key schools are allocated more government resources and as a result have a more competitive entrance than ordinary schools (You, 2007). Admission to key schools is a decisive advantage for students because key school students have university admission preference (Lin, 1999). The school classification system contradicts China's model of standardised education by establishing a hierarchical education model that prioritises the development of key schools and their students over others (Ibid.: 230). S1's resource allocation and top reputation attracts highly qualified teachers, many of whom have received special titles or recognitions. Ruan's (2021) ethnographic study on the use of *guanxi* to gain admission to preferential schools links *guanxi*, school choice, and moral norms. The study found that uses of ritual performance of *guanxi* validated bribery for school admission; this practice was acceptable as a cultural norm and increased the social capital of both parties involved. Ruan's (2021) findings and the elevated status of S1 suggest *guanxi* as bribery operates as a context for the ritual performance of morals and socio-cultural norms in China's competitive school market.

S1 is located on a tree-lined street in a wealthy, historic neighbourhood. It is centrally located within Nanjing and is within walking distance to a large lake and the Jiangsu Provincial capital government agency buildings. This prime location means there is little vehicle traffic and noise on S1's campus because the adjacent roads are designed to redirect cars away from the vicinity of the government offices. In addition, the area surrounding S1 has lush gardens cared for by dedicated gardeners employed by the Jiangsu Province government. This gave the outside entrance of S1 an exclusive and elegant air, suggesting to a passer-by that this school was an elite or private institution.

S1 has a relatively small number of students in comparison to most primary schools in the city with approximately 1700 students and 40 teachers. S1 teaches grades 1-6. The average class size is 40 students per teacher. Teachers only teach one subject and move around classrooms throughout the day. Despite S1's location in the urban city centre, the campus felt spacious. Within the campus was a large track and field, multiple courtyards with grass, a basketball court, and a bamboo garden.

S1 has a growing partnership with multiple international schools. S1 consistently receives government awards and recognitions for teaching, student achievement, and promoting a healthy, patriotic lifestyle for youth. There is fierce competition for entrance into S1. Like most primary schools, students are allowed entrance due to the location of their home within the designated 'school zone.' Given the prestige of S1, many homes in the S1 school zone are purchased by wealthy families for the sole reason of giving their child entrance into the school, resulting in a rapid increase in property values within the school zone of S1. However, most apartments surrounding the urban S1 area are older and less modern than their price suggests. Therefore, some wealthy parents who purchased homes for S1 school entrance do not live at those properties, but rather have students commute daily to S1 from their more modern, larger homes in suburban Nanjing. This has created a strange phenomenon in the S1 school zone of a dual increase in home property values and of home vacancy.

The campus is a series of quadrangle buildings that opened to individual central courtyards. The buildings are painted an off-white colour, which was in stark contrast to the bright green faux grass within the courtyards. The buildings are roughly four stories tall, with open hallways looking out onto the courtyard. There is much greenery and colour throughout the campus, from student murals to bamboo gardens. There is a large flagpole and outdoor television screen in the centre of the main courtyard. It displays Party propaganda images on a rotational basis, such as the '12 Core Socialist Values' and 'Child's Heart Turned Towards the Party, Grow Up Happy' (*tongxinxiangdang, kuailechengzhang*).

Classrooms are arranged in similar ways throughout grade levels. Each classroom is rectangular-shaped, with individual desks arranged in neat rows. There are approximately forty desks in one classroom. Each classroom had a green chalkboard and a front table with an overhead projector. Above the chalkboard was a class phrase in red letters centred around a Chinese flag. The walls of most classrooms were relatively sparse except for an assortment of Party propaganda posters.

A new addition to S1 classrooms was a small monitor, roughly the size of an iPad, affixed outside the classroom door. This monitor was similar to an iPad and had an interactive screen which students could freely use. I observed this device mostly outside fifth and sixth grade classrooms, although I was told that the school had plans to install more outside each classroom. By using this device, students could access school information, such as grades, the cafeteria menu, and class schedules. Another

use of this tool was attendance. As students entered class from the break, they were meant to pause in front of this device; it would scan each student's face and register their attendance. This information was sent to teachers and parents as a way for parents to monitor their child's attendance and grades throughout the day.

In reality, this high-tech device was ineffective. Some students were not tall enough for their heads to reach adequate height for the device to scan their faces, and the majority of students either forgot or disregarded the requirement to 'register' with facial recognition as they hurried to their seats after the bell. In addition, teachers still spent the first few minutes of class conducting a roll call. The lack of teacher and student interaction with this expensive device led me to believe it was in place largely for the benefit of parents who wished to interact with their students, as well as a status symbol to indicate S1's designation as a key school.

My main contact at S1 was the Party Secretary of the school, a role similar to a deputy head teacher or vice principal. Usually, the Secretary runs and manages the school and its daily operations. The principal can be an honorific figure but is usually someone with very little contact at the actual school campus. The Secretary of S1, whom I will call Ms. T, was a highly respected educator. In addition to school Secretary, she was also a third and fourth grade moral education teacher at S1. She approved of my requests to conduct research at S1 without hesitation.

7.2.2 S1: A typical student day

S1 students attend class Monday-Friday. Due to close proximity to the metro station, a majority of S1 students take the metro to school. Older students, such as fifth and sixth graders, may take the metro independently, while younger students are often accompanied by their parents or grandparents. Other students are dropped off by their parents or grandparents on electric motorcycles; only a few students take the bus or walk to school. Most students eat breakfast at home and arrive at school ten or fifteen minutes before first period.

Students at S1 are required to wear uniforms on Mondays. The student uniform consists of white collared shirts with navy blue bottoms, the red Young Pioneers scarf, and a CCP pin. Girls often wear skirts while boys are allowed to wear trousers or shorts. The red Young Pioneers scarf is tied in a simple knot around their neck, and the Party pin is attached to their chest above their heart. Shoes are meant to be one plain colour and hair should be cut short for boys. Girls were allowed to have longer hair that was tied back in a demure fashion.

Despite only requiring uniforms on Mondays, I noted that most students wore their uniforms, or some combination of the uniform, every day. Most significantly, almost all students wore the Young Pioneers scarf and CCP pin on a daily basis. Given the students' young ages, I suspected their parents or guardians likely chose their daily school outfits. This led me to believe there was an 'unwritten rule' for parents that Party paraphernalia must always be worn and is officially 'optional' but unofficially 'required.' I assumed that if students did not wear their scarf or CCP pin, then it would indicate that their parents are not strongly patriotic. Furthermore, this 'unwritten rule' suggested that the most important time to wear Party paraphernalia is when it is optional, a cultural construct which reflects Gramsci's ideas of 'spontaneous consent' of ideological conformity.

This observation led me to consider the school as a process of political socialisation for youth and parents. China's rapid socio-political and economic transformation over the past few decades means that the formal education of today's youth likely varies drastically from the education of their parents. Discourse analysis of textbooks (discussed in Chapter 5) revealed narrative themes of changing existing society to merge with the 'ideal' society constructed in official narratives and curricula. Parenting styles strongly influence cultural value transmission (Schonpflug, 2001). The active process of parents clothing their children in Party paraphernalia is an act of political socialisation for students and parents. Social norms constructed within school culture of wearing Party paraphernalia every day of the week forces parents to embody and practice forms of political socialisation for the reputation of their child and themselves.

Classes at S1 begin at 8:30am. There are eight periods every day; each period is fifty minutes long. Between each period is a ten-minute break, which students use to relax or play outside. Between periods four and five students have a one-hour lunch break. Students stay in the same classroom for most of the day, while teachers rotate. Students leave their main classroom for courses such as physical education or special electives like dance, music, or robotics. A class bell keeps time for teachers, and rings at five minutes before class ends and at the end of the class period. The bell is a long, loud jingle. At S1, the class bell was to the tune of the Christmas song 'Jingle Bells.'

A typical fifth grade student would have mathematics for their first period, followed by Chinese languages and literature for second period. At the start of third period, students have a guided 'eye health exercise' (*yanbaojiancao*). A recording plays over the loudspeaker whilst students rub their eyes and head in synchronised

movements, which aims to relieve eye strain and promote healthy growth. These exercises are common throughout China and have been integrated into the national curriculum in response to the government's focus on fostering 'all-around health' (Xinhua, 2019b). Third period is arts (*meishu*), usually painting, origami (*zhezhi*) or paper cutting (*jianzhi*). Fourth period is science; after fourth period is lunch.

Typically, students eat lunch in their classrooms. A cafeteria worker brings large pots of food, usually boiled rice, meat dishes, vegetables, juice boxes, and steamed buns, to each classroom. Students serve themselves and eat at their desks. After lunch, the typical fifth grade student had moral education class, followed by English language class. Periods seven and eight are optional extracurriculars or 'self-study' periods. Students typically leave school around 3:45pm. Many students have numerous after-school classes (*buxiban*) or activities, and often have a few hours' worth of homework. The amount of homework and extracurriculars grow in tandem as students age, meaning fifth and sixth grade students are increasingly busy.

Fifth grade students have math and English class four times a week and Chinese language and literature class is five times a week. Students have physical education and writing (*zuowen*) three times a week. Science, moral education, art, and music are twice weekly. Lastly, students will take labour class (*laodong*), usually some activity with their hands such as traditional paper cutting, a 'comprehensive project' class (*zhongheshijian*), information class (*xinxi*), a Party activity class, and a 'Happy Friday' class all occur once per week. A sample weekly schedule is provided in Figure 7.1.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Math	Chinese	Math	Chinese	Math
2	Chinese	Music	Writing	Labour	Physical Ed.
3	Art	Physical Ed.	Writing	Chinese	Chinese
4	Science	English	Information	Moral Ed.	Art
5	Moral Ed.	Comprehensive Project	English	Science	Party Activity
6	English	Math	Music	Physical Ed.	Happy Friday
7	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)
8	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)	(Optional extracurricular)

Figure 7.1: An average fifth-grade student class schedule at S1

7.2.3 S1: Experiences of moral education

The first moral education class I observed at S1 was a third-grade class taught by Ms. T. When I had entered the campus some twenty minutes earlier while classes were in session, the campus was quiet. I observed a lone student shuffling down the hallway to the bathroom. However, as soon as the bell rang and class ended, the younger students burst from their classrooms and ran about. As Ms. T and I walked together, we were surrounded by a cacophony of children laughing, screaming, and shouting. Students ran wild with unbridled energy, sprinting through the hallways, classrooms, and in the central courtyards. Suddenly balls, jump ropes, and toys appeared from out of nowhere. Quite a few students bumped into us as we walked and many tripped on the stairs. Ms. T noted my shocked reaction to the sudden change in atmosphere and told me that unlike Western schools, Chinese students encourage children to play and 'let loose' on the breaks. She said that this practice makes up for the strict behavioural policies required in the classroom.

The moral education classroom was an average sized classroom with forty desks neatly arranged in rows. Students did not wear a uniform, but almost all (roughly 75%) wore a red scarf around their necks, the uniform of the Young Pioneers, the youth branch of the CCP. I observed roughly 90% of students also wore a CCP pin; the teacher also wore this pin.

The content of Ms. T's moral education class was seemingly unstructured and relied heavily upon teacher and student interaction. The students were well-behaved and enjoyed the interactive class environment. Her pedagogy focused on encouraging students to identify what makes them happy and learn that studying does not just happen at school; their playtime, homework time, mealtime, and rest time is also a form of learning.

There was no covert or overt political-oriented instruction at any time throughout Ms. T's third grade class, seemingly in contradiction to the Party's goals of explicit politically oriented moral education instruction and the initial hypotheses. However, the CCP was undoubtedly present within the classroom. In addition to the CCP pins and Young Pioneers scarves, numerous posters lined the classroom walls reiterating the political orientation of moral education. These included a poster of the nationally mandated nine 'Primary Student Rules,' which the first rule is 'love the Party, love the country, love the people. Understand the Party's history and circumstances, cherish the country's honour, warmly love ancestors, warmly love the

people, and warmly love the CCP.’ Other posters included ‘Core Socialist Values’ and ‘The Struggle for the Communist Cause.’

In discussions afterwards, Ms. T noted S1’s ethos of moral education is to guide students to be good members of society and to have a happy life in society. She felt her purpose as a moral education teacher was to encourage students to the right morals of society by first developing a strong sense of self and happiness, then gradually introducing things that are right vs wrong. She did not see moral education as overt political education, but rather insinuated that the two are inextricable: good members of society have good morals, and a good society is built by people with good morals.

7.2.3.1 English as an economic, not cultural, tool

Another day, I came to S1 to help a fifth-grade English class. I learned that students had recently studied vocabulary pertaining to the Easter holiday. Given the early-November date, I offered to give a lesson to students surrounding the American holiday Thanksgiving. The English teacher was very pleased with this idea, and we brainstormed for a few minutes to discuss vocabulary and the lesson plan. We agreed this activity could take place the following week.

A few days later, Ms. T, the school Secretary, sent me a message. She said she wanted to clarify my involvement with the English classes. She noted that my time tutoring students was appreciated, but that attaching lessons to a Western holiday ‘wasn’t necessary.’ I reached out to the English teacher for clarification, wondering if our lesson plan would still go forward. The English teacher said, ‘[Ms. T] said it is best not to promote Thanksgiving because currently, schools are not allowed to propagandise (*xuanchuan*) foreign holidays.’ The teacher told me this was likely a recent Ministry of Education requirement.

The English teacher noted that last year they taught a Christmas holiday lesson plan and activity but were no longer allowed to teach that lesson plan this year. However, the English teacher asked if I could still teach the Thanksgiving lesson the first week of December, so the lesson wouldn’t coincide with the actual holiday in late November. She also asked if I would remove some of the Thanksgiving-specific vocabulary and replace it with less-specific words.

This interaction led me to believe that whilst my presence at S1 was welcomed, it was also monitored. I was unaware how Ms. T knew of my plans for a Thanksgiving activity, and whether teachers submit their lesson plans for approval or if any planned

interaction teachers had with me was monitored. In addition, this event demonstrated the framing of English as a pragmatic tool for continued economic advancement rather than a subject valued for international culture. It echoes top-down trends that have called the decreased importance on English as an important step towards reform (Ni, 2013). Once hailed as a hallmark of the 'Three Represents' and Opening-Up period to launch Sino-international globalisation in the late 1970s, English threatens Chinese cultural dominance. Chinese lawmakers have recently proposed to remove English as a core subject from the compulsory education system (Liu, 2021), which suggest an ideological shift against established ideas of globalisation and towards maintaining cultural dominance.

Overall, my initial impression of S1 was that it was an elite school in terms of student achievement, resources, and reputation. The students that attended S1 undoubtedly had socio-economic advantages that gained them admission. S1 employed highly skilled teachers and received multiple awards for teaching, school culture, and overall school environment, which gave students a decisive advantage in the competitive Chinese school market.

7.3 School 2 (S2)

7.3.1 S2: The school and classroom atmosphere

S2 is also a public primary school in central Nanjing. My first impression of S2 was that it was difficult to find. Nestled in a residential area close to a major hospital, S2 is not visible from the main or side street. Its main entrance is down an alleyway leading to apartment buildings. The school entrance has a retractable gate between two tall, tiled pillars; there is a security office to the left of the gate. S2 has a smaller campus footprint than S1, however the school buildings at S2 were nearly seven storeys tall, almost double the building height of S1. The campuses of S1 and S2 are located less than four kilometres apart in downtown Nanjing.

S2 has two campuses due to capacity limitations. The main campus, which I visited, teaches grades 2-5; grades 1 and 6 are taught at other locations. In total, the whole school has approximately 3000 students with 150 teachers; however, the main campus has around 1900 students and 100 teachers. The average class size is 45-50 students per teacher. I was told that school administrators recently placed caps on class size to reduce the growing student-to-teacher ratio. Due to the small footprint of the campus, most physical education classes are held at a public gym across the street.

Teachers have specialised training in one subject and rotate throughout the school to teach the individual course; however, some teachers teach tangential subjects to fill unexpected vacancies or scheduling conflicts. S2 also has a 'Party Branch Office,' whose representative's job is to ensure the school curriculum meets Party standards. While S2 is not designated as a key school in Nanjing, it has received numerous awards and is working to establish international educational collaborations.

The buildings of S2 are arranged in an open hallway design, with hallways overlooking the central courtyard. The central courtyard was large and made entirely of pale green rubber performance material, with the outlines of a basketball court painted in the centre. There was a large tree and shrubbery in one corner, providing some greenery in the urban setting. Next to the tree was a large television screen and flagpole, with propaganda posters and slogans displayed on a rotation. The slogans displayed on the screen were similar to those at S1, such as the Core Socialist Values.

The overall atmosphere was of a happy, relaxed school. There were positive slogans, pictures of smiling children, and award plaques adorning the hallways. There was significantly more writing, imagery, and colour throughout the school than S1. However, it was clear that S2 had fewer luxuries than S1. S2's classrooms were slightly older and more worn-down in appearance than S1. The classrooms in S2 appeared to be slightly larger in size than those of S1, but also contained more desks with a roughly 1:45 student to teacher ratio and seemed small and cramped. S2 did not have any student facial recognition devices outside the classrooms.

My host contact at S2 was Mr. Y, a man who wore many hats. He was trained as a Chinese (*yuwen*) teacher but was 'redeployed' by the school principal to teach moral education. He was also studying part-time at a nearby university for his doctorate. He was a tall, kind man in his late 30s who clearly had a strong work ethic and a genuine desire to help others.

Mr. Y mentioned that moral education is becoming increasingly sensitive due to the growing political influence within the curriculum. He cited examples such as the (then ongoing) 2019 Hong Kong protests and the Sino-US trade war. He said these international issues made my presence on campus slightly controversial and forced him to hesitate to give me full access to students, the classroom, and teachers. However, he said that it was in the school's best interests to understand other countries and cultures, so he would do his best to support my research at S2.

In future interactions with Mr. Y, I observed that he tried his best to help me whilst also keeping a low profile in supporting my research. For example, when I

offered to give back to the host school by teaching English or helping wherever needed, he quickly dismissed this offer and said that would be unnecessary. While Mr. Y was instrumental in helping facilitate my research at S2, I understood that he felt the safest course of action for students, myself, and himself was to bring about as little attention of my presence as possible.

During one of our discussions, Mr. Y mentioned that he was aware that the international community does not think China has philosophy. He noted that this was a strong factor in Xi Jinping's ideological reforms, encapsulated in the statement: 'A country without virtue is a man without virtue' (*guowudebuxing, renwudebuli*). Mr. Y was quoting Xi Jinping's 2014 18th Party Congress speech titled, 'Youth should consciously practice the core values of socialism. In his speech, Xi explained that Core Socialist Values are a form of morality, and the State cannot progress without strong collective moral values. He said:

...The core value is actually a kind of virtue, not only a personal virtue, but also a kind of great virtue, that is, the virtue of the country and the virtue of society. A country cannot prosper without virtue, and a man cannot stand without virtue. If a nation or a country does not have common core values, is inconsistent and has nowhere to go, then this nation or country will not be able to move forward. Such situations are not uncommon in the history of our country and in the world today. (CCP, 2014a).

My discussion with Mr. Y offered significant insight into the ethos of official moral education. On the theoretical level, moral education is directly related to societal progress. Xi's phrase, 'A country without virtue is a man without virtue' shifts the responsibility of societal progress onto the people, suggesting that if their nation is truly moral and virtuous, then they will progress. On a practical level, sentimental language is instrumental in establishing emotional homogeneity that supports ruling Party ideology. By construing sentimental patriotism as a 'social fact' (Durkheim, 1938), emotions serve as a coercive actor to regulate and constrain individual thought and action into a generally accepted societal social code that reinforces ruling Party legitimacy.

7.3.2 S2: A typical student day

Classes at S2 run Mondays-Fridays. Similar to S1, S2 students are required to wear a formal uniform on Mondays for the flag-raising ceremony. The formal uniform consists of a white top with the red Party neck scarf. Male students wear khaki-

coloured trousers and female students wear a khaki or blue skirt. On Tuesdays through Fridays, most students wore a more casual uniform in the style of a tracksuit with a white and blue windbreaker jacket, a white shirt with a blue collar, and rain-proof blue pants. I did not observe many students wearing the Party pin. Students had similar hair styles to S1.

S2 was not located within close proximity to a metro station, so the majority of students arrive via foot, bus, or are dropped off by their parents or grandparents on an electric motorcycle or bike. The electric motorcycle was the most common form of transportation that I observed.

