

## **Selling ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’**

### *‘Thought and Politics’ and the Legitimisation of China’s Developmental Strategy*

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2008 looks set to be remembered for the global discrediting of an overly doctrinaire faith in market-driven economic development and, by the same token, of predominantly market-based rather than state-directed models for the provision of basic services. Meanwhile, in China, a year in which the Beijing Olympics were intended to be an unalloyed triumph for the successes of national development has been punctuated by a series of unfortunate events underlining the tensions inherent in what Harvey has termed ‘Neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’ (Harvey, 2005). Both the glittering spectacle of the Beijing Games, and the subsequent spacewalk by a flag-waving Chinese astronaut, were meant to illustrate in spectacular fashion the nation’s acquisition of key attributes of ‘developed’ modernity. However, the freak snowstorms of February, the April earthquake in Sichuan and the autumn milk-powder scandal<sup>i</sup> have demonstrated the effects of political and fiscal structures that have left many communities severely disadvantaged, and have “significantly impaired” the capacity of local governments in poorer areas to respond to local needs and demands for decent public goods’ (Shue and Wong, 2007, 10, citing Liu and Tao, 2007). In addition, the furious public outrage expressed by mostly young, urban and educated Chinese at the anti-government protests in Tibet during March, and at Western reaction to the subsequent government clampdown, highlighted the powerful resonance of discourses that on the one hand portray minorities as ‘backward’ beneficiaries of enlightened Han trusteeship, and on the other depict Western states as determined to demonise and misrepresent Chinese policies in order to frustrate the drive for national strength and international status.

This essay examines the ‘Thought and Politics’ (*sixiang zhengzhi*) texts for senior high school, to examine how these legitimise the regime’s current developmental strategy. In particular it considers the way in which the texts emphasise the strengthening of the state as the overriding developmental goal. It is argued that this emphasis is premised upon the imperative of securing China’s position within an international order seen as governed by Darwinian laws of competition – a strategic imperative represented as demanding collective and individual sacrifices. Many aspects of the worldview presented in these texts will be familiar to those who read the Chinese press or who have witnessed or participated in Chinese discussions of development or world affairs. However, the decision to focus here on ‘Thought and Politics’ is largely based on how this subject – along with its junior counterpart ‘Thought and Values’ (*sixiang pinde*) – serves as a benchmark of ideological correctness across the school curriculum, within what remains a highly centralised system of curriculum development. At the same time, it is important to stress that the argument is not being made that the school curriculum in general, or ‘Thought and Politics’ in particular, can be seen simply as an instrument with which the party-state shapes and moulds popular consciousness at will. ‘Thought and Politics’ is a compulsory subject for students in senior high school, but it would be highly misleading to attribute the attitudes of any senior high school graduate simply to the effects of schooling because obviously an individual’s attitudes are affected by a range of factors including the media, popular culture, friends and family. All that can safely be said is that schooling plays a very important role in

political socialisation – but its precise importance will vary, and the messages that the curriculum seeks to impart will not necessarily be absorbed uncritically by students.

The article begins with a brief analysis of the shifts and continuities in China's developmental strategy, and of the roles assigned to education within that strategy. The importance traditionally attached in China to the moralising function of schooling is noted, as is the relatively elitist character of the recipients of the 'Thought and Politics' course examined here – senior high school students. After considering how and why a discourse of state-centred patriotism has become so central to the Communist Party's efforts to legitimise its authority, the implications of the 'Patriotic Education Campaign' for the broader school curriculum are reviewed. The main discussion then focuses on the way in which the current texts for 'Thought and Politics' set about justifying China's developmental strategy in terms derived from this patriotic discourse. Finally, the conclusion considers some potential implications of this combination of patriotic political socialisation with a highly labour-repressive developmental model, setting the case of China in comparative and historical context.

### ***The context – education, ideology and China's development***

Notwithstanding the preceding caveats, certain broad generalisations can be ventured concerning the likely readership of the senior high school texts discussed below, and these students' receptiveness to key aspects of the worldview presented therein. Whereas the majority of pupils nationwide complete the compulsory nine years of education (up to the end of junior high school), participation at higher levels of education narrows dramatically. As of 2000, official figures showed that nationally 98 percent of children were completing primary school, and just under 88 percent completing junior high school (i.e. the nine years of compulsory education), but that only 23 percent attended senior high school (Connelly and Zheng, 2007). These figures also showed that, while the rate of participation in junior high school had jumped by almost a quarter over the preceding decade, the rate of transition to senior high school had witnessed a far more modest rise of about 4.5 percent. Although participation rates in senior high school and tertiary education have continued to rise since 2000, the principal barriers to enrolment on the part of poorer students have remained in place. The costs of post-compulsory education, and the location of high schools (almost invariably in urban centres), mean that the vast majority of senior high school students are urban-resident, Han and middle class. As the urban-rural gap has widened over recent years into a chasm, claims concerning the state's farsighted contributions to rural or regional development may be expected to go largely unchallenged by the gilded youth of the cities, who have little experience or knowledge either of rural China, or of local conditions in Tibet, Xinjiang or other 'minority' regions. And when city-dwellers are confronted with the realities of rural poverty – either through encounters with migrants from the countryside, or through tourism – the pervasive discourse of '*suzhi*' (or 'quality') may prime them to blame poverty largely on the indigence and ignorance of the poor themselves (Murphy, 2007).

Indeed, young Beijingers or Shanghainese in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century inhabit a 'networked' society closer in almost every way to that of their counterparts in Taipei, Hong Kong or Seoul than to the rural universe of villagers living three-hours' drive from the city centre. Perceptions of the world outside China nevertheless remain powerfully mediated by official discourse (and by official controls over the internet), and influenced by a populist nationalism that the regime has

alternately sought to stoke and rein in (Hughes, 2006). While opportunities for contact with foreigners, and for direct experience of the world outside China's borders, are far greater for young urban Chinese today than even five or ten years ago, such opportunities remain limited to a relatively privileged few, and often do not involve the kind of prolonged or sustained interaction with actual foreign 'natives' that might fundamentally challenge preconceptions and stereotypes.

The relatively affluent young urbanites who populate senior high classrooms are thus prospective citizens of a China in many respects radically different from that inhabited either by high school students of previous generations, or by their poorer rural compatriots today. The policy shifts that have underpinned this societal revolution – most notably the progressive abandonment of socialist central planning, and the marketisation not just of agriculture, industry and trade, but also, to a large extent, of the provision of public services such as health and education – have been widely noted and analysed (Shue and Wong (ed.), 2007). However, when contemporary developmental strategy and the official discourses deployed to legitimise it are viewed in the context not just of the history of 'New China' post-1949, but over the longer duration of the struggle to transform the Chinese Empire into a modern nation-state, the continuities are as striking as the ruptures. Late Qing, Republican (Guomingdang/Kuomintang), Maoist and post-Reform Communist regimes, for all their differences, have shared several overriding state goals: the strengthening of China as a unitary state within its Qing borders (give or take Outer Mongolia), the formation of a strong national consciousness amongst the people within those borders, and the restoration or enhancement of national status and influence beyond them. Lending urgency to the pursuit of these aims has been an overwhelmingly Darwinian perception of the international order – strikingly evident in the writings of both Sun Yatsen and Liang Qichao one hundred years ago, powerfully reinforced by the experience of war with Japan in mid-century, and complemented but never superseded by the rivalries of the Cold War.

Amongst the continuities in China's development strategy has been the role assigned to education in character formation. This moralising thrust, along with an emphasis on preparing students for success in public examinations, has been a perennial feature of the Chinese educational scene since long before the modern period: though it is worth noting that a stress on the moralising function of basic schooling has been a feature of many pre-modern societies – it is not unique to China (Bakken, 2000; Thøgersen, 2002; Schneewind, 2006). While successive Chinese regimes have adopted sometimes quite radically different views concerning the priority to be accorded to academic learning or vocational skills, a humanistic or a scientific/technical curriculum, all have shared a belief in moral transformation as a fundamental purpose of schooling. In some respects, the content of the moral code that schools have been tasked to inculcate has undergone dramatic shifts – from Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, through progressivist modernising nationalism to class-consciousness, 'socialist civilization' and Lei Feng-style self-sacrifice. As is argued in the conclusion to this essay, to a large and generally unacknowledged extent, the post-Mao authorities, while retaining 'socialism' as a slogan, have in fact adopted an ideology strikingly similar to that adopted by the Kuomintang regime in the 1930s: further, this ideology was in many respects retained on Taiwan until the 1990s. Like their 'pre-liberation' predecessors, though so far with considerably greater success in terms of economic growth, the Communist Party of the 'Reform and Opening' era has used state-centred nationalism to justify a labour-repressive model of rapid industrialisation and modernisation, leaving considerations of

social equity very much on the back burner. Neoliberal ideology, the ‘Washington consensus’ and human capital theory approaches to education as an ‘investment good’ have all no doubt had some influence on Chinese policymakers. But these international discourses of the market have also been tactically invoked to bolster a fundamentally statist rationale for the prioritising of rapid economic growth over the provision of basic public goods. For all the *laissez-faire* rhetoric that has emanated from government circles in recent years, especially when delegations from the World Bank come calling, China’s developmental strategy, like that of Meiji Japan, owes more to Friederich List than Adam Smith.