In the fall, summer, and winter months, the first period at S2 begins at 8:15am; in the summer, classes begin at 8:35am. A typical fifth grade schedule at S2 begins with a daily morning reading class from 7:30-8am. The last period ends at approximately 3:05pm, when students can take optional classes at the school or be released to their parents. Class periods are forty minutes long; there are seven periods throughout the day and a one-and-a-half-hour break for lunch between periods four and five. Students have a fifteen-minute break between each period. Students have Chinese, writing, and math classes every day, physical education four times a week, and moral education, art, 'social realisation' (*shehuishijian*) twice weekly. Party activity class, comprehensive learning (*zongyan*), information, science, and music class occur once per week. A sample weekly schedule is found in Figure 7.2.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Morning reading	Morning reading	Morning reading	Morning reading	Morning reading
1	Math	Chinese	Comprehensive learning	Chinese	Math
2	Chinese	Math	Physical Ed.	Math	Music
3	Physical Ed.	Chinese	Social realisation	Information	Chinese
4	Physical Ed.	Social realisation	Math	Art	Chinese
Lunch					
5	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
6	Moral Ed.	English	Art	Physical Ed.	Science
7	Chinese	Party activity	Chinese	Moral Ed.	English

Figure 7.2 An average fifth-grade student class schedule at S2

7.3.3 S2: Experiences of moral education

7.3.3.1 The Monday flag-raising ceremony

I first visited S2 on a warm Monday morning in September. The first event that I observed was the mandatory weekly flag-raising ceremony. Zhu and Liu (2004) noted that the flag-raising ceremony is an important extracurricular moral education activity. 'Good' students are selected for the honour to raise the national flag, and students, teachers, and principals give speeches about patriotism. However, my observations did not align with Zhu and Liu's account.

The flag-raising ceremony at S2 invited all students to the central courtyard; most students wore the school uniform and a red-scarf of the Youth Party organisation, while a few select students wore youth military fatigues. The approximately twenty-minute ceremony began with students filing into their assigned spots in the central courtyard. Teachers stood back outside of the courtyard. Music played over the loudspeakers whilst the large outdoor television screen showed a moving image of the Chinese flag. Eight students, dressed in military fatigues, uniformly marched through the centre of the rows of students; one carried the folded Chinese flag in their arms. They marched to the flagpole and deftly secured the flag to the ropes hanging from the pole.

As they slowly raised the flag, one student held onto the flag to make sure it did not touch the ground. Once the flag was raised far enough off the ground, the student theatrically threw the flag into the air, likely with the aim of having it catch the wind and unfurl in a dramatic fashion. Unfortunately, it was a windless day, so the student's exaggerated panache had the opposite effect and made the flag coil tightly around the pole. I heard some children laughing while another older and taller student quickly unwrapped the flag from the pole. After the flag was raised, all students raised their right hands in the Youth Party salute and sang the Chinese national anthem. Then, skits and poems were performed by a few students.

I noted the flag-raising ceremony was led entirely by students and involved very little adult or teacher interaction during the ceremony. While the students stood in neat lines according to class and grade in the central courtyard, all of the teachers and school administrators stood together in a group behind the students, in effect slightly removing themselves from the assembly and giving students almost complete autonomy. This arrangement was in stark contrast to the average class period with strict instruction and control by teachers and very little student autonomy on movement, action, and even appearance.

The shift in authority, from teacher absolute control to student leadership, during the flag-raising ceremony indicated a designed shift in encouraging autonomous student patriotism, rather than at the direction of teachers or curriculum. The ritual actions of students singing patriotic songs, raising the national flag, and arranging themselves in neat and orderly formations was all occurring voluntarily, marking an important shift in patriotic devotion from forced coercion to the participatory consent of students (Gramsci, 1971; Storey, 2006).

This exercise of *active* patriotism, as opposed to *passive* patriotic sentiments, reflected Gramsci's descriptions of the 'normal' exercises of hegemony (Storey, 2006: 85). While it is true that students willingly and independently engaged in the ritualistic flag-raising ceremony, they were not truly embodying Gramsci's ideas of 'spontaneous' consent (Buttigieg, 1995) because this was a required activity for all children. Despite having little teacher interaction during the ceremony, students followed prescriptive requirements of appearance, movement, and expression. Participation in the ceremony was not voluntary, and students would likely have been reprimanded if they did not engage in the required manner.

The flag-raising ceremony was reflective of a combination of force and participatory consent (Storey, 2006: 85-86), whereas force was exerted in a manner that made consent seem natural and voluntary. This exercise in hegemony likely serves as an important foundation for youth ideological education in that it engages students in a structured display of patriotism whilst conditioning youth to 'freely' consent in political activities.

After the ceremony, Mr. Y explained S2's moral education ethos, using broad language to encompass all primary schools within China and the general focus of education overall. He said moral education focuses on building the students' mental strength and capabilities from youth so they can learn to love themselves. Mr. Y said that as students mature, this love expands to the country, the Party, and the socialist system. Songs and performances of the flag-raising ceremony included a strong reiteration of 'loving;' loving oneself, loving one's family, loving one's school, etc. During one section, students chanted phrases in unison: 'Love my family! Love my city! Love my country!'

The correlation between loving oneself and loving one's country was not immediately clear to me. I asked him, how does self-love equate to patriotism? I said that I can love myself whilst expressing few emotions for my country, government, or political leaders. Vice-versa, I could be strongly patriotic whilst lack self-love. Mr. Y

laughed at the comment and shrugged it off to cultural differences between the US and China.

I found many themes that matched Mr. Y's description of framing patriotism through emotions and sentiments (see Chapter 5). His comments made me question the construction of 'love' within official curricula and whether it referred to emotions or civic duty. In a study of 'emotional indoctrination' in primary education textbooks during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1959), Mahamud (2016) established a correlation between the strong affective component in early political socialisation and ruling Party's efforts to emotionally homogenise youth through official curricula. Mahamud found that two predominant sentiments, love and pride, are represented through the Franco regime which merged Catholicism with Spanish patriotism (Ibid.: 665). While present-day secular China differs from fascist Franco-era, Mr. Y's comments on the merging of love and patriotism reflect similar representations of emotional persuasion that suggests official curricula educate students to *feel* rather than *understand* patriotism and nationalism.

7.3.3.2 A struggle session about soup

A second visit to S2 included observing a fourth-grade moral education class. This had 49 students; almost all students were wearing the school uniform and Party red scarf, despite this not being a school requirement. Students were using grade 4 'Morality and Rule of Law' textbook, 2019 edition. The classroom walls were blank except for the back wall which had a large poster board with a mix of poems and Party posters. Some Party posters included, 'I Study, I Implement;' 'Eight Courtesies and Four Rites;' and 'China Youth Sayings.' Classrooms were arranged in a similar layout to S1, with neat rows of desks facing a green chalkboard at the front of the classroom. The class phrase, written in red letters above the chalkboard and centred around a Chinese flag, was a quote from Mao Zedong: 'Study every day and every day you will improve' (*haohaoxuexitiantianxiangshang*).

This class was instructed in a strict fashion, but students were less well-behaved and at times were slightly rowdy. The teacher often raised their voice to control the students, and a few times sharply rapt a ruler against the metal table to get students' attention. The teaching style was interactive and was a mix of direct instruction and group work. The lesson revolved around an interesting activity in which students judged the moral doings of other students. A student would stand up and give an example of something they recently did that was considered 'moral' or

'virtuous.' Then, other students had the opportunity to stand up and either support or refute the student's accounts. Through this exercise, the teacher focused on relating moral education to students' everyday lives.

For example, a student gave an example of working in the cafeteria. The student had the responsibility of doling out soup. Towards the end of the meal, the student realised that there was not enough food for everyone. Upon this realisation, they made the selfless choice to give up their own soup so their classmate could eat, choosing to go hungry instead. The student explained that they would make this sacrifice because they cared for their classmates. After this student's moving account, another student stood up and declared that they had seen the student sometimes have a lot of soup themselves and had never seen the student giving out the soup, implying this student's example was not truthful. The teacher asked students to raise their hand to vote whether they had ever seen the student work in the cafeteria, and if they thought this student's character implied they would likely help their classmates and that their story was true. The majority of students raised their hands supporting the student's claims of doling out soup. With this, the student who contradicted his story was ashamed and sheepishly sat back down in his seat. The teacher then praised the volunteering student for his selfless act but reiterated the importance of eating and taking care of themselves first.

While this exercise helped students see the importance of morals in their everyday lives, it also illustrated the unique identity of morality. The exercise created an atmosphere of strength in collectivism and weakness in individualism; the student's actions were not deemed moral until the group collectively agreed. It also gave the impression that students are always being watched and judged by their peers, which can be beneficial (such as for the cafeteria student), or potentially detrimental to their moral reputation if classmates had deemed so.

From this exercise, I observed the strong importance of collectivist ideology within moral education, as well as how students are taught that one's status and reputation is dependent upon the testimony of others. This pedagogical method constructs a society where one's reputation is constantly at risk, drawing links back to China's Cultural Revolution-era 'struggle sessions' that constituted forms of public humiliation for political gain (Wu, 2014). In addition, this practice mobilises youth to observe, criticise, or report their peers' actions or misdeeds for their own benefit. This example illustrates one way in which the 'moral judgement of others is manifested through outward behaviour' (Oderberg, 2013). Students learn that public criticism is

not only accepted but encouraged to ensure societal conformity and ‘proper’ moral actions throughout all citizens.

7.4 S1 & S2: Distinct geographies of experience

The previous section detailed two similar yet distinct public primary schools in the Nanjing urban area through three lenses: the school and classroom environment, a typical student day, and experiences of moral education. This section uses methods of comparative case study to identify causal patterns of commonalities and divergence (Krehl & Weck, 2020) between two comparable temporal and spatial regions. This analysis found that while the two host sites of S1 and S2 have many similarities on the surface, a deeper analysis revealed different levels of socio-economic and class constructions at play. Figure 7.3 compares S1 and S2 through several factors.

	School 1 (S1)	School 2 (S2)
Location	Central, urban	Central, urban
Relative size of school population	Small-medium	Large
Relative size of school campus	Medium-large (large courtyards, room for children to run, adjoining track and field)	Small-medium (seven-story building, one central courtyard, small patches of greenery)
Grades taught	1-6	2-5
Average student population	~1700	~1900
Average number of teachers	~40	~100
Average classroom teacher: student ratio	1:40-45	1:45-50

Figure 7.3 Comparative chart of two host schools

Both schools are well-known, reputable public primary schools in Nanjing. Both schools are the recipients of numerous top awards and are increasingly competitive to gain admission. Their central location, positive reputation, and diverse extracurricular opportunities have driven up local house prices as parents vie for the limited number of admission spots available for their children. Given the increasing demand for primary school admission, some local schools, including S1, have implemented a lottery system to allocate some admissions for potential students. In 2020, S2 did not participate in the lottery admissions scheme.

In terms of curriculum, both schools place a concerted focus on math and Chinese language, which are typically the most heavily weighted on the *zhongkao* and *gaokao* tests. However, S1 places a stronger focus on English and science by requiring more of these classes within the weekly schedule; it is worth noting that English and science are also subjects of importance on the standardised *zhongkao* and *gaokao* examinations. S1 has a more diverse curriculum, while S2 has a more rigid, repetitive schedule. Both schools have integrated information classes, 'social realisation' and Party activities into their schedules, in line with recent government requirements that aim to improve compulsory education with an 'all-round moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic grounding and a hard-working spirit' (Xinhua, 2019e; 2019f).

Chinese primary schools are mostly funded by the government under the Basic Education Law (1986), but also benefit from private donations and grants from regional awards. Students pay some fees which mostly cover the costs of school uniforms, lunch, and certain extracurricular activities. Despite recent investment and development, Chinese public primary schools remain unequal (Kipnis & Li, 2010). The differences in school atmosphere, opportunities, and curriculum indicate there is a strong hierarchy throughout Chinese public primary schools. S1's designation as a 'key school,' facial recognition devices, robotics classroom, and more spacious facilities in the urban environment suggest that the school has significantly more financial resources than S2.

Furthermore, both schools have a strong focus on ideology. Visually, both schools had large outdoor televisions that displayed Party propaganda and classroom walls were adorned with numerous Party posters and slogans. The omnipresence of Party paraphernalia within the classroom, textbooks, and student uniforms further highlights the strong presence of the Party within primary schools. Pedagogically, both schools focused on the individual development of children's mental and physical well-being as a starting point for moral education through the strong repetition of love, patriotism, and societal responsibility.

Based on the observations, initial descriptions of the intertwined nature of politics and moral education are supported. There is no overt political education in moral education classes because moral education *is* political. Its efforts to build a happy, strong, and harmonious society are a core goal of the CCP. Moral education throughout the education system slowly pulls back the curtain behind which sits the entirety of the political and social structure of China: a system of governance that *forms* and *is formed by* ideological conformity.

7.5 Chinese primary school moral education: Main emergent themes

Four emergent themes were discovered based on the three-month ethnographic period from September to December 2019. While the majority of observations occurred in the moral education classroom, I had the privilege of accompanying teachers to moral education conferences throughout the city. This gave me unique insight into the experiences of moral education outside of the two host schools, as well as the perspective of moral education teachers. In addition, I spent time observing other classes, such as Chinese (*yuwen*) and English, and extracurricular activities at both host schools. My time was limited at each school due to teacher schedules and availability, and unfortunately the longitudinal ethnographic study was cut short due to the global pandemic.

The four emergent themes are drawn from field notes, observations, and informal discussions with students, teachers, and school administrators. They pertain to my ethnographic observations of the *lived* experiences of moral education. The four themes are: 1) strength through comparison; 2) censorship of opinions, not topics; 3) explicit instructions and efficient development; 4) patriotism becomes an emotion. The following section describes each theme in detail through first-person perspective, vignettes, and post-fieldwork analysis. The final discussion section notes how all four themes are highly interconnected and interdependent.

7.5.1. Strength through comparison

7.5.1.1 A lesson on oracle bones and hegemonic historicism

One afternoon I visited a fifth-grade moral education class at S1. I was joined by five other visiting observers who were teachers from a newly constructed primary school in the outskirts of Nanjing. They had come to S1 to observe various classes due to S1's top reputation throughout Nanjing, which they hoped to use to improve their own school. We sat in the back of the fifth-grade classroom, sitting very close together due to the limited space.

The fifth-grade students were well-behaved, quiet, and respectful. They had impeccable behaviour and followed the teacher's instructions quietly and efficiently; I doubted that their behaviour during this class was solely due to the observers, but rather reflected both their maturity and the strict classroom rules that offer little leniency for older students. Students were not surprised to see observers in their class, suggesting S1 often has visitors. However, students were surprised to see me, a

foreigner, and my presence elicited many hushed whispers and furtive glances from curious students.

The teacher began the class with a PowerPoint presentation, showing two images: on the left, an example of Chinese calligraphy, and on the right, a page of writing in English. The teacher asked students which type of writing was most beautiful. Without hesitation, roughly 90% of students pointed to Chinese calligraphy; the remaining students mostly remained demur and silent. The teacher nodded in approval and praised the students' correct choice.

The teacher went on to discuss the beauty and long history of Chinese characters, including examples of their transformations through time. The teacher wrote a quote from Xi Jinping on the chalkboard, in which Xi celebrated the upcoming 120-year anniversary of the discovery of ancient oracle bone inscriptions (Bi, 2019), which were the first ancient iterations of modern Chinese characters. The students read the quote from Xi out loud in unison and discussed its importance. I noted that while most students spoke about the importance of oracle bones and Chinese characters, the teacher also encouraged students to discuss the importance of Xi's comments and a few times referred the class back to Xi's speech.

Throughout this activity, I wondered why the teacher felt compelled to compare English and Chinese writing to show the beauty of Chinese characters. If the teacher did not ask students to compare between Chinese and English writing, would students still be able to recognise the beauty of Chinese characters and learn their history? Why did the teacher compare Chinese characters to English writing, and not to other languages that use a different writing system such as Arabic, Hindi, or Russian? Furthermore, I wondered why the teacher chose a quote from Xi to describe the importance of Chinese characters, rather than an archaeologist, linguist, or scholar with expert knowledge. A comparable situation might have been British history textbooks quoting Boris Johnson about Stonehenge.

The teacher's lesson plan illustrated how Xi's image is being developed through official narratives. In addition to his role as the paramount political leader, he is also often portrayed as a jovial and friendly 'uncle' (*xidada*) in official propaganda and media (SCMP, 2016). His image throughout the school on propaganda posters and in textbooks further normalises his presence and reinforces his shifting identity as not just a political leader but a cultural paragon.

The cult of personality developed around Xi's image also suggests that knowledge must be 'verified' through Xi. For example, would the discovery of the

oracle bones have been equally important if Xi had not commented publicly on its discovery? The construction of an overarching cult of personality within standardised education supports the centralisation of ideological power in the hands of the Party. Xi's omnipresence within moral education reaffirms the moral superiority of the Party and co-opts historical, anthropological, or scientific events (such as the oracle bone discovery) as practices in ideological hegemony.

This lesson also demonstrated a form of cultural hegemony through the State's efforts to monopolise the culture and history of China for ruling Party benefit. Specifically, it reflects the idea of 'historicism' (Iggers, 2005) in re-framing historical phenomena in order to contextualise ruling Party ideology and the cult of personality around Xi. Oracle bones were most widely used during the Shang Dynasty (1600-1049 BC), predating the current PRC by millennia. However, the teacher's lesson plan recontextualises their re-discovery as one that depicts the comparative strength of the State. This example of discursive historicism argues that the State, through Xi's approval, is the owner of idiosyncratic cultural developments. Furthermore, the teacher's example of comparing English and Chinese writing shows how culture or history is re-framed in a comparative manner for the goal of showing China's inherent cultural superiority.

7.5.1.2 Fear as a motivator for patriotism

Another day, I observed a moral education event at S1. Hosted in the school lecture hall, this event was a competition for local moral education teachers. S1 was hosting the first stage of the competition at the city district level, where local schools send their best moral education teachers to compete. The winning teachers progress through various different rounds at the local, regional, and provincial level to earn accolades for themselves and their schools. Teacher training is an integral part of the National Plan as well as the 13th Five-Year Plan, which aims to create 'outstanding talents that compete to teach' whilst showcasing their talents (MOE, 2020b).

For the first event at S1, teachers each taught a thirty-minute class on the auditorium stage. A different S1 moral education class was brought in at the start of each period and sat in the desks arranged on the auditorium stage. There was a projector and a chalkboard available for the teacher's use. There were approximately twenty people in the audience, including three judges, teachers from S1, and roughly ten moral education teachers participating in the competition. Many teachers used different pedagogical techniques, from interactive class discussion to encouraging

students to engage with the audience. Despite the diversity of pedagogy, many teachers focused their lesson plan on a comparative perspective between Western countries and China to demonstrate China's strength.

The focus of one teacher's class was to show the nation's strength through its generosity, such as offering aid to developing nations. Roughly twenty minutes into the class, the teacher directed students' attention to two images on their PowerPoint slide. The first image was a well-known photo taken in 2015 of a two-year old Syrian refugee child who was found face-down and drowned on the shores of Turkey. The moment the image appeared on the screen; the auditorium fell silent; students' eyes were glued to the screen. The teacher acknowledged this photo as an example of tragedies throughout the world and the dangers children can face in different parts of the globe. They also noted that China was helping the Syrian refugee crisis, such as through food donation (Xinhua, 2018b).

The next image displayed was one of a happy, smiling Chinese student wearing a school uniform and red scarf, holding hands with smiling military personnel. The teacher explained that this photo was an example of China's domestic aid in response to natural disasters, such as flooding in southwestern China where the photo was taken. The teacher played a short propaganda video clip that showed China's military response to natural disasters. The video highlighted grateful citizens being rescued by smiling and well-equipped soldiers. The teacher asked students how they felt after seeing the photos and video. Many students remained silent, and a few hesitantly acknowledged that China is good because it wants to help others. The teacher concluded the lesson to say, 'Our motherland is very developed, so we do not have to be like Syrians.'

When viewing this lesson plan, I struggled to hide the shocked look on my face. However, I noticed that most teachers did not register emotion on their faces. The use of an international tragedy to demonstrate the nation's strength and development illustrated to me that there were few restrictions on *what* or *how* teachers can teach their lessons, so long as it achieves the goal of highlighting CCP strength. In addition, the lesson plan reflected emotional work through the use of fear. The comparison between disasters in China and abroad reinforced the collective 'we' as a safe place, as seen by the happy Chinese student with a Chinese soldier, and the outsider 'they' as dangerous. This lesson plan didactically served as a warning and a threat to children, reminding them that the CCP will bring them safety and security.