A former Education Minister Zhou Ji, echoing the then-President Jiang Zemin, has defined the priority for China’s higher education system as building a ‘personnel great power’ (*rencai qiangguo*) (Zhou, 2006). This priority reflects an elitist bent to recent education policy which has witnessed a drive to create ‘world class’ universities in the burgeoning cities, while across vast swathes of rural China access to basic education remains problematic. Policy is informed by an assumption that the ‘personnel’ who will achieve ‘great power’ status for China will be a highly-trained elite of technocrats – a modernising vanguard who will guide their benighted compatriots towards national strength and prosperity at top speed. The official orthodoxy, at least since the 1990s, has been that, given its condition of relative underdevelopment, China cannot afford the luxury of ‘welfarism’ – or an emphasis on securing basic public goods for its citizens – since this would divert resources from the supreme task of strengthening the nation through modernization and industrialization.

As many scholars have noted, often fierce debate has raged throughout China’s modern history concerning the priority to be accorded to spreading the benefits of development to ‘the masses’ – or between what Pepper has termed the discourses of ‘quality’ and ‘quantity’ (Pepper, 1996). Some advocates of ‘quantity’, most notably Mao, have seen a mass-based development strategy as also constituting the most rapid route to modernization and industrialization – but the terror unleashed during Mao’s great campaigns helped to discredit the cause of egalitarianism among China’s ‘intellectuals.’ The post-Mao period has thus witnessed a dramatic swing towards elitism or ‘quality’ and away from the pursuit of egalitarianism – a swing that accelerated in the 1990s following a brief post-Tiananmen hiatus. Under President Hu Jintao, in office since 2003, central government has increasingly acknowledged a need to curb the gross inequalities that have emerged within Chinese society over the past two decades – and official anxiety has been reinforced by persistent rumblings of popular discontent throughout the country, for example in the form of protests against corruption. However, as Shue and Wong (2007) emphasise, the Party remains unwilling to contemplate, or unable to implement, the radical reforms to China’s systems of political accountability and fiscal management that would be essential to fundamentally address existing inequities.

In the absence of an egalitarian, redistributive thrust to the practice of Chinese ‘socialism’, the Party’s ideologues have been assigned the task of repackaging the Communist brand – or rather, of refilling the existing package with new ideological content. At the same time as supreme leader Deng Xiaoping was relaunching his programme of pro-market economic reforms in 1991-2, the Party was also rolling out a parallel campaign of thought-reform: the ‘Patriotic Education Campaign’ (Zhao, 1998). The process of ideological reformation has continued, with President Jiang articulating his ‘Three Represents’ (*san ge daibiao*) with the aim of repositioning the Party

as the representative not just of the labouring masses, but of all ‘advanced forces’ working for the construction of a strong, modern China.<sup>11</sup> While strength and modernity were officially seen, thirty years ago, as allied to a vision of egalitarian socialist utopia, they are now portrayed as firmly rooted in the unique conditions and history of China, with the Party reappropriating a national past it had previously attacked as ‘feudal,’ and casting itself as the guardian of heritage and tradition. Having effectively abandoned the cause of social (let alone cultural) revolution, the Party has deployed patriotic discourse largely in order to align itself with a powerful and expanding constituency amongst the young, educated, urban middle classes. This is precisely the group that was at the forefront of challenges to the regime in 1989, but with whom appeals to state-centred patriotism resonate most strongly. Moreover, as already noted, this is also a social group that is disproportionately represented amongst students at senior high school level and above.

### ***Curriculum Development and ‘Patriotic Education’***

Bakken (2000) observes that one of the Communist Party’s key post-Tiananmen initiatives was a National Morality Conference, convened in 1990 – reflecting an official view that, just as failures of moral education had allowed the emergence of the recent Student Movement, so a reinvigoration of educational moralising would inoculate the nation’s youth against future subversion. The subsequent effort to moralise the nation went hand-in-hand with a drive to nationalise morality, in the form of the concerted campaign of Patriotic Education (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu*) that accompanied the re-launch of the Deng reforms. This campaign embraced not only the school, college and university curricula, but also the print and broadcast media, film, and the political education activities of work units (*danwei*) and the People’s Liberation Army (Zhao, 1998). The core themes of the campaign included a celebration of past developmental success under Communist leadership, but also an insistence that future prospects were potentially threatened by a host of factors – from domestic social or political ‘contradictions’, to foreign attempts to isolate China or foment internal discontent in order to frustrate the state’s continued development. China’s ‘national situation’ (*guoqing*) was represented as uniquely complex, as well as characterised by incommensurably ‘Chinese’ cultural and historical legacies, meaning that only the Communist Party – tried and tested in the fires of revolution and heroic resistance against the wartime Japanese onslaught – could be trusted to provide the steady hand required for the national tiller. It was also made clear that the course the Party would have to chart would be determined not by reference to abstract or universal principles such as democracy, but by a hard-headed assessment of national interests, informed by an awareness of the peculiar characteristics that distinguished China from all other nations and civilizations. While none of these ingredients of the post-Tiananmen ideological mix were particularly novel, ‘patriotic’ themes assumed far greater prominence in official discourse as socialism was abandoned or downplayed, both in practical and rhetorical terms.