7.5.2 Censorship of opinions, not topics

Throughout much of Western media, there are often broad claims of Chinese censorship. Indeed, the Chinese government censors, restricts access, and punishes those who access certain media or literature. Yet in the classroom, I did not observe a black-and-white censorship of controversial topics, but rather a censorship of *opinions*. Teachers often expressly discussed controversial or internationally sensitive topics, such as the PRC's relationship with Taiwan, protests in Hong Kong, or China's South China Sea claims. However, lessons were structured to imbue prescriptive knowledge to students pertaining to these sensitive topics, narrowing the scope of intellectual discussion to 'approved' responses. This method is also related to the third theme in this chapter, explicit instructions and efficient development, through the active process of developing students' geopolitical and geospatial awareness in line with Party doctrine.

One day I was invited to a local school on the outskirts of central Nanjing, very close to the banks of the Yangtze River. This school was hosting a training session for moral education teachers and invited teachers from other schools to attend and offer advice for trainee teachers. The school had a much more relaxed feel to it than S1 or S2, likely due to its distance from the hectic urban centre and older architecture.

Similar to the event at S1, this school had arranged desks on the school auditorium stage. A young female teacher took the stage in front of a fifth-grade class. She began the class with a video montage showcasing Chinese cities, culture, nature, geography, and landscapes. After the video played, she asked students how China makes them feel. She then guided students to repeat after her to say, 'it makes me think that my motherland is vast and great' (*wozuguoohenliaokuo*). She wrote the sentence on the chalkboard and asked students to write it in their notebooks.

Her next slide showed a distorted map of China. China was in the centre of the image, and the surrounding continents were downsized to make space for enlarged China; I recall noting that Eurasia and Australia looked roughly one third of the size they appear on Western maps. Using this map, the teacher compared China's size to many other countries to indicate its prominence and importance. China's topography was discussed, and students were asked to write a short poem describing the size of China's landscape.

Textbooks separated Chinese territory into three categories: physical territory (*lingtu*), maritime space (*haiyu*), and territorial air space (*lingkong*). The teacher then directed students' attention to Taiwan, which she described as 'our motherland's

largest island' (*zuguozuidadediaoyu*). She explained that Taiwan returned to 'its motherland' after the 20th century Sino-Japanese War, centuries after it was stolen by Dutch and Japanese colonists. The teacher reaffirmed that Taiwan has always been China's territory, despite attempts to rip Taiwan away from the 'bosom' (*huaibao*) of the Chinese motherland. The teacher read a recent quote from Xi describing how China's territory, including land, maritime, or space territories, can never be separated like it had been in China's recent past. She then repeated the last phrase of Xi's quote, *China can never be less*, and asked students to join in chanting:

Teacher: *China can never be less! (Zhongguoyidianbunengshao!)*

Students (in unison): *China can never be less!*

Teacher and students (in unison): *China can never be less! China can never be less!*

China can never be less!

Despite the highly political subject, I observed most students only moderately engaged in this lesson. Students enjoyed the group chanting at the end, seemingly because it gave them a fun opportunity to energetically participate in class. The teacher ended the class with a short video montage from the PRC's 70th anniversary propaganda photo that showed high-action clips of CCP military highlights. Students said they learned China was prosperous (*fanrong*), in a strong and powerful position (*qiangshi*), and has vast greatness (*liaokuo*). The teacher also noted that China's rights cannot be violated (*bukeqinfan*) by the international community. The teacher ended the class after the high-energy video montage, leaving students smiling, happy, and engaged, likely with an overall positive impression.

The phrase 'China can never be less' is a political rallying-cry first popularised in response to the *Philippines vs. China* 2013 international arbitration case, which eventually ruled against the CCP's claims in the South China Sea (Ward, 2015). Since then, it has become common propaganda phrasing, often used by Xi and the CCP mouthpiece newspaper, *The People's Daily*, to justify aggressive geopolitical action. The integration of this phrasing into moral education class reiterates the political scope of moral education, as well as how the curriculum can bolster geopolitical objectives. Furthermore, this teacher's lesson framed a sensitive subject, Taiwan independence, as a history lesson wrapped in patriotic propaganda. This example illustrates that within moral education classes, topics themselves are not censored, but rather presented and reinforced in a way that supports Party legitimacy.

The importance of acknowledging censored topics within moral education was a prominent theme in an academic conference I attended at my host university. This conference invited a well-known scholar, Mr. W, to the Faculty of Education Sciences. The audience was filled with roughly sixty graduate and doctoral students, most of whom were students at the host university. Mr. W spoke at length about the importance of *lideshuren*, the overarching philosophy of education introduced by Xi Jinping. I realised that in academic settings, *lideshuren* dominates research. However, I had never heard the phrase being mentioned or referenced in practical settings such as classroom environments. This reaffirmed my initial observation that *lideshuren* is a philosophy and not a practical application.

Mr. W began his discussion by stating that *lideshuren* is at the centre of people's hearts, and classroom content is also *lideshuren*. His talk focused on five main points: 1) textbooks should explicitly write that patriotism is essential for students; 2) while China has been consistent in its thinking and its goals, the methods of achieving these goals have adapted; 3) the main task of the teacher is to foster morality; 4) students should identify with patriotism and morality; and 5) the cultivation of all abilities and skills is for moral education.

Mr. W also noted that teachers should not be vague or avoid controversial topics, as this will foster doubt and suspicion amongst students. He gave the example of Hong Kong, noting that students will likely ask teachers about the political situation or questions such as, 'Why should Hong Kong return [to the PRC]?' Mr. W noted the appropriate response would be to acknowledge the 'messy' situation in Hong Kong and use this as an important starting point to show students why it is necessary to honestly discuss Hong Kong. He said teachers should not only use maps and laws to educate students that Hong Kong is and has always been a part of the PRC, but that the ongoing protests show immorality throughout Hong Kong society and a failure of moral education. Therefore, teachers must also use emotions and 'their heart' to educate students on the realities in Hong Kong.

Mr. W's comments provided significant insight into the intellectual justifications for moral education reform. The narrative framing of Hong Kong protests as a failure of moral education served not only to shift blame for the protests from the government onto the people, but also to galvanise ideological education reforms to ensure the safety and security of the people. Mr. W used this discourse to justify the importance of revising moral education material, particularly imbuing feeling, patriotism, and emotions into the curriculum.

In another Sino-Western comparison, Mr. W noted that American civics textbooks do not have emotion. He offered examples of American societal uprisings, such as the Black Lives Matter or feminist movements, and said they are a result of textbooks that do not have strong connections to emotion, thus weakening citizens' patriotism. His statements also suggested that protests or non-governmental reform are viewed as a failure of governance, rather than progress, highlighting an important distinction between Sino-Western political culture.

7.5.3 Explicit instructions and efficient development

A third major theme I observed was derived from the dual focus on explicitly instructing students how to think, act, and integrate into Chinese society, as well as using youth to realise societal goals. These two practices were interdependent, in that the curriculum appeared to be designed for a future state in which societal goals were realised. Official curricula imbued a sense of responsibility and duty upon students to achieve these goals and actively contribute to societal development.

During one third grade moral education class at S1, the teacher began the class with a clip of China's technological advances. This clip was from a 2018 propaganda documentary titled, 'Amazing China' (*lihaile, wodeguo*). The documentary's aim was to display China's significant technological and scientific achievements under the leadership of Xi Jinping (CCTV, 2018). The short clip played for the third-grade class featured large satellites, the international space station, rocket ships, fighter jets, and submarines set behind uplifting and patriotic music. Many of the students seemed familiar with the documentary. Following this, the teacher asked students to describe the 'motherland's' power and advanced technology, to which many students, mostly males, discussed military machinery and aviation. I noted that students responded to the teacher's questions in the possessive, such as, 'Our motherland has fast fighter jets.' The uplifting and energetic film clip energised students and many were perched on the edge of their seats during the film.

The teacher asked students how they felt after watching the video. Most students responded that it made them feel proud to be Chinese. One student said, 'It made me realise how fast my motherland's economy has developed,' using phrasing verbatim to the textbook. The teacher acknowledged that China has experienced rapid change in its recent history, and Nanjing has also changed significantly over the past 70 years since the establishment of the PRC. This led to an open discussion between students to discuss how Nanjing has changed. A student stood up and described how

her mother could not afford to ride a horse when they were younger, so they had to walk from neighbouring Anhui Province to Nanjing, a roughly 170km journey. The teacher gave an example of her family burying cabbage in the summer so they would have vegetables to eat in the winter. The teacher then said, 'but now that our motherland's economy is developed, we can buy fresh produce any time of the year.'

The teacher then transitioned to acknowledge the significant progress of China, noting that Xi Jinping has said the 'China Dream is the dream of 1.4 billion people' (*zhongguomengshishisiyirendemeng*). The teacher said students should be patriotic and proud to continue realising the Chinese Dream. Then, students were asked to write down who they thought were 'patriots' in their own lives. Many students chose to write about military personnel, doctors, teachers, and police. The teacher asked students to discuss what 'patriotic actions' (*aiguoxingwei*) are, to which some students responded, 'protecting the motherland' (*baohuzuguo*) and 'study hard' (*nolixuexi*). The teacher ended class by encouraging them to identify 'the patriots in their daily lives' and embody their patriotic actions.

This lesson illustrates how the use of societal propaganda campaigns, such as the China Dream narrative, are employed for the primary school audience. China's rapid transformation is discursively portrayed to be a success of the Party, and students are encouraged to describe examples of poverty to show current prosperity. However, this historical recontextualisation distorted the realities of present-day China, glossing over the fact that millions of Chinese people continue to live in poverty; for example, a recent study found that nearly 600 million Chinese live with an average monthly income of \$140 USD (£100) (Li, 2020). The examples of poverty were said in a light-hearted, almost eager tone which betrayed the realities of poverty that their parents and grandparents likely experienced, and the poverty that permeates throughout present-day China. The socio-economic advantages of S1 likely meant that most students viewed poverty as a thing of the past, despite its continued presence in other socio-economic circles. This narrative teaches students to be thankful to the State, described as the 'motherland', for everything it has provided, from fresh food to trains. This narrative apotheosis elevates the State as a paternalistic, god-like figure and frames gratitude as a moral value.

7.5.4 Patriotism becomes an emotion

7.5.4.1 Discursive colonisation through cultural hegemony

The most prominent theme observed in moral education class was clear and explicit patriotic education. From textbook activities to classroom design, moral education class is designed to imbue strong patriotic, nationalist, and paternalistic values into youth ideology. Most often, patriotism was framed through emotive discourse such as feelings of love or pride, as well as framing patriotism as an emotion itself.

In mid-November, I visited a fifth-grade moral education class at S1. Classroom walls had numerous propaganda posters, such as *Core Socialist Values*, *Primary School Students' Rules*, *My Chinese Dream*, and *Be Prepared: Have a Successful Career for the CCP*. The classroom slogan, painted in red lettering above the chalkboard, read: 'I have a pair of skilful hands' (*woyouyishuanglingqiaodeshou*). Students sat wrapped in many layers of clothing due to the unseasonable cold weather that time of year; it was around 4° Celsius that day.

Despite modern technology such as projectors, wide-screen televisions, and face-recognition technology, S1 did not have central heating. In fact, this is common not only in Nanjing public schools, but in public housing, as heating is usually only provided in provinces located north of the Yangtze River. I observed the energy of students was quite low during that class, and many of them hid hot water bottles under their jackets to stay warm.

The teacher, Ms. Q, began the lesson discussing the upcoming Chinese New Year holiday. Using a PowerPoint presentation, she showed illustrations of Chinese New Year celebrations in China and abroad, such as in London, Toronto, and San Francisco Chinatowns. The teacher asked students how these images made them feel, particularly seeing Chinese characters in different parts of the world. Most students responded saying they felt proud and had a strong feeling of nostalgia for China. Some students expressed interest visiting the international Chinatowns, not to explore diverse cultures but rather to connect with their homeland whilst abroad and visit 'international' China, as one student said.

This lesson had similar themes to another third-grade moral education class I visited at S1 which aimed to teach traditional architecture. The teacher, Ms. X, asked students where they had travelled. Despite their young age, many students responded that they had travelled to many cities, regions, and provinces in China and internationally, which reinforced my initial assumption of S1 being located in a highly affluent area. Ms. X showed students different photos of Chinese architectural features, such as *paifang*, a traditional gateway structure, in Mainland China and in

international Chinatowns. The teacher asked students if they thought traditional architecture should be torn down, to which students emphatically responded, 'No!' Then, the teacher and students recited a phrase in unison: 'I am proud to be a Chinese person!' (*wojiaoaowoshizhongguoren!*)

Both lessons used emotion and cultural hegemony to construct 'discursive colonisation,' a term widely attributed to postfeminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Mohanty, 1988). Mohanty's writings on Western discursive narratives of 'Third World Women' illustrate a narrative of indirect colonialism by framing Western (White) women as saviours of marginalised women (Ibid.). Applying Mohanty's ideas to the moral education lesson, discursive colonisation is used to create emotional bonds between Chinese students and the international Chinese diaspora. By capitalising on a shared cultural tradition, the Chinese New Year, Ms. Q framed international Chinatowns and Chinese heritage as an extension of the State. This discursive framing echoes political dialogue calling for the reunification of overseas ethnic Chinese and Chinese nationals. The strong connection to Chinese diaspora is a key facet of Xi's 'China Dream' narrative, which aims to support the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,' not limited to Chinese land but to Chinese people globally (Kuhn, 2018).

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) described culture as, 'the way in which the People understand and express their world and how the People understand themselves in their relation to their world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 86). Moral education lessons, such as Ms. Q's lesson, frame culture as a commodity moderated by the State. Chinese identity is constructed through shared cultural traditions but transcends spatial borders; the existence of a Chinatown in London shows the global power of the State. Students are taught to equate emotions such as pride and patriotism with events of cultural heritage in China and abroad. This process shapes the way students see the physical world, including borders and nations, and culture in a way that supports ruling Party ideology.

7.5.4.2 A patriotic pedagogy for geography class

On another November day, I observed a fifth-grade moral education class at S1 taught by Ms. T. She began the class with a short clip of people waving Chinese flags from the 2019 film 'My People, My Country' (*wohewozuguo*). This highly patriotic film was released to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the PRC on September 30th, 2019; domestically, it grossed over USD \$425 million in sales (Chen *et*

al., 2019). The students registered excitement when the short clip started, and almost all knew the film and had seen it in theatres. When the actors began to sing, all the students, at the encouragement of the teacher, began singing in unison. One line from the song was, 'I can never be separated from my motherland' (*wohewodezuguooyikeybunengfenge*).

After the video, Ms. T asked students what they knew about their 'motherland.' Students raised their hands and gave examples such as that the PRC was established in 1949, there are fifty-six ethnic minorities, and the nation is very large and grand. I noted that some of the language used by students was reflected verbatim in textbooks, such as the phrase, 'My motherland is vast and great' (*wozuguohenliaokuo*).

Ms. T then discussed three different levels of perspectives that students should cultivate: a universal outlook (*yuzhouguan*); a world outlook (*shijieguan*); and a life outlook (*renshengguan*). On a large image of a map projected onto the chalkboard, Ms. T asked students to place geographic labels in certain regions, such as flatlands, mountain ranges, and rivers. The South China Sea and Taiwan were both prominently labelled as part of China on the map. After describing the diverse geography and topography of China, Ms. T asked an open question to students, 'What is the most profound impression students had regarding the topics covered in class today?' Ms. T then asked students if they had an 'upsurge of emotion' (*xinchaopengpai*) when viewing the photos; students emphatically agreed. Ms. T then asked students to raise their hand and answer the question, 'Why do you feel a sense of pride?' She asked a few students to give their answers, most of which noted China's long history and beautiful country. Afterwards, students were asked to answer this question in their textbooks.

Ms. T's fifth-grade class had a strong focus on patriotism through emotional work. Linguistic narratives which support ruling Party legitimacy, such as reframing 'China' as 'motherland' teach students the right ways to 'think, feel, and behave' (Gee, 1996). The emotionally charged language used to describe benign topics, such as geography, re-frames the lesson as one that reinforces a sense of love and pride for the nation and one that blurs the distinction between patriotism and paternalism.

These examples suggest that moral education lessons adopt one topic, such as science or history, and explores that topic through patriotic discourse. In that sense, moral education does not have its own curriculum, but aims to frame all aspects of the Chinese education system through the narrative framing of patriotism. For example, Ms. T's fifth-grade class was essentially a class on geography, but instead of

students learning geographic features and topography, its goal became to teach students how to express patriotism through land, air, and maritime spaces.

In this sense, the curriculum aimed to foster strong pride in 'cultural colonialism' in that it expressed the viewpoint that Chinese emigrants and widespread culture was not a form of globalisation and cross-cultural communication, but rather represented the CCP's growing influence and clout throughout the world. These two lessons gave significant insight into the focus of patriotic education as a domestic and global geopolitical strategy.

7.5.4.3 Emotion, facts, and the shame of being different

The strong focus on national pride took many forms. In late October, I observed a teaching conference at S1. The school had invited numerous moral education teachers from local schools to view a classroom lesson. In a large conference room, roughly fifty teachers sat arranged in tables around desks. The teacher leading the session was an experienced moral education teacher, Ms. C. After a short introduction, Ms. C called in the sixth-grade students who had been waiting in the hallway. Students were all wearing their school uniforms, red Party scarf, and CCP pin. They hastily marched in and stood behind their assigned desks. The class leader (*banzhang*) yelled, 'Begin class! (*Shangke!*); all the students bowed and said in unison, 'Hello, teacher!' (*laoshihao*). Ms. C bowed to the class and said, 'Hello, students. Begin class!'

The ritualistic performance of beginning the class mirrored military-style drills. While I had observed this behaviour before in other classes, it was usually at the discretion of the teacher. However, it was clear that these students had rehearsed for this class and had dressed in their best school clothing for the occasion. These observations suggested that this training session was an important event. It also further solidified S1's high status and reputation throughout the local area and city, in that the large audience and synchronised, highly orchestrated class illustrated S1 used the best pedagogical practices and was a model school.

Ms. C began the class with an eight-minute-long video of teachers, students, and important school administrators visiting S1 and wishing the nation a happy 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. This video was composed with the help of the Nanjing Television station and was very professional. The principal of S1 made a short cameo, offering happy greetings for the nation's 70th anniversary and the excellent work at S1. I noted that this was the only time I saw (either via video or in person) the principal of S1.

After the video, Ms. C asked students about their different identities. She said that when they are at school, they are students. When they take the metro, they are metro riders. However, regardless of where they are or what they are doing, they are always Chinese citizens. Ms. C's statement suggested Chinese identity is the most important identity students possess, as well as gently reminding students that they are always representing and under the jurisdiction of Chinese society regardless of their physical location. The teacher directed students' attention to a PowerPoint presentation, which showed six images of different people, all with different ethnicities. Two appeared to be of Asian descent, one was Central Asian wearing an Islamic *kufi* hat, one person was Caucasian, and the other two were light skinned. Ms. C asked students, 'Which ones are Chinese citizens?' to which most students responded that the two people of Asian descent were likely Chinese, and roughly 25% of the class thought the Central Asian person might also be a Chinese citizen. Ms. C then told students that all of the people in the six images were Chinese citizens, eliciting loud interjections of surprise from students. Ms. C used this platform to begin her discussion on Chinese nationality and citizenship laws.

She asked students, 'how do you get different nationalities?' and, 'how do you emigrate?' Students eagerly raised their hands, and if called on by Ms. C, would stand up beside their desk and give their answer, then sit back down only when Ms. C advised them. One student used the phrase 'Chinese person' (*zhongguoren*) in their answer, to which Ms. C quickly corrected them, noting they should have said 'Chinese citizen' (*zhongguogongmin*).

Ms. C gave statistical information that showed there are very few people who emigrate to China. Her statistics noted that in total, roughly 12000 foreign citizens have received Chinese national identity, whilst within the last ten years that number has been less than 300. Given that China does not recognise dual citizenship, it is exceptionally rare for citizens to fully emigrate to China. Ms. C emphatically told students that these very low numbers should make Chinese citizens very proud that their country is so selective.

Much of Ms. C's class explained practical information, such as national student ID card, passports, and immigration laws. Her pedagogical methods were relatively interactive, with students actively responding to questions, completing some tasks in small group discussions, and writing their answers in the 'Morality and Rule of Law' textbook. However, it was clear that this class was not a discussion of students' perceptions of these laws, but explicit education on the facts surrounding citizenship,

immigration, and societal laws. The questions that Ms. C posed to students had explicit answers and were not meant for discussion. Despite the abundance of student-teacher interaction, there was no discussion of the merit of the rules and laws. Laws were explained in a happy, unproblematic manner, and were presented as a method to promote collective societal identity. However, the strong focus on the prescriptive, collective identity also created a situation in which some students were alienated.

Roughly halfway into the fifty-minute class, Ms. C discussed the national ID card (*shenfenzheng*). She explained citizen ID numbers and the layout of the card, including information that indicates where citizens were born, their gender, and in which city/district they are registered. Almost all citizens are issued a national identity card at birth, but it is only required by law to carry it with you at all times for citizens aged 18 and over. As these sixth-grade students were roughly 11-12 years old, they were all aware of their card but did not have it with them. Ms. C asked if any students did not have a national identity card; only one student raised their hand. Realising they were the only one that had raised their hand, the student quickly lowered their hand in embarrassment.

However, Ms. C quickly noticed the raised hand and asked this student, who appeared to be a girl of age nine or ten, to stand. Ms. C proceeded to ask the other students why they thought she did not have a national identity card. Some students suggested her parents hadn't yet picked it up from the local government office, while others thought she had maybe moved recently and had lost it. While students were casually analysing why she did not have an identity card, this student stood sheepishly, her eyes looking down at her desk; it was clear she was uncomfortable. Some students asked her if she was Chinese, to which she nodded, and others asked if she was born in Nanjing, to which she did not answer. Eventually, Ms. C happily told the student to sit down and moved on with the lesson plan.

Ms. C's lesson illustrated two themes central to CCP moral ideology. On one hand, there is a strong focus on collectivism and homogeneity. Social features that group citizens together are praised, such as the national identity card. Laws are not seen as neutral facts, but rather positive aspects, even rewards, of society. However, those that do not conform to prescriptive homogeneity, such as the student without the national identity card, are outliers. Non-conformity can cause uncomfortable situations within society, much like the student experienced in class.

I was unclear why the student was singled out, and why the teacher did not pause the lesson when she was noticeably uncomfortable. While the majority of S1

students are highly affluent, the school participates in a lottery scheme to allow some students outside the school zone, mostly students whose parents are migrant workers or impoverished, to receive admission. This student may have been granted admission from the lottery scheme, or she may have had other reasons for displaying emotions of shame during class. Shame may have been portrayed as a warning to other students (Mahamud, 2016) that individualism, not following the law, or diverging from the *status quo* is 'bad' and 'wrong.' I would assume that the student who was singled out did not learn much about national ID cards from this lesson, but likely left with a strong sense of shame for being *different*, which may contribute to her overall identity formation.

Ms. C's lesson also indicated that Chinese identity is dictated not by heritage, socio-economic status, or culture, but by the government. This concept contradicts other aspects of CCP ideological education, such as Xi's reforms of national rejuvenation which aim to mobilise the greater international Chinese diaspora. This contradiction suggests that Chinese identity, controlled by the government, is a reward for following and maintaining prescriptive ideology; those that support ruling Party ideology are welcomed into the greater Chinese family, whilst those that do not conform are outcast.

Following Ms. C's sixth-grade class, a new teacher, Ms. D, took the stage. After a short introduction, Ms. D called in a fifth-grade class to take their seats in front of the teacher audience. I observed these students also wore their uniforms, red Party scarf, and CCP pin, however they were slightly less rigid. At times they fidgeted in their seats, and a few laughed and nudged their friends when they saw the large audience. A few students also recognised me and hastily waved whilst hurrying to their seats. Ms. D began the class in the same ritualistic style as Ms. C, having students stand and shout in unison, 'Begin class!' (*Shangke!*). The focus of the fifth-grade class was Chinese geography, with the corresponding textbook section titled, 'Our sacred motherland' (*womenshenshengdeguotu*).

Ms. D began describing a map of China displayed on the projector. The map included a noticeable section of China's maritime claims, and the Nine-Dash Line territory was in large print. Taiwan was labelled as 'Taiwan Province' (*taiwansheng*). Ms. D asked students to identify China's land-based neighbours (*lushanglin'guo*) and maritime neighbours (*haishanglin'guo*). Ms. D discussed the four municipalities directly under central government administration, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing. The next slide was a map of Taiwan, which highlighted the different cities

and regions of the self-governed island. Ms. D briefly discussed the history of Taiwan, noting that in 1945 Taiwan was ‘recovered’ and returned to ‘the motherland’s bosom’ (*zuguohuaibao*).

Next, Ms. D showed a cartoon image of ethnic minority clothing and asked students to guess the ethnic minority and location. The first image was of Uighur clothing, which students quickly identified. After that activity, Ms. D played short clips of songs and asked students to listen and guess which location they are from, listening to the dialect and musical instruments unique to China’s diverse minority culture. Many of the students quickly guessed correctly.

I noted the song played for Hong Kong was in Mandarin, not Cantonese. Pausing after the Hong Kong song, Ms. D asked students, ‘Why must we [China] take back Hong Kong?’ (*weishenmeyidingyaobatashouhuilai*). This led to a discussion of British colonialism, with some students noting that the UK still wanted Hong Kong and was instigating the ongoing protests. Ms. D nodded and turned to the next slide, which was a rousing clip from the patriotic movie ‘My People, My Country’ (*wohewozuguo*) (Chen *et al.*, 2019). The movie scene was a re-enactment of the flag-raising ceremony after the official handover in 1997, showing tears in the eyes of Hong Kong citizens, military, and national leaders as Hong Kong was ‘returned to the motherland’s bosom.’ After the movie clip, Ms. D showed a quote from Xi Jinping detailing his phrase, ‘China can never be less!’ (*Zhongguoyidianbunengshao!*). Ms. D asked students to repeat the quote in unison. After a few rounds of rousing chanting of ‘China can never be less!’, Ms. D ended the class and excused the students, who left class energetic, smiling, and chatting happily with their friends.

After the second class, the teachers and visiting guests remained in the classroom for a discussion. Ms. T, the school Secretary, took the stage along with Ms. C and Ms. D, and another moral education teacher at S1. Ms. T began by thanking teachers for their time and hard work. They then engaged in a discussion about pedagogical methods, lesson content, and observations from visiting teachers.

Teachers noted that student actions (*xingwei*), cognition (*renzhi*) and emotion (*qinggan*) are all synonymous elements in moral education. They noted that morality spreads to all aspects of life, and moral action, moral cognition, and moral emotions are integral components of developing strong values. The teachers also focused on the introduction of factual elements into the curriculum, and how new pedagogy focuses on relating these facts to students’ everyday lives to make the class more engaging and age appropriate. The teachers also discussed how students view them and the

importance of upholding their own moral standards to be good teachers. They all acknowledged the need to continue personal improvement and understanding around Chinese ideology.

The two class periods, as well as the teacher discussion, provided interesting viewpoints to assess the 'ideal' moral education pedagogy. First, there was a strong focus on normalising socio-politics into the curriculum, such as the description of Taiwan as a Chinese province, or Hong Kong as Mandarin-speaking. However, teachers did not shy away from these controversial issues, but rather presented them as factual, such as the 'fact' that Taiwan is part of China, the 'fact' that everyone has a national identity card, or the 'fact' that patriotic moral virtue is the most important quality for Chinese youth and citizens. Second, it was clear that moral education pedagogy is an ideal, not a goal. The cyclical rounds of criticism, judgment, and performance of teachers, either through the classes, competitions, or discussions, suggest the ideal moral education has not yet been obtained, and it is the teacher's duty to develop and evolve to benefit her students.

7.6 The sociology of moral education: Overall observations

The ethnographic observation illuminated the multifaceted practices and lived experiences of moral education. First and foremost, I observed the primary school campus and moral education classroom to be a happy place. Both students and teachers appeared relatively light-hearted, carefree, happy, and energetic. Despite teachers' demanding schedules of class preparation, teaching, and training, every teacher I encountered loved their job and found teaching incredibly rewarding. I also noted that most teachers were female, particularly in the subjects of English, arts, maths and science. In contrast, the few male teachers I met were usually either moral education, Chinese, or physical education teachers. Furthermore, most teachers I met were between the ages of 25-40, with a few exceptions. This may indicate a cultural shift in the younger generation valuing education more as a profession, or an indication of high burn-out rates amongst teachers.

Secondly, my observations illustrated the diverse contexts of moral education within youth education. On one hand, moral education is not solely taught during the namesake class, but rather has been extended to incorporate a practice, lifestyle, and embodiment of goals for students and teachers. Moral education has monopolised school space, time, and media. In education theory, it has become the sole criteria for judgement and the primary focus on education. Yet on the other hand, moral

education is not highly valued. According to students, moral education is a fun, relaxing class that does not impart the same academic rigor of maths, science, English, or Chinese. Similar testimony from teachers acknowledged that moral education is often not prioritised, such as using moral education class time to study for other subjects. Questionnaires indicated that the majority of teachers and students highly enjoyed moral education (see Chapter 6), in practice it does not retain the same high status as indicated by official documents.

There was a significant disconnect between the classes presented during teacher competitions and the average, everyday moral education class at S1 or S2. During the competitions, which I observed at S1 and other local primary schools, teachers drew on diverse propaganda, such as movies, songs, and visual imagery, to show China's strength and power. Teachers also encouraged chanting, singing, and energetic displays of emotion; these actions would likely not be allowed in an average class. The content of teaching competitions' curriculum was dominated by patriotic and nationalist narratives. Whilst these themes were always present in average classes, they were not the dominant focus.

This section separates the overall observations of the ethnographic experience at both host sites into four main categories: radical pedagogy; multiple student identities; ritual language & practice, and symbolism and structural control. Following those sections, I discuss my attempts at reciprocal engagement at the host schools and my reflections on the ethnographic process.

7.6.1 Radical pedagogy: Moral education teacher competitions

The discrepancy between the competition and average classes illustrated the performative aspect of moral education, particularly from a pedagogical standpoint. It is clear that the competitions are for the benefit of the teachers, rather than students, as evidenced by teacher rewards and few requirements for students. These teacher competitions can be seen as *performative* acts of moral education pedagogy, in that teachers are not only required to adhere to the national curriculum but also exceed beyond the status quo and continue to develop moral pedagogy to its fullest potential.

Teachers develop moral education pedagogy in novel ways that normalise CCP geopolitical doctrine and propaganda. Lessons to be emulated, such as the training sessions at S1, translate once esoteric language into youth rallying-cries, such as the fervent chanting of, '*China can never be smaller!*' a phrase originally designed to justify CCP maritime claims. From these examples, it can be deduced that successful moral

education is one that encapsulates the ruling Party doctrine into 'bite-sized' or easily digestible phrases, actions, or lessons for young children. Lesson content is equally important to pedagogy in moral education, a reflection of reforms in the National Plan which aimed to improve teaching style and education quality through 'heuristic and interactive' pedagogy (Xinhua, 2019c).

Furthermore, the moral education competitions also served as social class stratification. The process of grading, evaluation, and ranking are the first steps in the social stratification of labour as it conditions students to the general framework of socio-economic constructs (Apple, 2013). This process is also prominent within teacher training competitions, which judges teacher performance on a subjective scale based on prescriptive knowledge, student engagement, and embodiment of cultural values. Teachers that do not perform well in competitions receive stigma and 'lose face' (*diulian*) for their school, whilst teachers that excel in competitions can receive raises, special privileges, and bring honour to the school. The subjective evaluation of moral education teachers through teaching competitions aims to condition teachers as to how best to adhere to prescriptive and Party-approved pedagogy. The social constructs of 'success' and 'achievement' are developed by ruling Party ideology (Ibid.: 46), while the tangible rewards and repercussions for teachers based on their performance further establish ideological hegemony for moral education teachers.

Teacher competitions also mirror the strong focus on *practice-oriented* virtue. As MacIntyre (2007) describes, a practice is, 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.' Scholars have theorised the differences between the internal value of ethics and their utilitarian purposes (Ibid.; Lambek, 2013), for example the internal value of painting for pure enjoyment as opposed to its external function as a profession for the purpose of making money. Within contemporary Chinese society, it is clear that moral values must not only be internalised but must actively be demonstrated and practiced in order for moral education teachers, and teachers in general, to continue and advance in their profession.

While the majority of teachers are required to reiterate the dominant forms of knowledge to youth, a contingent of teachers (those that are deemed 'excellent' by the

CCP) are allowed develop, adapt, and revolutionise existing ideology into engaging pedagogy. This is demonstrated through the frequent teacher training competitions and compulsory events led by instructors who at times develop overzealous pedagogical methods, such as children chanting or drawing on the devastating photo of a drowned refugee child to illustrate China's strength. However, it is unclear the actual effect of these conferences on average teacher pedagogy, as most (although not all) events I observed were either sparsely attended or packed with an unengaged audience if attendance was mandatory. Therefore, it can be concluded that a significant purpose of the teacher competitions and events is not for the benefit of the students, but rather as a practice in the maintenance and monitoring of ideological hegemony.

Gramsci's description of teachers as 'cultural workers' (Gramsci, 1971; Mayo, 2014) echoes the requirement of Chinese moral education teachers to act as performative laborers of ideology, who are required to both iterate prescriptive ideology within strict cultural confines whilst continuously transforming values education for their own utilitarian benefit (such as recognition or career advancement). In contradiction to Bourdieu's (1997; Lambek, 2013) forms of cultural capital which values scarcity as the basis of value, the mandated performance of moral education teachers, whether in the classroom, at training events, or at competitions, relies upon abundance, overzealousness, and passion. Therefore, the performance aspect of moral education pedagogy contributes to its development as a form of 'radical pedagogy.'

Gramsci (1970) thought of schools as methods of knowledge production that support consensus through manipulation rather than coercion. His concept of 'radical pedagogy' viewed the politics and cultural manifestations within classrooms as rooted in narratives of common sense, acts of spontaneous consent, and the shift of cultural spheres (Giroux, 2002). The pedagogical practices of Chinese moral education primary school teachers embody *active* forms of radical pedagogy through methods such as group chanting, teacher training competitions, and standardised study of political doctrine. In addition, *passive* forms of radical pedagogy emerge from the utilitarian role of moral education development which forces teachers to engage in ideological reform to not only succeed in their careers but to maintain their social status. Students and parents are also subject to passive forms of radical pedagogy through required acts of consent, such as wearing the Young Pioneers scarf and CCP pin outside of mandated times. Active and passive radical pedagogy within moral education is purposeful and aim to foster ideological and societal change (Ibid.: 6).

7.6.2 A Chinese student & their multiple identities

The school culture and curriculum at both host schools facilitated the construction of multiple student identities. While much of the existing literature focuses on the layered construction of gender, sexual, or ethnic identity construction (Tormey, 2006), I observed a more nuanced focus of the construction of a 'national' identity. Durkheim (1972) argued the essential role of schools in imprinting a shared set of values, usually through a societal moral code, upon youth. He also noted the necessity of a 'degree of homogeneity' (Ibid.) which constructs and perpetuates normative forms of identity and control amongst young people.

The construction of a collective 'us' identity is a central role of education (Tormey, 2006: 315), particularly in authoritarian states such as China. Whilst waves of globalisation have created new methods of identity for the state (Green, 1997), the CCP have used standardised curriculum to encourage the dichotic relationship between 'us' and 'them.' 'Us' is constructed through the strong focus on group activities, homogeneous appearance, and specific collective phrasing within the curriculum and school media. 'Them' is broadly categorised as any and all people, culture, and nations outside of China that wish to infringe upon their sovereign rights.

The standardised curriculum follows a social constructionist epistemology where knowledge and identity are culturally, socially, and politically constructed. Student identities are formed based on prescriptive knowledge as well as through the interactive uses of such knowledge in structured social settings in the classroom, the playground, and in the school in general. Educational sociologists have argued that the construction of a national identity through sociocultural learning must constitute an active process by the learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Hausfather, 1996; Tormey, 2006). Students actively engage in school activities, embody cultural norms, and recite prescriptive knowledge on tests to achieve 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2011) that is defined based on one's adherence to prescriptive knowledge and political doctrine. As Chinese schools constitute highly social environments, students actively construct their national identity through social interaction that is designed to support the needs of the state.

While the establishment of a national, homogenous identity was a prominent observation, schools and the moral education classroom also perpetuated gender, race, and social status norms. For example, I observed that most extracurricular classes, which are chosen by students and parents, reinforced dominant gender roles. Classes

such as robotics, military training, and soccer were highly subscribed by male students, whilst ballet class was all-female. In addition, the choral class had thirty choral students, only one of which was male. These observations concur with Chen & Rao's (2010) observations of a 'hidden curriculum' of gender norms and expectations for Chinese children. China's traditional patriarchal culture strongly encourages specific forms of masculinity and femininity; for example, the common phrase *zhongnanqingnv* reinforces the strong gender bias towards males which has been exacerbated due to the One-Child Policy (Wang, 2005). These traditional roles have been normalised into the standardised curriculum to reinforce Party legitimacy.

Specific gender roles are integral to China's continued societal and economic development. Ramifications from the One-Child Policy have exacerbated gender inequality (Ebenstein, 2010). Other studies have found that the policy contributed to increased crime and dissatisfaction with the government (Huang, 2017a). Despite the government's attempts to loosen the strict policy and allow families to have two children in 2013 and most recently three children beginning 2021 (Xinhua, 2021), gender inequalities continue to be constructed through standardised education. For example, in 2020 the MOE (2020c) announced plans to place an increased focus on the 'cultivation of masculinity' within compulsory education. These plans stem from the National Plan, which encouraged an improvement in students' overall physical and aesthetic being (Ibid.). My observation in S1 gendered classes which had more males in physical and sports activities indicates that the CCP is successfully continuing to impart gendered social norms within the standardised school curriculum.

Bourdieu's agency structure theory offers a pertinent explanation for the construction of multiple student identities within primary schools. Bourdieu (1993) argued that the processes of *agency*, individuals' capacity to make free decisions, and *structure*, influencing factors that limit or hinder free choice, are social constructs. Within the classroom, as well as within greater society, behaviour is socially constrained (Ibid.). Students' agency is limited by the pervasive and overarching structure of normative forms of control within the classroom and school; examples of this include the memorisation of patriotic songs or phrases, the ritualisation of appearance, and the gendered peer subcultures. Teachers are also subject to the normative forms of identity construction and actively contribute to their development through teaching the standardised curriculum and supporting gendered activities and roles.

Furthermore, the ranking of schools through the designation of S1 as a 'key school' contributes to the construction of social class and hierarchy within public primary schools. Students at S1 received better resources, had more qualified teachers, and overall experienced more areas of social privilege based on their school status than S2, which was not a 'key school.' In turn, students have more opportunities to turn their privilege and status as a 'key school' student into cultural capital, as key school students have significantly more status and educational privilege such as high-test scores and guaranteed university admission (Lin, 1999). The multiple student identities developed within the classroom and school settings, such as the national identity and gendered norms, are key links to the reproduction of class power and the legitimation of ruling Party ideology.

7.6.3 Ritual language, time & practice

Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1995) identifies ritual and performance as key aspects to the construction of society. While Durkheim viewed ritual as a social function, cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983) argued it constitutes a social process (Turner *et al.*, 2017; Quantz, 1999: 494). In the Chinese public primary school setting, the ritual performance of greeting the teacher with military precision, wearing ritualistic Party clothing, and the patriotic weekly flag ceremony are all key aspects of social construction within school campuses. These also constitute proactive tools in establishing ruling Party legitimacy, building upon the idealised society depicted within the curriculum.

McKinnon (2018) discusses the convergence between Durkheim's focus on the ritual and Ricoeur's (1984) argument of the centrality of narrative. Despite seeming incongruous, McKinnon found that more often than not, these two theories overlap when discussing the relationship between ritual and narrative. He poses the pertinent question that if the narrative was extracted from the ritual, would the ritual lose its purpose? Vice versa, can the ritual be extracted from the narrative and retain its meaning? Given my observations during the ethnographic fieldwork period, I agree with McKinnon that narrative and ritual are inextricable. Furthermore, I argue that the ritual construction of narrative not only legitimises the past but is essential in constructing the narrative of 'idealised' reality (Bruner, 1991).