While the school curriculum was a key vector for the regime’s patriotic message, this was conveyed not only through officially-sanctioned textbooks or formal lessons, but also in a host of other non-classroom based or extra-curricular activities or rituals – school assemblies, sports events, flag-raising ceremonies, or outings with the ‘Young Pioneers’ (an organisation somewhat similar to the Scouting movement). Within the academic curriculum, the main burden of patriotic

socialisation fell upon subjects such as Chinese History and Chinese Literature – though patriotic themes could be detected in texts for the whole range of school subjects. For example, Jones (2005) has analyzed the way in which history curriculum developers during the 1980s and more particularly the 1990s progressively diluted their emphasis on Marxist historical materialism as the organizing principle of the national narrative, and revised their approach to key figures and movements in order to celebrate commitment to the Chinese state, irrespective of ‘class background’. Thus commemoration of ‘peasant revolutions’ (*nongmin qiyi*) in ancient China, previously a recurrent theme of the narrative, gradually receded, and representatives of the traditional literati elite who had worked to modernise and strengthen the Qing, China’s last imperial dynasty, were lauded as stalwart patriots, having previously been derided as malevolent reactionaries.

The subjects of ‘Thought and Values’ and ‘Thought and Politics’, compulsory respectively at junior and senior high school level, have supplied the most explicit statements of the official ideological ‘line’ at any particular time, though in and of themselves the impact of these subjects on the consciousness of students may not have been as significant as that of other school subjects. Students – and teachers – commonly confide that they find these subjects intensely dry and dull, and claim that the lessons assigned to them are not taken particularly seriously. Nevertheless, these subjects are examined, thereby compelling students to read and memorise substantial chunks of their textbooks. Moreover, as already noted, these subjects also constitute a benchmark for ideological correctness not only for teachers and students, but also for curriculum developers. While recent years have witnessed some opening up and diversification of the market for school textbooks in subjects such as English, curriculum development remains highly centralised, with the People’s Education Press (PEP) in Beijing retaining a key role in the process. For most subjects, the PEP texts are still the default resource for schoolteachers, not least because the centralised system of curriculum development is paralleled by hierarchical arrangements for the setting of provincial and national examinations – with PEP texts also serving as benchmarks for examiners. Within PEP, meanwhile, as within any traditional state-run ‘work unit’ (*danwei*), the Party Committee oversees the activities of the organisation. The texts for ‘Thought and Politics’ can be seen as the clearest and most elaborate exposition of PEP’s organisational ‘take’ on the Communist Party’s official line, and thus as the clearest available indication of the political thinking that underpins the work of curriculum development more broadly.

### ***‘Thought and Politics’ (Sixiang Zhengzhi)***

Politics texts for use in senior high schools remained suffused with Marxist ideology throughout the 1980s, though the excesses of Maoism were effectively denounced through attacks not on the Great Helmsman himself, but on the Gang of Four: such attacks were particularly prominent in texts of the early 1980s. While the adoption of the economically liberalising reforms of the 1980s was justified on the grounds that China was only at the ‘first stage of socialism,’ texts continued to exhort students to ‘love the workers’ and to point out the fatal flaws of the capitalist system (People’s Education Press Curricular Materials Research Unit, 2001). Hughes notes that the ‘Thought and Politics’ curriculum in the mid-1990s continued to grant considerable prominence to Marxist or revolutionary as well as vehemently patriotic themes, although by then the ideological content had already shifted decisively from socialism to

patriotism (Hughes, 2006, 75). The 2007 edition of the ‘Thought and Politics’ course analyzed here observes a concentric approach of the kind also observed in the ‘Thought and Values’ texts, reflecting a similar shift towards what curriculum developers regard as a more student-centred approach (analysed elsewhere by Vickers, 2009). Political themes are accorded more prominence here than in the junior course, an emphasis deemed appropriate for older pupils. The course is divided into four textbooks, the first of which is devoted to ‘Economic Life’ (*Jingji shenghuo*) (People’s Education Press – hereafter PEP, 2007a), followed by ‘Political Life’ (*Zhengzhi shenghuo*) (PEP, 2007b), then ‘Cultural Life’ (*Wenhua shenghuo*) (PEP, 2007c) and finally ‘Life and Philosophy’ (*Shenghuo yu Zhexue*) (PEP, 2007d).<sup>iii</sup>