Let us once again return to the description of the weekly flag-raising ceremony held at S1 and S2 on Monday mornings. Ritual is integral to this ceremony, demonstrated by the crisp military-style uniforms, group singing, and ritualistic

procession. This ritual is centred around the cultural product of the Chinese national flag, which is elevated to a renewed importance during this weekly ritual and subjected to praise and adoration. Students are given, or rather, *allowed* autonomy to embody roles symbolic of military or Party officials, thereby normalising their integration into the Party.

Would the weekly flag raising ceremony maintain its purpose if the means of constructing a narrative were removed, for example if students did not have to wear their uniforms, line up in the courtyard, or chant and sing in unison? I argue it would not, as these ritualistic actions not only embody the narrative of the ceremony but condition students in the required actions and ideology of 'good' and 'moral' future citizens. Alternatively, if students were simply made to line up in the courtyard, hang a nondescript flag on a flagpole, and 'go through the motions' of the ceremony, would it lose its meaning? Again, I argue the meaning would be lost. It is the combination of both ritual and narrative, and the enactment of the beliefs, that make performance so powerful.

Durkheim's theories of the ritual of performance are especially applicable to the Chinese education setting. Durkheim argued that rituals were actions, and the performance of these actions is closely linked to ideology and thought (Cossu, 2010). The weekly flag raising ceremony is clearly a performance, with costumes, memorised lines, and a clear script. Yet does the performance end at the same time as the flag raising ceremony? Or are students continuously engaged in a performance during their time at school? At what point does school cease to be a re-enactment of a performance, and the start of autonomous learning, action, and thought?

Scholars of *functionalist structuralism*, notably in the tradition of T. Parsons, link the concepts of ritual, performance, societal control, and homogeneity. Parsons (1949; *Ibid.*: 35) suggests that rituals produce societal conformity through the semiotic connections of action and thought. While counter arguments against *functionalist structuralism* focus more on the efficacy of the rituals, I ask, how can one evaluate the efficacy of rituals? It is likely that students do not emerge from the flag raising ceremony with renewed enthusiasm and patriotism, particularly because they are young students who do not yet grasp such abstract concepts as Party propaganda and doctrine. However, it remains effective in integrating political ideology into the daily lives of youth as well as transitioning the school campus from a place of learning to a place of political socialisation. The flag raising ceremony, with its pomp and propaganda, is normalised as a common ritual, which blurs the line between

performance and autonomy. It sets the stage, so to speak, for rituals not only of action, but rituals of thought in line with Party doctrine within the daily lives of Chinese youth.

7.6.4 Symbolism and structural control

Lastly, the fourth observation pertained to the use of symbols to construct and maintain control, a theory which is attributed to Basil Bernstein. Bernstein (1973; 2000; 2003) argues that the structure and symbolism of knowledge is an integral part of societal and cultural control. Bernstein's theories of pedagogic devices focused on what is communicated within education and the structures of communication (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999). Bernstein (1971 *as cited in* Sadovnik, 1991: 51) described the process of pedagogy as the following:

'Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realisation of the knowledge on the part of the taught.' (Bernstein, 1971)

Bernstein's theories are helpful in understanding how knowledge is produced and the underlying power structures within education. Bernstein argues that pedagogic devices, consisting of instructional and regulative discourses, allow for symbolic control; this in turn shifts societal discourse (Ibid.: 269). On the micro level of the classroom (Morais, 2002), most moral education instruction was focused on patriotic and nationalism sentiment, geopolitical doctrine, and scientific and technological advancement. Regulatory discourse, which focuses on *how* knowledge is transmitted (Ibid.: 560), included pedagogical devices such as the omnipresence of political propaganda media within the classroom, the encouragement of homogeneity of thought, appearance, and action, and the strong evocation of emotion.

Language, time, and symbols are elements of 'cultural products' (Bruner, 1991: 3). Within the moral education classroom, I observed symbols such as propaganda posters, the CCP pin, and the red Youth Pioneers scarf, among others. The lack of other posters, allowing for the dominance of Party propaganda, was also symbolic. Symbols are not limited to visual elements, but also include sounds, gestures, practices, rituals, societal norms, and more. The repetitive ritual of greeting the teacher at the start of each class, students raising their hands to salute the flag during the weekly ceremony, and the social norms of patriarchal hierarchy within socio-cultural

norms all constitute pedagogic forms of what I am labelling 'symbolic structuralism' within the moral education classroom.

From an ontological perspective, structuralism 'de-centres the subject' and moulds individuals to fit pre-existing structures of society, culture, and politics (Hoyle, 1985). Within the Chinese moral education classroom, students are sculpted to fit prescriptive structures of language (Sadovnik, 1991), feeling and emotion (Williams, 1958; 1961), and relationships (Gibson, 1984). My ethnographic observations supported the theory that symbolic structuralism is present within primary school moral education classrooms. Students were guided into existing roles and their identities were passively constructed through actions, symbols, and constructed language. To borrow phrasing from E.P. Thompson (Hoyle, 1985: 183), students were *structured* by social relations and norms, *learned* by standardised curriculum, and *conformed* by ideological homogeneity.

Culture is defined in this research as both a lived experience and as a commodity (Apple, 2013: 79). Cultural products not only facilitate social interaction and student cognitive development (Gauvain, 2001), but also reinforce the established *status quo* of social hierarchies, political legitimacy, and socio-cultural norms. Rogoff (1998) describes youth cognitive development as a 'collaborative process' which builds upon students embodying different roles that construct their surrounding communities. Children embrace and participate in narrative rituals, often with the use of cultural tools, which allows them to acquire representational knowledge (Gauvain, 2001: 127).

Bernstein's theories are also helpful to illuminate the 'visible' and 'invisible' pedagogical practices within the classroom and school environment. Bernstein's (1973; Tang, 2008: 196) pedagogic theory of 'classification' and framing' gives structure to how the process of symbolic control is regulated by pedagogic discourse. I observed the Chinese moral education classroom to exhibit strong framing, which consisted of teachers (or transmitters, as Bernstein describes) exerting explicit control over the distribution and dynamic of knowledge, including the selection, sequence and pace of classroom content. Furthermore, there was a clear hierarchical relationship in pedagogical practices as well as the constructed moral education knowledge. The strong framing constituted 'visible pedagogy' (Tang, 2008: 197) that made clear the underlying power dynamics and control within the standardised curriculum and daily learning experiences of youth, as well as the control over teachers' ideology and pedagogical styles.

From this analysis, we can see that there is a clear regulatory 'code' (Bernstein, 1996) within the curriculum, moral education class, and ideological education in general. The curriculum and pedagogical practices constitute 'message systems' (Sadovnik, 1991: 51) that establish, regulate, and normalise socio-cultural norms and ideo-political doctrine. The structure of the classroom supports these messages through explicit media, propaganda, and sounds, as well as homogenous identity, appearance, and thought. Student and teacher modes of communication, whether through language, self-expression, or intellectual exploration, are highly regulated (Bernstein, 1977).

However, I diverge from Bernstein's analysis that regulated code is a most common trait of the lower-class. Regulated speech is constructed through the standardised curriculum, which builds community throughout the vast nation. Students and teachers at S1, a 'key school' with significant resources, exhibit regulated code and speech similar to students and teachers at S2, which is not a key school and has fewer resources. In contrast to Bernstein's ideas of regulatory code as an impediment to intellectual development, we see the current Chinese government using regulated code amongst students to *generate* academic success, *transmit* high cultural proficiency, and *promote* future economic development. These insights allow us to analyse the purpose of standardised, regulated, and homogenous ideology not only in terms of micro- or meso-level educational attainment, but on macro-level social, political, and economic reform.

7.6.5 Forms of 'othering'

In order to give back to the host institutions, I offered to be a resource for their English department. I hoped to build trust and gain more interaction with students and teachers in a different context as well as fostering *guanxi* through reciprocal relationships. S1 was especially interested in my offer, while S2 preferred that my presence on campus was not brought to the attention of the whole school.

One day, I was facilitating a Q&A session for fifth-grade English students at S1 to give students an opportunity to practice colloquial English. Most students asked generic questions, such as what England is like and what I like about Nanjing. As the conversation evolved, a shy student raised her hand and asked me in broken English what I thought about Hong Kong. I hesitated and looked towards the teacher. The teacher quickly asked the student to repeat herself as she assumed she did not ask her question correctly. The second time, the student asked my thoughts about 'the

situation' in Hong Kong. The English teacher and I shot each other a furtive glance, but the teacher motioned for me to answer. I answered as best as I could whilst avoiding controversy; the student and teacher seemed satisfied with my answer and the conversation turned to other topics.

The student's question illustrated to me that children are well aware of the sensitive nature of geopolitics, such as the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Despite the curriculum's best efforts to de-stigmatise geopolitical conflict and portray the situation through 'facts,' students remained perceptive to the controversy. However, what I understood from this student's question was that she did not see the situation in Hong Kong as sensitive, but rather that she knew my opinion as an *outsider* would be controversial. This example reflects Said's idea of 'othering' people and phenomena (Joffe, 2011).

Akin to Said's explanations of the 'West' categorising the 'East' for political benefit and justifying colonial involvement through Western intellectual and cultural superiority (Said, 2003), prescriptive knowledge focuses on how *others* view an issue and not the issue itself. During my time in China, the Hong Kong protests were on the news almost daily, and therefore it was likely that young children would be aware of the situation. Much of the dialogue in textbooks (see Chapter 5) and lesson plans (see section 7.5) frames sensitive issues through a metaphorical conflict between China and a foreign enemy, such as the Japanese occupation of Taiwan or British colonisation of Hong Kong. Contested international issues are conveyed through emotion, such as the use of sentimental phrases that evoke sadness like, 'Hong Kong was returned to the bosom of the motherland' or ones that arouse aggression or resentment like students and teachers chanting, 'China can never be less!'

While America and Europe were the most common discursive targets of 'othering' in classes, the lesson plan that depicted the young drowned Syrian refugee to illustrate China's strength (see section 7.5.1) showed that 'othering' is not limited to Euro-centric countries. Nations are treated homogenously with the overarching goal of depicting Chinese strength or eliciting emotional responses that evoke patriotic and nationalist sentiments. The discursive practice of 'othering' in official narratives, including curricula and media, strengthens China's domestic soft power by depicting the State as responsible and powerful (Pan *et al.*, 2020).

7.7 Power as daily ritual

My observations at both schools provided significant insight into *how* society is constructed. The organisation of knowledge was just as integral to the construction of the ideal society as its methods of transmission. In this case, schools are a microcosm of the greater 'ideal' society; not representative of how society *is*, but representative of how society *should be*. The school used methods such as ideological-political education, symbolism, and ritualist practices to develop specific narrative constructions of time, space, and society.

Bourdieu (1993) asserts that power relations are embedded in everyday life. Although aspects of the standardised curriculum encourage homogeneity and ideological coherence, the structure of the school produces and reinforces societal stratification. Apple (2013: 205) argues that a systemic approach to national curriculum, testing, and knowledge reproduction does not constitute reform, but rather perpetuates class, race, and gender differences. Gramsci (1973) sees hegemony as a form of cultural leadership exercised by the dominant ruling classes. Student daily rituals of donning their CCP pin and red Youth Party scarf, walking past Party propaganda media on their way to their classrooms, and engaging in prescriptive knowledge which reinforces CCP hegemonic control. The life of the average Chinese primary school student is inextricably linked to hierarchical state-society power relations.

7.7.1 Does a lack of evaluation equate to a lack of efficacy?

My observations lacked an assessment of representational knowledge. I observed the significant and repetitive reinforcement of ideological values, morals, and political doctrine on a daily basis within the classroom and school. Yet there was very little analysis or evaluation of the retainment of information from students, or the efficacy of moral education. Students were required to participate in mandatory ritual performances, including through actions, appearance, and thought. Tests also amounted to participation, as examinations largely rewarded the repetition of prescriptive knowledge.

Moral education permeated throughout the curriculum, classroom, school, and the greater community. Despite the few class hours and relative devaluation of moral education class in practice, moral education was present in almost every aspect of the student's daily lives. History, Chinese, science, English, and even physical education all constituted forms of moral education due to the targeted integration of ideological education into the curriculum. As I discuss in the following section, moral

education plays an important role in the State's efforts to maintain cultural hegemony outside of the classroom.

7.8 Conclusion

To conclude, this section focused on the *lived* experiences of moral education reform through ethnographic observation and auto-ethnographic discussion. First, this section compared and contrasted the two host schools through three frames of reference: the school and classroom atmosphere, a typical student day, and experiences of moral education. Following this comparison, I discussed the development of four major themes observed throughout the ethnographic research period: 1) strength through comparison; 2) censorship of opinions, not topics; 3) explicit instructions and efficient development; 4) patriotism becomes an emotion. An analysis of the ethnographic data collection was discussed through the lenses of radical pedagogy, student identity, ritual language and practice, and symbolism and structural control.

Chapter 8

Discussion: Drawing conclusions from multiple optics

好好学习天天向上

Hǎo hào xuéxí tiāntiān xiàngshàng

Good good study, day day up; Study hard and improve every day (a quote
attributed to Mao Zedong)

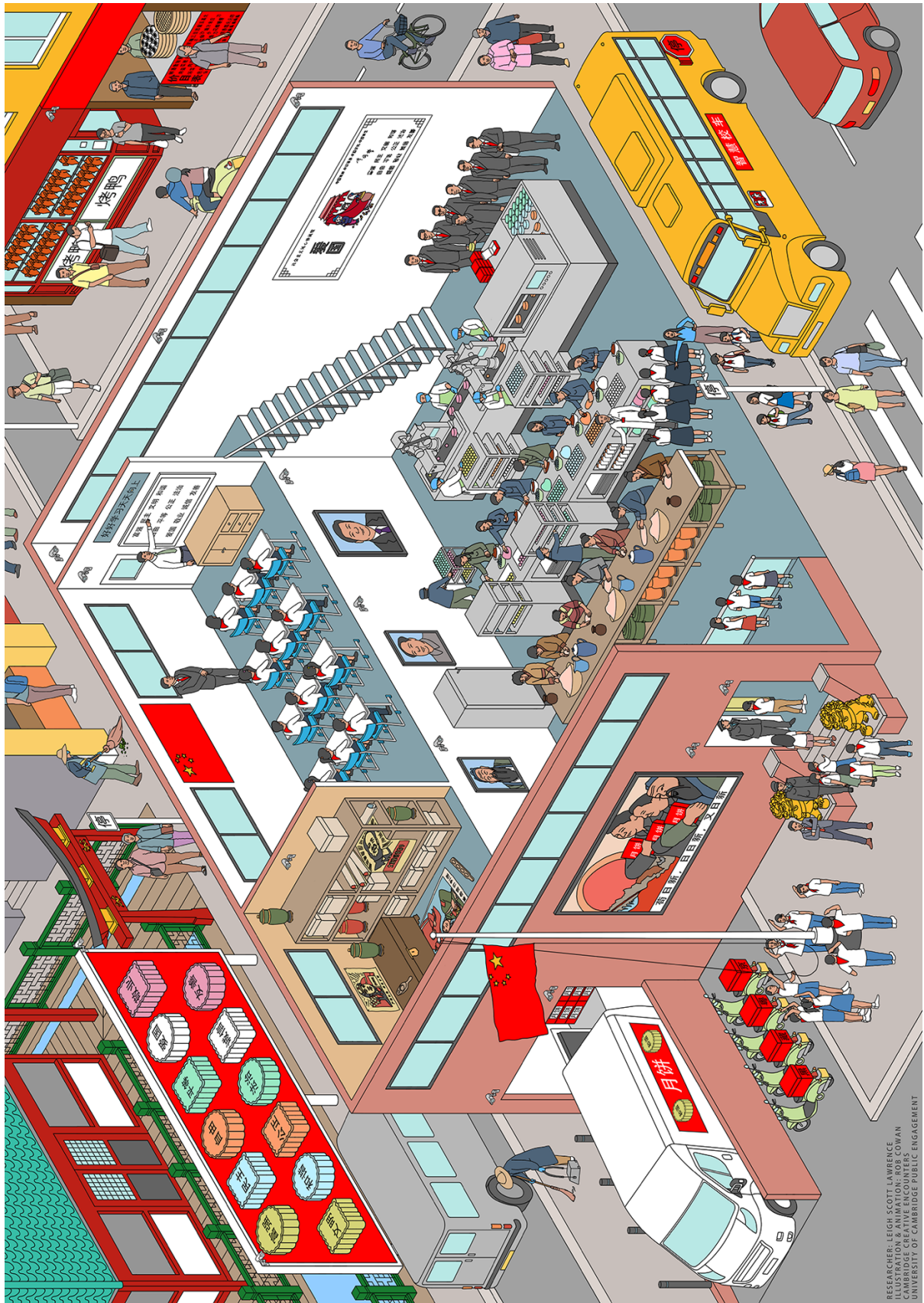


Figure 8.1 'Mooncakes & Morality' image created by Rob Cowan for the University of Cambridge Creative Encounters project; with thanks to the University Public Engagement and Wellcome Trust ISSF

8.0 Introduction

This section brings together the three thematic chapters to discuss the main questions guiding this project: how do the *prescribed* and *lived* definitions, descriptions, and realisations of the National Plan differ? How is the *impact* of ideological reforms measured, and how does that compare to the *outcome*? What is the influence on Xi Jinping's ideological campaign on the National Plan and moral education within the classroom? From a policy perspective, what is the societal and political rationale behind moral education reform?

This chapter critically analyses the main themes of this thesis in relation to a wider theoretical positioning within educational and sociological understanding. This section focuses on salient topics discussed throughout this thesis and their contributions to our current understandings of Chinese moral education, ideology, and cultural hegemony. The implications of this study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

8.1 Positioning this project

This thesis empirically examined the manifestations of moral education reform in Chinese public primary schools. It offers a critical analysis of ongoing phenomena through three levels of analyses: macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. First, Chapters 3 & 4 assessed background and theoretical foundations for this project, including policy analysis and Sino-Western moral education theory. The macro-level perspective, detailed in Chapter 5, developed ideas surrounding prescriptive moral education on a national scale through a critical discourse analysis of standardised textbooks. Chapter 6 presented a meso-level analysis which evaluated the 'grey area' between prescriptive and lived moral education reforms through student and teacher perspectives. Lastly, Chapter 7 contributed an ethnographic view of the moral education classroom and public primary school setting in two distinct host sites in Nanjing.

This project is positioned within the disciplines of education, sociology, and politics. It leans heavily upon the scholarship of two renowned yet philosophically distinct scholars, Durkheim and Gramsci. Upon first glance, a French sociologist (Durkheim) and an Italian Marxist philosopher (Gramsci) appear to have little in common except for both being alive in early 20th century Europe. However, Durkheim is often discussed in the chain of sociological development beginning with Marx and Weber, and one cannot speak of Gramsci without discussing the influence of Marxism

on the young Italian philosopher. Durkheim and Gramsci both developed ideas of collective consciousness (Giddens, 1982; Filippini, 2016), the social production of the individual (Joseph, 2003), and the cultural and political role of schools (Giroux, 2002; Durkheim, 2012).

Despite writing in Euro-centric circles over a century ago, the writings of Durkheim and Gramsci are applicable to contemporary Chinese moral education. In Chapter 4, I discussed how Durkheim's concepts of secular morality are compatible with present-day Chinese morality. Durkheim viewed the function of education as the process by which a society perpetuates itself; moral behaviour is that which conforms to established rules (Peterson, 1974). We can extend this idea to Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, in that morality does not just govern and regulate society, but also the cultural and historical apparatuses of society. The macro-level perspectives on secular morality shed light on the use of language and emotions to construct 'social facts' that create and ameliorate moral crises (Mitchell, 1931; Durkheim, 1973).

The ethnographic research is centred around my experiences as a researcher at two public primary schools in the host city of Nanjing. During this research project, the education and geopolitical landscape of these schools changed. While in Nanjing in 2019, I observed that Xi Jinping Thought was ubiquitous but abstract ideology in public schools. The main tenets of the new ideology and its integration into the curriculum were constantly evolving. Now, Xi Jinping Thought has transitioned from an ideology to a practice within the standard curriculum. A 2021 mandate by the MOE will require Xi Jinping Thought to be added into the curriculum of all classes, from primary to vocational schools, and throughout various subjects (MOE, 2021).

The recent changes to governmental control over education have extended beyond the classroom. In July 2021, the Chinese government cracked down on private afterschool tutoring in an effort to develop a 'fairer society' (Feng & Zhang, 2021), effectively stifling a booming international industry worth more than \$140 billion USD (Chau *et al.*, 2021). One month later, the government introduced education policies that encroached upon the private lives of children by limiting the number of hours minors can play videogames each week; one stipulation entirely bans youth from playing videogames Monday through Thursday (NPPA, 2021).

These new mandates, which I theorise will likely only fuel underground tutoring and illegal activities, reflect the elevation of ideological hegemony under Xi. My research clearly showed that ideology is being raised to a new importance that had not been seen in 21st century China. Moral education, despite its history of

implementation as ideo-political education, has taken a new identity as the reification of cultural hegemony under Xi's 'New Era.' It presents a specific and highly curated social guide as to what the ideal society should be.

This section positions ongoing ideological education reforms in the Chinese primary school classroom within the interlapping spheres of ideology, education, and power. I argue that ideological education acts within an ideological policy feedback loop in the cause-effect relationship of societal changes and the reinvention of the state. This is due to its use as a *passive* tool of political legitimisation as well as an *active* process of cultural and ideological renegotiation. I propose that the goal of ideological education, specifically moral education in the compulsory education system, is mobilisation to establish ruling Party cultural hegemony in China's 21st century 'New Era.'

8.2 Prescribed vs. lived: Three levels of analysis

A guiding question of this research project was how the *prescribed* and *lived* definitions, descriptions, and realisations of the National Plan differ. This analysis found there was a significant disconnect between the goals listed in the National Plan and the everyday realities in an average moral education classroom.

This study utilised three levels of analyses to draw a comprehensive picture of the current state of moral education amidst ideological and socio-political reform. The macro-level analysis found that prescriptive knowledge is focused on fostering patriotic and nationalist identities among youth. Textbooks reinforce existing social stratification while shifting spatial-temporal definitions of Chinese history and culture, the state, and the world. The micro-level analysis established areas of discrepancy between the *idealised* state depicted in propaganda and curricula and the *lived* realities of students and teachers, suggesting ideological reforms are incompatible to current society. Lastly, the meso-level analysis assessed the 'grey area' between prescriptive official curricula and the real-life interpretations of ideological reforms. It identified a strong undercurrent of dissent amid outward displays of prescriptive ideology, suggesting that ideological education reforms may have a superficial effect on the current population.

Macro-level forces that influence ideological education include society, economy, politics, and culture (Ye, 2014: 49). This research identified different power distributions among micro-level actors such as school administrators, teachers, and students. For example, moral education teachers bear the brunt of societal change as

they are tasked with developing a new generation and realising ideological reforms despite insufficient funding and institutional support. Power is centralised in the hands of the government who control curricula, pedagogy, and avenues for social mobility. Power is also expressed through the State's control of cultural expression, time and historicity, and ideology. For those in a higher social status, such as S1, moral education is an expression of power, as the school and students were rewarded for their prescriptive knowledge and model behaviour. Yet for those in a lower social status, such as S2, moral education is a reminder of their daily struggle to self-improve and emulate those with a higher socio-ideological status.

Curriculum development is a socio-political process (Goodlad, 1991: 9), and we should view standardised curriculum as a political text (Pinar *et al.*, 2005). Curriculum is authorised representation (da Silva, 1999) of the society, culture, and state. Given the systematic encroachment of political manifestos into the standardised Chinese curriculum, the distinction between curriculum and political texts continues to blur. The standardised moral education curriculum represents a selection of the culture of a society, containing specific material of the way of life, knowledge, attitudes, and values that are regarded as so important that transmission to next generation cannot be left to chance (Lawson, 1975).

Bernstein (1973) identified the groundwork of the systematic understanding how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits, and evaluates education knowledge. The selected public knowledge reflects the distribution of power and principles of social control. China's top-down moral education reforms reflect the rigidity of ideology within Xi's China, as well as the CCP's necessity to control and redirect national discourse to maintain its legitimacy. The selection and classification of standardised curricula is not decided by Chinese society but rather directed by the State.

While the curriculum may not reflect the true realities of society, it depicts the *idealised* version of society, culture, and history of the State. Ideological reforms represent a pragmatic and lexical expression of the dynamic power interactions between education, societal development, and government legitimacy. Transformations in the Chinese 'ideoscape' (Appadurai, 1990) are distributed and transmitted through lower-level actors, such as provincial or local governments, schools, and teachers. In this stage, the State loses some control over the process, resulting in pedagogy, curricula, and student intellectual development differing across the nation based on existing social structures and hierarchies. For example,

despite using the same textbook, students at S1 and S2 had starkly different experiences of moral education. At S1 moral education was held in high esteem and was sometimes treated as a special event, such as when students had class on a stage with a guest teacher and ‘performed’ moral education class. At S2, the idea of moral education was omnipresent, from large patriotic slogans on classroom walls to the shiny Party branch office on campus. However, the actual practice of moral education was at times rushed and not prioritised when compared to other subjects.

While the lived realities differed at each school, both classrooms failed to adequately evaluate the success and impact of moral education on their students. Neither school had a systematic implementation or evaluation method for ideological reforms, and the National Plan did not provide guidelines for implementation. Interview data revealed a general disapproval for the integration of moral education on the standardised examinations, essentially solidifying its place as a ‘less important’ discipline in China’s rigorous test-based education system. This raises the question as to the *reason* behind the lack of implementation methods, which equates to an inability to evaluate or measure their success or failure. As I outline in the following section, the National Plan follows a pattern of an ‘ideological policy feedback loop’ that aligns with methods of curriculum development.

8.3 A brief background of CCP policy experimentation

Policy experimentation is a process used by many governments throughout the world in explicit or implicit ways (Wang & Yang, 2021). It is characterised by cycles of decentralised policies tested in spatially or temporally limited trials to assess small-scale implementation and evaluation (North, 1990). Policy experimentation allows governments to test, innovate, and learn from new initiatives or problem-solving policies without influencing a nation’s larger policy framework (Heilmann, 2008a). However, experimentations are often limited in scope, and results are not always replicable on a large scale.

A hallmark of CCP governance is policy experimentation. It has been used throughout numerous stages in China’s development by the CCP since 1949 to trial social, economic, and political policies (Heilmann & Perry, 2001; *Ibid.*). Mao-era experimental policies attempted to create unified and homogenous policies under the idea of the ‘permanent revolution’ doctrine, but they largely had a negative effect on the nation’s social and economic development (Teets & Hasmath, 2020). Deng-era reforms that stemmed from policy experimentation were more successful. Deng’s

model of experimentation allowed more regional variation than Mao-era experimentation, and policy experimentation developed into a key component of his pragmatic and market-driven reforms (Florini *et al.*, 2012; *Ibid.*). Deng described his blueprint of ‘place-specific’ experimentation to develop a unified national agenda by saying: ‘new methods can be launched from smaller parts, from one locality, from one occupation, before gradually expanding them’ (Deng, 1994: 150 *as translated by Lim*, 2017).

Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao developed a new model of ‘principle-guided policy experimentation,’ a term coined by Wang (2019) to describe a top-down process of officials first agreeing on the principle of reforms and subsequently initiating experimentation, in contrast to previous bottom-up models that developed principles *after* experimentation (Heilmann, 2018). Policy experimentation under post-Deng leadership of Jiang Zemin/Zhu Rongji and Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao played a significant role in poverty alleviation, improving the health and welfare of citizens, and facilitating China’s integration into the global economy (Zeng, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Howell & Duckett, 2018).

Policy experimentation has continued to be adapted by Xi. Although Xi adopted many policies during his first few years of leadership that were based on Hu-era policy experimentation (Howell & Duckett, 2018), Xi has ushered in a new era of policy experimentation that differs from his predecessors. The new model is characterised by increasing centralisation of powers under a ‘top-level’ design (*dingceng sheji*) that emphasises a more systemic and results-oriented approach to policy experimentation (Yang & Jian, 2018). The ‘top-level’ design can be understood as an amalgamation of Deng-era pragmatism encapsulated in the phrase ‘crossing the river by feeling the stones’ (*mozheshitougouhe*), and the theoretical foundations of Xi Jinping Thought and other contemporary guiding philosophies that encapsulate China’s unique model of systemic reform (*Ibid.*). Xi’s ‘top-level’ design approach requires local authorities to strictly adhere to CCP guiding ideological principles to mobilise and initiate reform (*Ibid.*: 103), therefore merging contemporary ideological epistemology with praxis.

The number of provincial and local-level policy experiments has decreased during Xi’s leadership compared to the Hu-Wen administration (Stepan, 2016). This decline does not mean that policy experimentation is being phased out, but rather that the type of policy experimentation has shifted. Under Xi’s ‘top-down’ approach, local cadres have less authority to innovate and experiment due to fear of retribution for

implementing policies not strictly in-line with the CCP's *status quo* (Teets, 2016a; Teets *et al.*, 2017). These fears have been exacerbated by Xi's anti-corruption campaign and the prevalent criticism of local governments failing to implement policies and instead pursuing their own interests, a practice encapsulated in the phrase 'policies come from above and countermeasures come from below' (*shangyouzhengce, xiayouduice*) (Cheung, 2015; *Ibid.*). Xi has further consolidated control of policy experimentation by requiring strict ideological conformity by lower-level cadres, such as the requirement that all CCP members follow the Four Consciousnesses (*sige yishi*): the consciousness of being politically loyal, serving Party and national interests, upholding Xi as the core leader, and staying aligned with central ideology (Cheung, 2015; CCP, 2016b). Local officials have engaged in what Teets (2016) described as 'survival experimentation' due to rigid ideological regulations and the unwillingness to deviate from ideological parameters.

These factors have shifted policy experimentation from a process where lower levels innovate and reform to one where they 'tinker' with existing programs and engage in small-scale adjustments to policy (Yu & Ahlers, 2016; Teets & Hasmath, 2020; *Ibid.*). Such circumstances have led to unintended consequences, such as the creation of an active central policy process but passive local actors (Cheung, 2015). Despite Xi's calls for local officials to spare no expense in deepening pilot reforms (Xinhua, 2015), the re-centralisation and rigid ideological structure has disincentivised local cadres from experimenting and adapting new policies (Teets & Hasmath, 2020).

8.4 Policy experimentation in education

Policy experimentation is also an important component of Chinese education reform and innovation. Most recently, education reform since the 2000s has been characterised by experiments on school-based curriculum development, testing reform agendas, and assessing implementation (Xu & Wong, 2011). For example, the 2001 *Compendium of Curriculum Reform for Basic Education (Experimental)* was launched with the intention of testing the reform agenda in thirty-eight cities throughout China (Zhong *et al.*, 2001). Many other basic education reform policies were implemented in pilot regions throughout China as a way of testing implementation amongst different regions and grade levels (Song, 2002; Feng, 2006). In many policies, pilot regions were responsible for merging national standards with local conditions to implement policies, measure evaluation, and record educational outputs (Yang, 2013).

The National Plan is also categorised as an experimental policy. It is constituted out of numerous levels of reform and local and provincial levels for components of the plan, ranging from quality education to specialised vocational training (Li *et al.*, 2017). The development of the National Plan was also experimental in that it underwent numerous rounds of revisions and evaluations through a public decision-making process (Hui, 2013). Leaders were already planning to implement components of the National Plan before its formulation was complete, with Premier Wen Jiabao describing pilot studies as a ‘feature of the [policy] formulation process’ (Wen, 2009 *as cited in Ibid.*: 35).

Education policy experimentation under Xi has focused on re-centralising policy and curriculum development under CCP guiding philosophies. Xi has consolidated educational leadership through layers of reforms that reinforce his personal power and the omnipresence of CCP ideology. For example, the integration of Xi Jinping Thought into all levels of education (Global Times, 2021) represents the process of national-level experimental policies transitioning directly to universal implementation. Frequent standardised textbook revisions, particularly moral education textbooks, also indicates a cyclical and systemic process of consolidating moral education and establishing ideological hegemony at a gradual and controlled pace.

Parallels between Xi’s ideological education policy experimentation and Deng-era economic reforms offer clues to the future trajectory and sustainability of Xi’s education reforms. Zhang (1996) categorised Deng-era political and ideological change as a recurring cycle of advancing reform policies and by implication their values followed by retreat and reconfiguration after criticism. Immediately after gaining power, Deng faced a significant obstacle of re-establishing unified ideological support for modernisation from Party members that retained strong ideological ties to radical Maoism (Rubenstein, 2021). To do this, Deng established ideological justifications for modernisation which highlighted his prioritisation of economic development over socio-political ideology (Zhang, 1996; *Ibid.*). This central tenet of Deng-era economic modernisation is encapsulated in his pithy phrase, ‘It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice’ (*buguanheimaobaimao, zhuodaolaoshujiushihaomao*), meaning the overall results of positive economic development as an outcome are more important than the methods or ideology that guided it.

Xi has also established ideological justifications for reform amid his growing strongman rule that has sought to quash opposition. One method he has used is highlighting moral crises to justify the consolidation of moral ideology under 'New Era' reforms. Yan (2021: 99) defines moral crises in China as, 'the perception of a critical accumulation of attitudinal changes that disrupt pre-existing ethical norms and behaviour.' As early as 2012, Xi's wide-ranging anti-corruption campaign persecuted corrupt 'tigers' and 'flies' (low and high-level officials) under a national discourse targeting public perceptions (Fabre, 2017; Chawala, 2019). This campaign was also seen as a power play for Xi to establish credibility throughout the Party, remove ideological opposition or leadership threats, and mark the first steps in Xi establishing himself, as opposed to the Party in general, as a morally superior ruler. Another moral crisis targeted by Xi was a 'cultural crisis of Westernisation' (Kubat, 2018), which Xi used to justify the removal of Western educational materials in education institutions and the renaissance of 'traditional culture' that glorifies the CCP (Lams, 2018).

In sum, whilst the idea of policy experimentation is not new, this study reveals that it can take on innovative features under different leadership. Xi's 'top-level' policy experimentation design re-centres ideological control and political authority and stifles lower-level reform and innovation (Chen & Göbel, 2016; Teets, 2016b). Ideological conformity through policy experimentation has become a weapon of the Party against disunity or values antagonistic to Party legitimacy. While this ideological weaponisation is not new (Heilmann, 2008b), policy experimentation under Xi has (whether intentionally or unintentionally) repressed Party discord and reaffirmed the Party loyalty of lower-level cadres in addition to its main goals of fostering endogenous reform and creating pockets of adaptability in governance (Shambaugh & Brinley, 2008).

The restructuring of policy experimentation has introduced risks for Xi. His position at the helm and as the (literal) face of ideological reform places the responsibility of reforms on him personally. If ideological reforms fail or are not widely accepted by society, he will be held culpable, a change from previous models of policy experimentation that allowed leaders to endorse only the best performing policies (Stepan, 2016). The cult of personality curated throughout moral education classrooms that idolises Xi and his ideology may be indicative of risky hubris by Xi regarding his popularity, or they may suggest a transformative process of finding new avenues of legitimacy. The repetitive institutionalisation of Xi, his writings, and his

political campaigns into moral education curricula suggests construction of Xi's personal legitimacy. The integration of Confucian moral values separates Xi from Mao's cult of personality, which was predominantly based on communist doctrine (Luqiu, 2016; Hart, 2016). Routine encounters of 'leader symbols' (Lim, 2015), such as political propaganda or art, in public and private spaces reinforces the cult of personality (Hart, 2016; Ibid.). In public, especially classrooms, Xi's writings and symbols of his leadership are ubiquitous. In addition, the colloquialisation of 'Uncle Xi' (*Xi dada*) and the portrayal of Xi as a moral paragon (see Chapter 6) bring him into citizens' private lives through familial bonds. These changes suggest that methods of governance in China are reflective of a transition from collective authoritarian leadership to a 'personal autocracy' (Luqiu, 2016: 302).

8.5 The National Plan: An ideological policy feedback loop

Social transformation is an impetus for, and is reflected in, educational change (Law, 2002). Within the cause-effect pattern of societal change and reinvention of the State, ideological education reform serves a dual purpose. Its role within this dynamic process can be understood through the idea of a policy feedback loop. Policy feedback loops refer to the process of outcomes of policies spurring new input that reinforces or alters existing policies (Leutert, 2021). Policy feedback loops may contribute to consolidation of state power and 'state building' (Ibid.: 3). A positive policy feedback loop is depicted below in Figure 8.2.

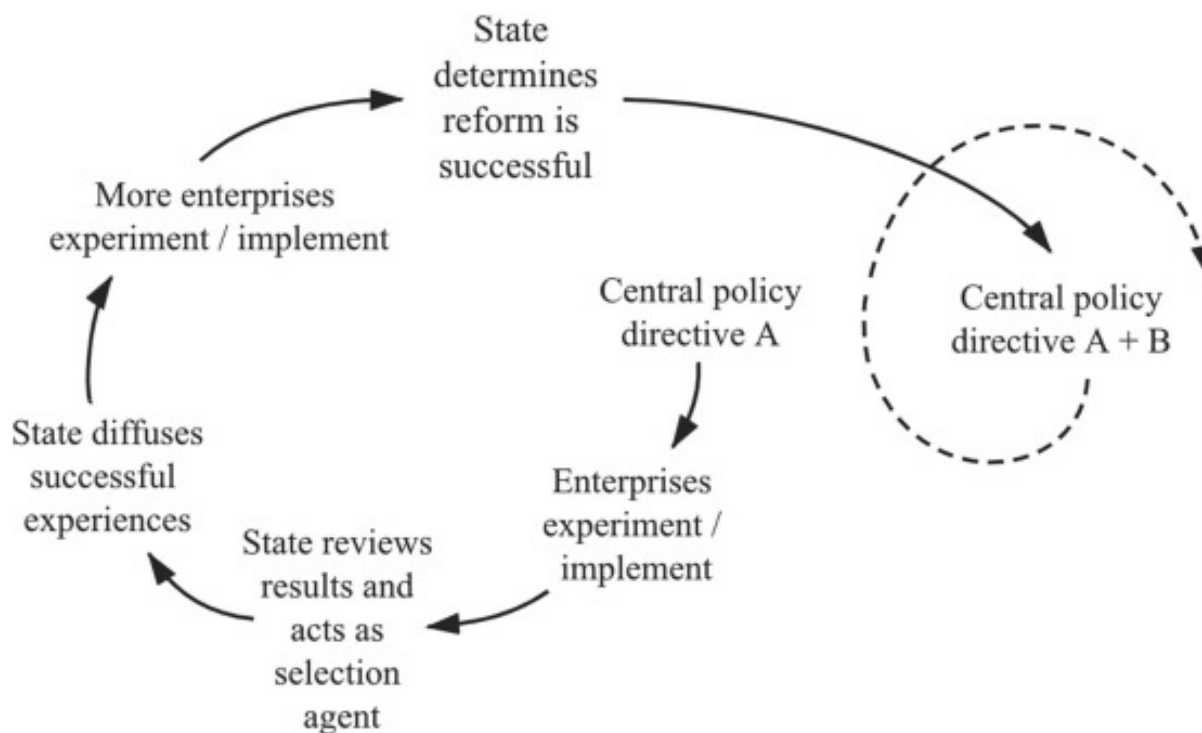


Figure 8.2 Positive policy feedback loop (Leutert, 2021)

In China, policy feedback loops are ‘multi-actor, multi-level, multi-phase’ processes which operate over space and time (Ibid.). Policy feedback loops help to explain the lack of clarification between policy goals and realised impact in Chinese public policy. In assessing Chinese economic reform, Leutert (2021) describes the process of a policy feedback loop as:

Policy feedback loops begin when the central government issues broad directives in a particular policy area. By keeping reform goals wide in scope and not specifying means to achieve them, the center deliberately allows subordinate actors space to experiment in accordance with their particular conditions (Ang, 2016). Central-level reforms may also focus on desired ends rather than specified means simply because the central government does not know how to realize them... Conditions of uncertainty may prompt [subordinate] actors to improvise, innovate, and reinterpret central government directives in divergent and even contradictory ways (Katzenstein and Seybert, 2018). (Leutert, 2021: 2).

Ideological education reforms under Xi’s ‘New Era’ follow a positive feedback loop cycle and help explain the heightened importance placed on collective societal values and compulsory moral education during this period. First, the State experiences socio-economic change; this can be positive or negative change, such as Xi’s ascension to power or China’s declining rate of GDP growth that threatens the CCP’s performance legitimacy model. The State responds to this change with ideological reforms which reinforce ruling Party cultural hegemony. In theory, policy

and implementation are mutually supportive (Hogwood *et al.*, 1984). The policy feedback loop blurs the line between policy ‘experimentation and implementation’ (Leutert, 2021: 9), allowing the State to experiment with new policies while maintaining distance from negative repercussions or culpability for failed experiments.

The concept of a policy feedback loop is helpful to assess the lack of implementation and evaluation methods within the National Plan. An initial discrepancy within the National Plan was the broad, overarching goals which appeared to have little to no implementation strategies or guidelines. While many of the National Plan’s goals were abstract and vague, ideological reform was still implemented in some form throughout the compulsory education system: through textbook and curricula revision, teacher training, school propaganda, etc. This suggests that the National Plan was an experimental policy, in which top-down reforms are initiated by the CCP or MOE (or even Xi himself) and provincial or local-level governments have autonomy to implement them in various ways.

A policy feedback loop may explain why despite increasing standardisation and consolidation of educational control, most local governments or schools retain some levels of autonomy in developing moral education curricula and lesson plans (Yan, 2012; Xia *et al.*, 2017). However, schools act merely as means of production in State legitimisation and ruling Party ideology. The selection of ‘key schools,’ such as S1, as models for other schools to emulate legitimates existing social hierarchies by equating selective and wealthy schools as morally superior. Such developments do not occur in a vacuum, but rather mirror the society around them. Increased government funding rewards prescriptive morals and allows for specific growth and development amongst affluent students. Schools that are not key schools, such as S2, are systematically underfunded. Visiting teacher study sessions and moral education pedagogy competitions at S1 benefit S1 by reinforcing its superior social status.

The purpose of policy feedback loops is to gather ‘data’ to inform future behaviour (Leutert, 2021). First, we can assess how the National Plan acted as a policy feedback loop. The exploratory nature of the National Plan spurred nationwide experimentation in shifting education towards a centralised model that revolved around ruling Party ideology. The National Plan spurred provincial and local government curriculum experimentation, such as renewed teacher training and school environment changes. It also resulted in a prominent outward display of prescriptive moral education, such as propaganda within the school, that did not

reflect daily realities in the classroom that indicated moral education was not viewed as importantly as its outward display suggested.

Subsequent reforms after the National Plan demonstrated an increasing consolidation of power over schools and curriculum by the CCP. The centralisation of ‘Morality and Rule of Law’ textbooks and the standardisation of Xi Jinping Thought into the national curriculum are examples of the State circulating more experiments under the central directive of the National Plan. Increasing layers of ideological reforms and guiding philosophies, from Xi Jinping Thought to *lideshuren*, blur the opportunities for success as schools are inundated with reform packages despite few implementation guidelines.

I build upon the ideas of a policy feedback loop to construct what I am phrasing as an ‘ideological policy feedback loop’ that encompasses ongoing ideological education reforms in contemporary China. Ideological change, for example through propaganda campaigns or moral education reform, is the key factor that propels the policy feedback loop which reproduces ruling Party cultural hegemony. Using Leutert’s (2021) illustration as a guide, the ideological policy feedback loop is presented in Figure 8.3.

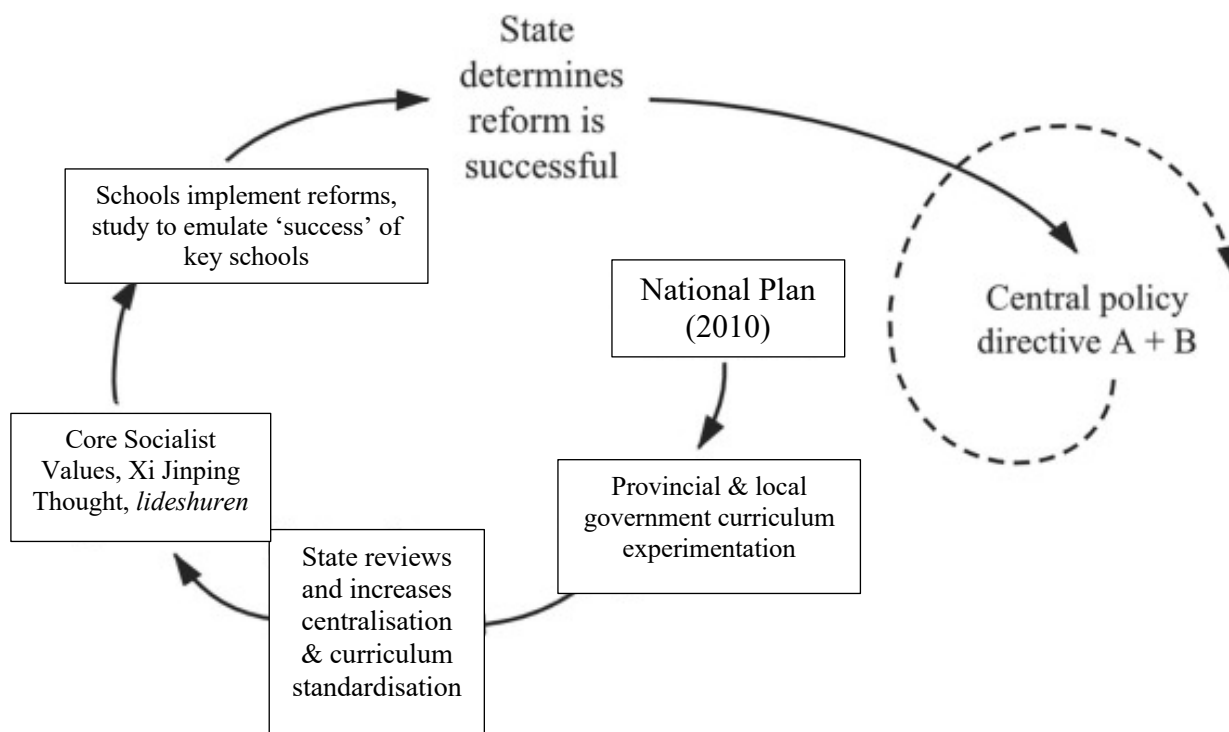


Figure 8.3 China's ideological policy feedback loop

The iterative process of State-directed reforms and lower-level implementation raises questions as to the driving force of the ideological policy feedback loop. Is the Chinese government intentionally stimulating the feedback loop, or is it an independent self-perpetuating cycle? Policy feedback loops are *designed*, but they also create momentum which maintains the continual loop. The result of policy feedback loops is that data informs future behaviour. Scholars have found that the size, duration, and traceability of benefits to individual beneficiaries are key factors in positive feedback effects (Campbell, 2012). Moral education within the ideological policy feedback loop is not portrayed as an individual benefit, but as a collective responsibility.

The ideological reform process is characterised by the contradictory components of crisis and stability. Ongoing ideological education reforms are not routine developments in governance because they are vague yet transformative; broad, sweeping policies aim to drastically change society in the name of social harmony, yet each policy seems to spur another reiteration, suggesting a state of ideological homeostasis is either unobtainable or not the true goal of reforms. The lack of evaluation or prescribed implementation methods makes the question of whether the National Plan and subsequent ideological education reforms were successful or unsuccessful impossible to answer. However, it does raise questions as to how the State determines 'ideological success.'

8.6 Evaluating ideological 'success'

E.E. Schattschneider (1935) noteworthy observation that 'new policies create new politics' is a useful aphorism to assess policy behaviour. Ideological education serves as a clear mechanism of governance (Fairbrother, 2013) to establish cultural governance (Shapiro, 2004). Ideology, expressed through the compulsory education system, *actively* and *passively* regulates, manages, and reproduces cultural hegemony. Schooling plays an important role in hegemony by fostering political socialisation and forming microcosms that exists in macro-system of broader political, economic, legal institutions (Steiner-Khamsi *et al.*, 2002; Fairbrother, 2008: 389).

The CCP maintains hegemony through frequent revisions of the Chinese state and collective ideology, such as the reinvention of ideological, spatial, and temporal domains under the guise of China's 21st century 'New Era.' Education laws strengthen new bases of legitimacy and the State's choice of educational or socio-political values conveyed within the education system (Law, 2002). Political socialisation is a main

focus of moral education which justifies the socialist government and strengthens society's faith in the Party (Ye, 2014: 42).

Weiss & Wallace (2021) found that the Chinese government uses ideological discourse as a tool of distraction away from events or narratives that may invoke societal instability or threaten CCP legitimacy. China has maintained economic success despite growing problems through targeted social policy responses that allow the CCP to retain capacity to quickly shift policy stances when faced with undesirable consequences (Yang & Zhao, 2015). Viewing ideological education reform through the lens of a tool of distraction may help to understand its lack of implementation or evaluation measures, as the introduction of the policy may be the most important component rather than its *actual* impact.

Globalisation has compelled China and other countries to reform educational institutions and curricula (Yates & Young 2010). By reaffirming calls for a return of traditional culture, strengthening nationalist education and shifting moral education to encompass Western ideas with Chinese interpretations (Cheng, 2019), moral education has become both a tool of distraction as well as the foundation for State-led consolidation of societal and cultural hegemonic control. The ongoing shift in ideological focus under the current Xi administration is a practice in hegemonic state-building in the CCP's efforts to transform the superstructure of the State (Gow, 2016).

8.7 Hegemony, common sense, and education

As discussed in Chapter 4, Durkheim and Gramsci's views of ideological education were enmeshed in societal change, including modernisation, globalisation, political revolution, and socio-economic reform. Contemporary Chinese society is undergoing significant change, from post-pandemic economic recessions to its shifting international identity as a global power. The nation's transition into a 'New Era' is a key step in the iterative and strategic feedback loop of state legitimisation and hegemony.

Gramsci's idea of hegemony incorporated processes by which social forces and movements are articulated in a set of strategic alliances which serves ruling Party power and legitimacy (Gow, 2016). Welsh socialist writer Raymond Williams (1921-1988) interpreted Gramsci's views of hegemony as a *lived* process, not restricted to existing social structures or systems (Williams, 1977). Williams goes on to describe hegemony as:

'It does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own.' (Ibid.: 109)

Moral education throughout the Chinese education system creates a scaffolding through which hegemony can be reinvented, manipulated, and changed for the continued legitimacy of the State. The moral development of children is a goal of ideological reforms but does not appear to be the most important goal of the comprehensive reforms. This is evidenced by the numerous flaws in moral education that sabotage its *lived* realities, such as insufficient funding and moral education's lack of importance on standardised examinations. While on occasions moral education was held in esteem, most notably during training competitions and events at S1, in general teachers at both schools admitted to skipping moral education class altogether to focus on 'more important' topics. A straightforward solution to these flaws of implementation would be to provide more funding for moral education teachers and to increase the weight of moral education on the *zhongkao* and *gaokao* examinations. This has been done on some local and provincial scales, but to a small extent and with little success (see Chapter 3).

Therefore, we can assume ideological education has more abstract and measured goals that extend beyond the classroom. When critically analysing the current landscape of moral education, the broader climate of ideological education reforms is one that is preparing students and future society for a 'struggle.' International relations scholar Alexander Wendt describes anarchy as 'what the state makes of it' (Wendt, 1999). His phrase suggests that the State exerts superiority over society's *perceptions*, not realities, of harmony, peace, struggle, and reform. Anarchy, expressed through moral crises, legitimatises the CCP's process of ideological education reforms and justifies the ongoing ideological struggle.

Regardless of whether the ongoing struggle is real or fictitious, or externally or internally shaped, the feedback loop indicates that there will be a constant state of ideological turmoil in the name of progress. In protracted crises, discourse is produced through multiple avenues: textbooks, curriculum, speech, propaganda, and more. The homogeneity of values, with particular emphasis on emotion, struggle, and nationalism, is discursively portrayed as the best way (and only way) for the nation and culture to progress in times of crisis.

The significant emotional work in moral education classes indicates that a new form of pedagogy is being developed which centres on 'structures of feeling'

(Williams, 1977). Power relations between the State and the individual are designed to be emotionally experienced in the moral education classroom. In his 1961 work 'The Long Revolution,' Williams describes structures of feeling as:

In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation.... I do not mean that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities And what is particularly interesting is that it does not seem to be, in any formal sense, learned. One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere.
(Williams, 1961)

The 'culture of the period,' in this case China's 21st century 'New Era,' is constructed in schools. The moral education classroom is not a place where culture is taught, but where cultural hegemony is expressed. I echo Williams' argument that current ideological training is inept to prepare students for the unknown future society, as this is formed and structured by the new generation. The future of Chinese society, State, and ideology cannot be determined *a priori*.

Thus, we can conclude that ongoing ideological education reforms are designed as a form of governance for the present, not the future, and are an act of transformation through mobilisation. Although they aim to construct an idealised society and repair current faults, they serve the current society under the present model of CCP ideology. Successful transformations in civil society make lasting impressions and are integrated seamlessly into existing social systems, drawing strong correlations to Gramsci's ideas of 'common sense' (Ibid.: 33).

Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1909-2004) interpreted Gramsci's thoughts on ideologies as 'forces capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power' (Bobbio, 1979: 36). China's 21st century 'New Era' constructs a new sense of time-space distantiation (Jessop, 2000) produced through the cultural political economy. The CCP's introduction of a 'New Era' reflects the State's role in constituting time and historicity (Poulantzas, 1978) and asserts control over temporal norms and 'rhythms of social development' by 'monopolising national tradition and charting the nation's future' (Jessop, 2007). The establishment of the 'New Era' maximises CCP control over time and shifts political discourse towards a more future-oriented positive outlook rather than one reflective of current problems.

The content of moral education class constructs *common sense* identities for students, teachers, parents, and the collective society as a whole. Common sense can transform the identities, culture, and knowledge of a society over time. In the moral education classroom, identity, time, and space are redefined to fit the necessary and idealised narrative for continued ideological legitimacy. The moral education curriculum constructs a homogenous logic of 'good sense' (a term coined by Gramsci) and demonstrates how the CCP uses cultural hegemony as a platform for students to *naturally* experience their world (Williams, 1977).

Moral education frames prescriptive ideology through the centrality of one expert, Xi Jinping. Xi's image, personality, and ideology are reified into clear manifestations of the 'ideal society.' Members of society are constantly 'studying' Xi's philosophy to reproduce and understand his ideas, creating a clear distinction between Xi as an omnipotent leader and those under him. This delineation breaks from Gramsci tradition in that it removes the social construct of 'experts.' Government officials, school administrators, professors, and teachers are not viewed to be experts in ideological thought, but rather their role is similar to students in that they are also constantly studying and training ideology and its many reiterations. The lack of an ideological bourgeoisie class reinforces the supremacy and centrality of Xi's power as the owner of government, ideological, and cultural hegemony.

8.8 To progress is to mobilise; to mobilise is to establish *status quo*

Hegemony, much like the process of a policy feedback loop, *creates* and *is dependent* upon recurrent change throughout multiple layers of governance and education. Combining Gramsci's ideas of hegemonic legitimation and a policy feedback loop, the key connection between the two theories is *movement*. Ruling Party hegemony is never firmly established but continually pursued through 'complex mediums, diverse institutions, and constantly changing processes' (Buttigieg, 1995: 7). The constant revision and introduction of ideological education reforms generates movement within the feedback loop, mobilising youth and society to engage in emotional struggle, which in turn legitimates ruling Party ideology.

The necessity of ideological policy feedback loops suggests there is a strong correlation between knowledge production, ruling Party legitimacy, and precarity. Methodologically, ruling Party power is produced and expressed through the performative actions of ideological reforms, including their creation, propagandisation, and dissemination. The CCP strengthens its power by mobilising

ideological reform and social change through narratives of modernisation, progress, education, and moral good. The State positions themselves as an educator to the masses, re-establishing the *status quo* and cultural hegemony through prescriptive moral ideology. Moral education is not a goal, but rather a process in the policy feedback loop that mobilises society to produce temporary cultural hegemony.

8.9 Implications & suggestions for future research

While reforms have succeeded in developing moral education pedagogy and curriculum to fit the needs of the 21st century 'New Era' state, my overall consensus is that these reforms are not sustainable. In addition, I believe they will not have a significant impact on the ideological and moral development of students, parents, or teachers given their lack of full institutional support and indoctrinatory nature. In creating a policy feedback loop dependent upon mobilisation and ideological reform, ruling Party legitimacy is constantly threatened; the success of the State is contingent upon new iterations of ideology. It can be assumed that there will likely continue to be more and more layers of ideological education reforms, such as new textbook and curriculum revisions, propaganda campaigns, and ideological requirements in the coming years to continue satisfying the policy feedback loop. These reforms will likely become increasingly specific to the CCP's national and international interests, with strong focuses on nationalist and patriotic narratives, as the government struggles to continue ideological reinvention once current reforms falter.

I suggest that the education system will grow larger and more powerful as an offshoot of Xi Jinping and will be a significant factor in the rise of the propagandisation of the cult of personality around him. This trend will continue until Xi ends his term or is removed from power, at which point another ideological crisis will be created. Ideology will once again need to be invented for a 'new era' in line with the future geopolitical and socio-economic affairs of China.

Conventional wisdom suggests a strong culture of education poses a threat to authoritarian regimes. However, Harvard professor of Chinese politics and history Elizabeth Perry (2020) argues China's focus on educational reform and development has created the phenomenon of 'educated acquiescence' amongst well-educated Chinese and higher education institutions. The educated elite remain placated and acquiesce to 'political compliance' in exchange for the benefits afforded to them by the growing status of educational institutions (Ibid.). This trade-off ensures educational

institutions do not become vehicles for dissent by directing intellectual thought towards either conforming to ruling Party ideology or viewing it with deference.

Conditions by which the policy feedback loop might fail include a lack of societal mobilisation or a change in Chinese governance. Gramsci argues that hegemony is 'consensus armoured by coercion' (Gramsci, 1971; Gow, 2016; Ye, 2014) and constitutes active negotiation of consent and participation by citizens. If consent is not given, then force will be applied, as force and consent are inseparable elements of hegemonic dominance (Gramsci, 1971). This can explain why we see two very different experiences of ideological control in Mainland China and Hong Kong, wherein the latter's entire society did not consent to prescriptive ideology.

As the world continues to change, the CCP's existing modes of governance will undoubtedly be influenced. Mobilising common sense to serve CCP interests is a strategic weapon in the face of globalisation and socio-economic transformation (Gow, 2016), but it is fragile and unsustainable. Outcomes of policy feedback loops do not always occur as planned and their results can vary considerably (Jacobs & Mettler, 2018). The CCP cannot contain nor control unexpected consequences resulting in continual ideological shifts; at the same time, it must continue to develop society amid globalisation, recession, shifts in world order, and unexpected global phenomena such as the pandemic.

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) ominously predicted that 'wherever there is domination, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1975). Resistance to cultural hegemony will grow; resistance has already begun to sprout in the form of 'educated acquiesce.' The CCP's reliance upon ideological hegemony constructs a binary choice between responding to crises with more (and possibly ineffective) ideological education reforms or responding with force. The future of CCP ideology will likely continue to blur the line between authoritarian and totalitarian systems of governance as ideological education becomes both the *driving force* and *response to* socio-political reform in China's 'New Era.'

This study opens up the possibility of future research assessing the discrepancies between national ideological reforms and their integration into everyday life and individual perspectives. Furthermore, lends itself to further study of the role of ideology and culture in socio-economic and political reform. I am interested in using this research to further assess how ideology and cultural hegemony is internally measured by the CCP and how that informs future policies within the ideological policy feedback loop.

8.10 Epistemological contributions of this research

This project viewed the world, research, and data through specific ontological and epistemological lenses that were unique to the researcher. This research was informed by constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1998) describe constructivist research as relative, transactional, and subjective. The ontological standpoint of this research assessed multiple realities which were studied holistically (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My perspective emphasised a *subjective* view of social phenomena, research participants, and the 'constructed realities' of our interactions and thoughts (Berlin, 1987).

These methodologies were woven into the research design and narrative and influenced the adoption of the interpretivist theoretical positioning. My experiences unquestionably influenced my project design, data collection, fieldwork observations, and data analysis (Jenks, 2002). The interpretive stance allows researchers to acknowledge and emphasise diversity in research. Methodologically, this research is unique in that it focused on multiple perspectives of a social phenomenon and highlighted the perspectives of students, teachers, and official narratives. This thesis is situated within the interdisciplinary fields of education, sociology, political theory, and other disciplines, but it remains firmly rooted in the field of education studies and acknowledges that education is a driving force in the construction of culture and society, government legitimacy, and economic transformation.

Adopting an epistemological perspective, this research recontextualises our understanding of ideological education reforms through a case study of contemporary Chinese primary school moral education. This knowledge is particularly valuable given the significant amount of change that the Chinese education sector has experienced within the past decade. While this research offers a novel understanding of ongoing education reform, this project is also limited by the dynamic nature of reforms. Some of the policies I discuss and cite in this project are already outdated and may even be replaced with new policies or initiatives at the time of publication. The current landscape of Chinese education is constantly changing, a requirement of ideological policy feedback loops and hegemonic rule, which imposes limits on the scope of this research. Therefore, change is both the driving force behind this research as well as the most significant limiting factor in the timeliness and validity of this project (Golafshani, 2003). In light of this epistemological constraint, this research provides a 'snapshot' through multiple angles and perspectives to capture the

prescribed expectations and *lived* realisations of moral education reform. Additionally, it offers suggestions to help our current understanding of the nature and purpose of current and future ideological reforms in contemporary China.

8.11 Final remarks

As China engages in broad socio-economic and political reform, ideology has been elevated to renewed importance under the banner of China's 21st century 'New Era.' Less than a decade into his tenure, Xi has transformed China's presence on the global stage while consolidating domestic control. 21st century China has become a nation of paradoxes: an economic powerhouse experiencing slowing GDP growth and growing unemployment; a collective and harmonious society surrounded by international outcries of human rights abuses; and a forward-thinking, modern nation coping with maturing consequences of bygone policies.

This study critically analysed the present-day *lived* and *prescribed* realities of moral education reform. Unlike previous studies, this thesis locates the CCP's ideological work within the context of the moral education classroom and assessed different levels of perspectives, highlighting the unique voices of students, teachers, and school administrators throughout China. This study increases the awareness surrounding ongoing ideological education reforms and provides a new assessment of the theoretical and practical role of moral education in the compulsory education system. It highlights the importance of mobilisation in education and societal policy, suggesting that mobilisation provides inertia to turn the ideological policy feedback loop of ideological reforms and moral education. Despite the numerous challenges encountered during this three-year research, this thesis provides a timely and important 'snapshot' of contemporary Chinese moral education and shifts our understanding of what education 'means' within China's 21st century 'New Era.'

Furthermore, this study highlights the role of policy experimentation in China's shifting governance structures. It suggests that while top-down moral education policy experimentation is being enacted through various channels, pockets of resistance continue to form against the CCP's cultural and ideological homogenisation. On paper, reforms are successful and play an important role in shifting youth ideological and moral values towards a pro-CCP and pro-Xi framework. In real life, reforms are often overshadowed by daily realities and at times have only nominal importance. These findings indicate further research is needed into the evolving nature and lived realities of moral education reforms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information sheet



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敬启者：

您好！我叫罗葳，来自美国加州，是英国剑桥大学教育学院的一名博士生，南京师范大学教育学院的高级进修生(2019-2020 年)，导师是冯建军教授。我是美国耶鲁大学硕士毕业的，也在南京大学和北京师范大学完成了各项专业项目。

因为对中国文化十分感兴趣，加之，获得了 2019-2020 年美国富布赖特奖学金，因此来到了中国，来到了南京师范大学。我的研究课题为：21 世纪中国的教育改革现状及道德教育发展进程。2019-2020 年我将围绕我的研究课题在南京师范大学和南京的小学研究及道德教育相关的教材，并进行观察和访谈。此外，在此阶段我也会有旁听相关的道德教育课程。

由于 2020 年新型冠状病毒肺炎(COVID-19)疫情，我必须离开中国。所有的学校都暂时关门了，因此没办法进行我所安排的研究。现在我想通过网络进行研究调查，尤其是访谈教师和学生，这样才能够完整了解中国道德教育。

我承诺，所收集的信息仅用于撰写本人在剑桥大学的博士论文，对人名将会做匿名处理，收集的所有信息将被安全存储并不予以公开。如有其它问题，可联系我。

罗葳
Leigh Lawrence
博士生，教育学院
圣约翰学院
剑桥大学

微信：



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Faculty of Education
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Kingdom

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教育科学学院
中国江苏省南京市
鼓楼区宁海路 122 号



Appendix B Consent form for ethnographic observation in schools

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校长和师生参与者同意书

研究项目：21 世纪中国的教育改革现状及道德教育发展进程

我叫罗葳 (Leigh Lawrence)，是英国剑桥大学教育学院的博士生，美国富布赖特奖学金获得者，南京师范大学高级进修生 (2019—2020 年)，导师是冯建军教授。联系您是为了咨询您，是否可以在贵校进行科学研究。

我研究的主题为：21 世纪中国的教育改革现状及道德教育发展进程。主要活动包括：进行课堂观察、访谈教师和进行问卷调查。本研究旨在通过以上活动更好地了解中国的教育体制改革。

剑桥大学在与教师和年轻人进行道德研究方面有严格的道德程序，本研究符合当前英国教育研究协会的指导方针：<http://bit.ly/BERAethics2018>。在进行研究之前，我会告知贵方有关研究的信息，学生和教师有权拒绝，且可以随时拒绝参与研究。


经过您的许可，我将参与听课，与师生交流，访谈老师，并做观察记录。本研究不会打扰或干扰师生。在休息期间或下课后我将与师生交流，并展开访谈活动。在展开研究前，为了更好地了解贵校的情况，我将预先访谈贵校老师和校长，同时，这种反思实践也有助于教师专业发展。

所有的访谈和对话内容都是保密的，所有收集的数据都将保密并安全存储，参与者遵循匿名和自愿的原则。这意味着在随后使用录制的资料时，您的姓名，学生姓名，学校名称和任何个人信息将不会被使用。同时，您可以随时改变主意或撤销同意函。录制的文件将被存档和转录。所有记录的数据将存储在锁定的房间或电脑中，只有我的导师和我才能查看记录的数据。

此外，此研究不会对贵校、教师和学生造成任何风险或不良后果。虽然您不会收到任何费用，但却为这项研究做出了重大贡献。您的自愿参与将会帮助其他国家了解中国教育。

经过您的许可，我将，且仅将这些录音和内容用于研究和后续的出版物。剑桥大学将致力于为社会发展传播这一研究，并为支持这一承诺，建立研究材料的在线档案。该档案包括成功提交的期刊论文的数字副本，作为剑桥大学研究生学位课程的一部分。通过在线保存档案，研究人员可以免费访问论文全文，从而增加此研究的影响和对该研究的使用。如果您同意参加本研究，即表明您同意将材料用于撰写期刊文章，同意该期刊文章被公开发布和免费获取。

这项研究已经由剑桥大学教育研究伦理委员会审查，并已获得道德许可。本人附上了给学生和教师的信息表和同意表。

如果您有任何其他问题，请随时与我联系：。如果您想参加这项研究，或者需要更多相关信息，请与我联系。



感谢您的关注。期待您的回信。

此致

敬礼

罗葳
博士生
教育学院
剑桥大学

高级进修生（2019年-2020年）
教育科学学院
南京师范大学

我已阅读并理解了有关该研究的相关信息，我有权提出有关此项研究的问题并获得满意解答。我知道我有权退出研究，任何时候退出都不用承担任何后果。我也了解谁能访问所提供的信息以及在研究结束时数据会被引用或公开等。我知道这项研究已经通过了剑桥大学教育研究伦理委员会的审查，并获得了道德许可。如有需要，我可以随时联系研究人员（）或她在南京师范大学的导师（）。

我已经完全了解自己的权利，同意参加由剑桥大学教育学院全日制博士生罗葳【Leigh Lawrence】进行的研究。

老师姓名： _____

签名： _____

日期： _____年_____月_____日

-----仅供研究人员使用-----

签名： _____

日期： _____年_____月_____日

备注:

Appendix C: Consent form for qualitative teacher interviews

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访谈同意函

研究项目：21 世纪中国道德教育的发展进程

您好，我是罗葳，是英国剑桥大学教育学院的一名博士生，去年的南京师范大学的高级进修生（2019—2020 年）。本研究的目的在于了解 21 世纪中国教育改革现状和道德教育发展进程。为了进行此项研究，我将研究教科书、在学校旁听道德教育课程并进行访谈。

我现在邀请几位愿意参与的教师、学生和跟德育有关系的人进行访谈。访谈的时候我将问十几个关于你的背景和你对德育和中国教育的意见的问题。访谈时间不会超过一个小时，也会按照你的时间来决定时间。由于 2020 年肺炎疫情，我们将通过网络（微信、Skype 或者 Zoom）进行访谈。因为我的母语不是中文所以我将用录音机录音访谈。不过，我承诺本研究期间所收集的信息仅用于科学研究，对人名和个人信息将会做匿名处理，收集的所有信息将被安全存储并不予以公开。如果您对我的研究或者您的参与有任何疑问，可随时联系我。联系方式如下：

微信： 邮箱：

签署此同意书即表示您同意参与访谈并被录音（录音内容仅用于科学研究），同意研究者【罗葳】将录音内容归档。请您对以下问题进行作答，谢谢您的配合！

1.我同意接受访谈。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
2.我保留了研究者的联系方式。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
3.我同意谈话内容被录音。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
4.我知道我可以随时撤销对录音的使用权限，且无需作出解释。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
5.我同意其他学术出版物和专业发展材料引用访谈的内容。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
6.我知晓该项目已通过剑桥大学的伦理审批程序，通过了伦理审查，我了解谁有权访问数据、数据存储方式以及数据只用于科学研究。	是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否 <input type="checkbox"/>
7.进行访谈我想通过： <input type="checkbox"/> 微信 <input type="checkbox"/> Zoom <input type="checkbox"/> Skype <input type="checkbox"/> 其他联系方式：	
8.确定访谈时间（请选一个，但选两三个也可以）： <input type="checkbox"/> 早上（7:00-9:00） <input type="checkbox"/> 上午（10:00-12:00） <input type="checkbox"/> 下午（13:00-17:00） <input type="checkbox"/> 晚上（18:00-22:00）	
9.确定访谈时间（请选一个，但选两三个也可以）： <input type="checkbox"/> 周一 <input type="checkbox"/> 周二 <input type="checkbox"/> 周三 <input type="checkbox"/> 周四 <input type="checkbox"/> 周五 <input type="checkbox"/> 周六 <input type="checkbox"/> 周日	

姓名：

签字：

2020年 月 日

Appendix D: Consent form for student questionnaires

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学生问卷信息表和同意函——教师

尊敬的老师，

我叫罗葳 (Leigh Lawrence)，是英国剑桥大学教育学院的博士生，美国富布赖特奖学金获得者，南京师范大学高级进修生（2019-2020 年），导师是冯建军教授。我在贵校进行研究。我研究的主题为：21 世纪中国的教育改革现状及道德教育发展进程。主要活动包括：进行课堂观察、访谈教师和进行问卷调查。本研究旨在通过以上活动更好地了解中国的教育体制改革。

经过您的许可，我将进行学生问卷。**贵校已经签署好了研究同意函，允许我进行研究。**因为学生是未成年人所以需要老师的同意才能进行此次问卷。问卷很简单也不会打扰或干扰师生。问卷所有的内容都是保密的，所有收集的数据都将保密并安全存储，参与者遵循匿名和自愿的原则。这意味着在随后使用录制的资料时，您的姓名，学生姓名，学校名称和任何个人信息将不会被使用。同时，您可以随时改变主意或撤销同意函。录制的文件将被存档和转录。此研究不会对贵校、教师和学生造成任何风险或不良后果。虽然您不会收到任何费用，但却为这项研究做出了重大贡献。您的自愿参与将会帮助其他国家了解中国教育。

剑桥大学在与教师和年轻人进行道德研究方面有严格的道德程序，本研究符合当前英国教育研究协会的指导方针：<http://bit.ly/BERAethics2018>。在进行研究之前，我会告知贵方有关研究的信息，学生和教师有权拒绝，且可以随时拒绝参与研究。这项研究已经由剑桥大学教育研究伦理委员会审查，并已获得道德许可。

如果您有任何其他问题，请随时与我联系 (XXXXXXXXXX) 或我在你学校进行研究的主办人_____。感谢您的关注!

此致

敬礼

罗葳

我已阅读并理解了有关该研究的相关信息。我已经完全了解自己的权利，同意参加由剑桥大学教育学院全日制博士生罗葳进行的研究。

老师姓名：_____

签名：_____

日期：_____年_____月_____日

-----仅供研究人员使用-----

日期：_____年_____月_____日

备注

Appendix E: Consent form for teacher questionnaires

导语：尊敬的老师，你好！我是南京师范大学的访问学者、剑桥大学的博士研究生罗葳。我的研究主题是‘21 世纪中国教育改革与小学生道德发展’。想邀请你用几分钟的时间帮助我完成这份问卷。参与者遵循匿名自愿的原则，完成并交出该问卷即表示你同意参与。所填写的问卷，我都会安全保存，所填写的内容只用于学术研究。请你根据自己的想法，放心填写。你有任何问题可以与我联系（ls130@cam.ac.uk）。谢谢你的帮助！

1. 年龄： a.18-25 b. 26-30 c. 31-35 d. 36-40 e. 41-50 f. 50+
2. 你从教的学科是 _____
3. **（重要指数）**：请根据你的意见判断每一句话。在你认为最同意的程度下打√；每一句话只能选择一个

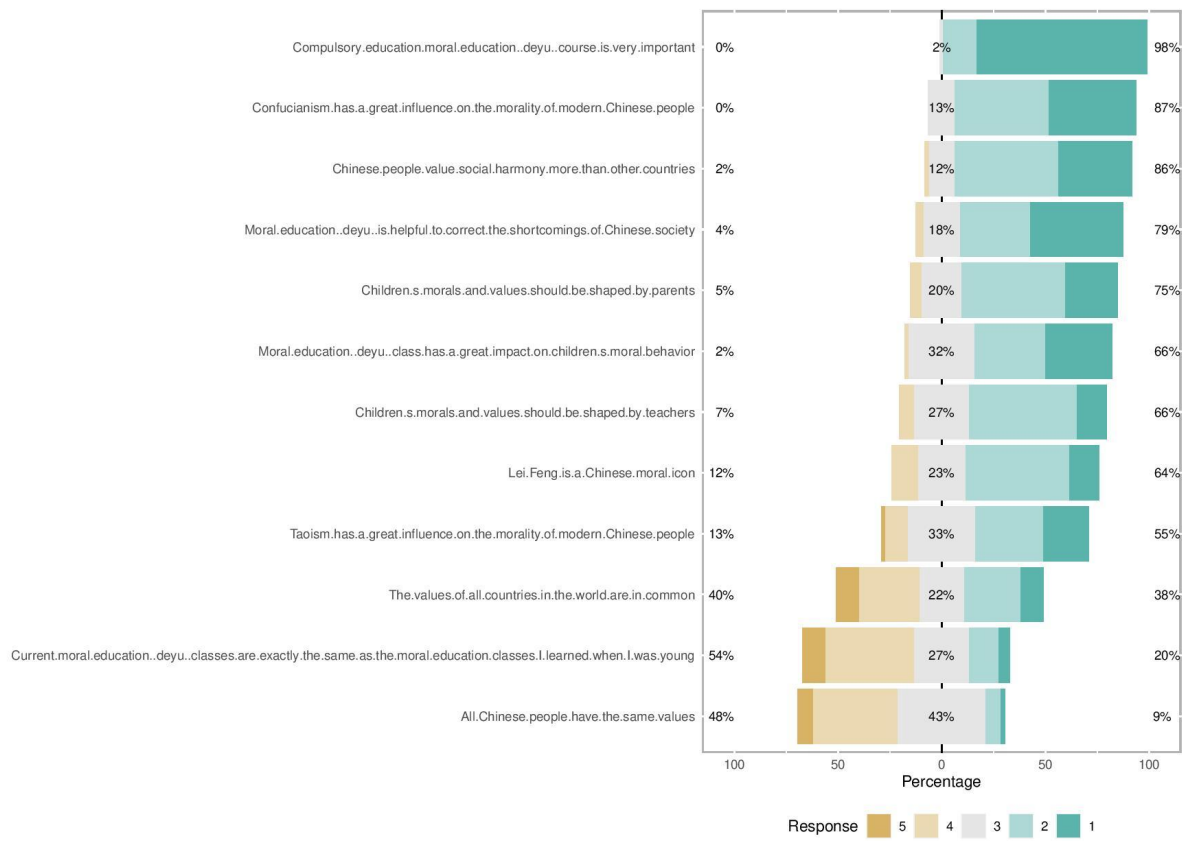
	非常同意	同意	不一定	不同意	非常不同意
义务教育道德与法治课非常重要					
道德与法治课有利于矫正中国社会的缺点					
孩子道德和价值观应该由父母塑造					
孩子道德和价值观应该由老师塑造					
道德与法治课对孩子道德行为的影响非常大					
儒家思想对现代中国人道德的影响非常大					
道教思想对现代中国人道德的影响非常大					
现在道德与法治课跟我小时候学的德育课完全一样					
雷锋是中国人的道德偶像					
中国人比其他国家更重视社会和谐					
中国人的价值观都一致					
世界上各个国家的价值观都具有共同性					

4. **（假设情况）**：海因茨的妻子罹患了一种罕见的疾病，濒临死亡，唯一的希望是一个药剂师刚发明的一种药物，但是价格高昂。这种药物的成本只有 200 美元，药剂师却要卖 2000 美元。但海因茨举家只能拿出 1000 美元。他把所有钱都给了药剂师并且请求能否以后再支付余下的，然而药剂师还是拒绝了，因为他发明的所以要赚钱。绝望中，海因茨为了挽救妻子的生命，所以闯入了药剂师的家偷了药。

假设答案	非常同意	同意	不一定	不同意	非常不同意
海因茨应该偷药。因为保护家人比法律重要。					
海因茨不应该偷药。因为法律非常严格，后果太可怕了。					
海因茨应该牺牲自己。如果他的妻子获救，就会活得更快乐，即使他被捕入狱服刑也值得。					
即使为治他妻子的病，也不能证明他偷药的行为是正确的。					

拯救生命的价值高于尊重药剂师的财产权。					
海因茨不应该有任何法律上的后果，因为他的目的是为了拯救生命，生命权高于一切。					
即便是海因兹救了他的妻子，但其他人也可能需要这种药，也必须要考虑到他们生命的价值。					
如果妻子因为买不起药而死亡，警察应该逮捕药剂师					

Appendix F: Teacher questionnaire quantitative data results



Appendix G: Student Survey

你好！我是南京师范大学的留学生。我正在进行一项关于小学生对德育课的观点的调查，想邀请你用几分钟时间帮忙真打这份问卷。本问卷实行匿名制，所有数据只用于统计分析，请你放心真写。题目选项无对错之分，自己的实际情况真写。你对我或者我的调查有任何问题请随时问。谢谢你的帮助！～罗老师

(圈出一项)

1. 你是几年级的学生？
 - a. 3 年级
 - b. 4 年级
 - c. 5 年级
 - d. 6 年级

2. 你最喜欢上什么课？
 - a. 数学
 - b. 德育
 - c. 历史
 - d. 语文
 - e. 英语
 - f. 其他：_____

3. 你喜欢德育课吗？
 - a. 非常喜欢
 - b. 喜欢
 - c. 不太喜欢
 - d. 不喜欢

b. 解释你的选择：

4. 你觉得德育课重要吗？
 - a. 非常重要
 - b. 重要
 - c. 不太重要
 - d. 不重要

b. 解释你的选择：

5. 你的价值观是从哪里学习的？
 - a. 从德育课
 - b. 从父母
 - c. 从媒体
 - d. 从朋友
 - e. 其他：_____

6. 在你生活中，你觉得最有道德的人是谁？
 - a. 父母
 - b. 老师
 - c. 警察或军人
 - d. 法师或法官
 - e. 朋友
 - f. 医生或护士
 - g. 党员
 - g. 其他：_____

7. 你的道德偶像是谁？
 - a. 家人
 - b. 老师
 - c. 朋友
 - d. 雷锋
 - e. 哲学家（比如孔子或孟子）
 - f. 国家领导人（比如毛泽东或习近平）
 - f. 其他：_____
 - e. 我没有道德偶像

8. 选择最合适的形容词：“我们_____的国土。
 - a. 辽阔
 - b. 神圣
 - c. 伟大
 - d. 发达
 - e. 不可侵犯
 - f. 和谐

9. 你认为哪项最重要？请为它们排序一到五，第一最重要，第五最不重要：

___ 文明礼貌 ___ 助人为乐 ___ 保护环境 ___ 遵纪守法 ___ 爱护祖国

10. 中国社会主义核心价值观有 12 项，你最看重哪一个？（圈出一项）

富强 民主 文明 和谐
 自由 平等 公正 法制
 爱国 敬业 诚信 友善

解释你的选择：