For the purposes of the present article, I will focus primarily on the volume dealing with ‘Political Life,’ but a brief overview of the other components of the course is necessary to provide some context. The first volume, on Economics, is striking for its brazen, though still implicit, abandonment of socialism in favour of an open embrace of the market. The text warns against the moral and social consequences of excessive materialism, with particular reference to the evils of corruption, and the fair distribution of wealth is acknowledged as an issue to be addressed. However, a significant role for the state in effecting any redistribution of wealth is seemingly not envisaged, and students are told that the socialist market economy must follow the principle of ‘efficiency before all’ (PEP, 2007a, 66). Fairness is to be achieved by encouraging wealthier individuals and regions to help those (individuals and regions) in need – the sort of thinking evident in policies such as the ‘Great Western Development Drive’ (*Xibu Da Kaifa*). In economic terms (though not in other respects), the vision appears to be of a minimalist state, one that provides basic services but which otherwise stands ready to provide emergency relief when needed. Examples are cited of the SARS outbreak of 2003 and of the need to be constantly ready to meet military emergencies (*ibid.*, 75).

In the volume on ‘Political Life,’ examined below, patriotic themes come more explicitly to the fore, and both there and in the third volume, on ‘Cultural Life,’ an intensification of international competition in the contemporary world is invoked to underline the importance of maximising national strength. ‘Culture’ is given an extremely broad definition, encompassing artistic heritage and traditional values, but also ‘science’ and advanced knowledge in all spheres; ‘culture’ in both senses is represented as essential for the progress of the nation:

Culture and the competition for comprehensive national strength (*zonghe guoli*):

In the contemporary world, competition between countries for comprehensive national strength is rapidly intensifying. The importance of culture to comprehensive national strength is becoming more and more apparent. The power of culture is inextricably bound up with (*rongzhu* – cast, fused with) a nation’s life-force (*shengmingli*), creative strength and cohesion (*ningjuli*), so that it becomes an important mark of comprehensive national strength. (PEP, 2007c, 11)

This point is driven home with allusions to recent rapid economic development (a photograph shows the Shenzhen skyline lit up by night), China’s speed in developing a hydrogen bomb (quicker than any other country), and the Chinese space programme (the country being one of a very small number of countries who have one). ‘Based on the above materials,’ students are

asked, ‘what can you tell about the relationship between culture and comprehensive national strength with respect to technological level and spiritual conditions (*keji shuiping he jingshen zhuangtai*)?’ (ibid., 12).

Here ‘culture’ is equated with the advanced technology and skills necessary for making China a ‘personnel great power’ (*rencai qiangguo*), but the text goes on to emphasise the importance of ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ and ‘constructing socialist culture with Chinese characteristics’ (*jianshe zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi wenhua*). This effectively repackages for the twenty-first century the old dichotomy of the late Qing dynasty advocates of ‘self-strengthening’: ‘Chinese learning for fundamentals; Western learning for practical use’ (*Zhongxue wei ti; Xixue wei yong*). Students are presented with a table outlining two extreme views of culture represented as having polarised debate within China during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: on the one hand were the all-out Westernisers, who regarded all traditional Chinese culture as a dead-weight holding the nation back; on the other were the ‘traditionalists’ (or ‘cultural reactionaries’ – *wenhua fugu zhuyi*), who argued that all foreign influences should be resisted or expunged, and the purity of Chinese culture upheld (ibid., 95). The role of the Chinese Communist Party in navigating a course between these two extremes is then praised.<sup>iv</sup> The ‘socialist’ in ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ turns out to consist of little more than an emphasis on the importance of honesty (in interpersonal and commercial dealings) and a broadly collectivist orientation. The ‘Culture’ volume concludes with another warning to students of the dangers of unfettered materialism and individualism, and the importance of an ‘all for one, one for all’ attitude (*renren wei wo, wo wei renren*). This is reinforced by the illustration on the final page of the text – a photograph of young office workers, soldiers and sailors, male and female, standing to attention with raised fists at a patriotic ceremony. The caption reminds readers that ‘striving for a higher standard of morality starts with me’ (ibid., 112). This sort of exhortation serves as a reminder to students that national development depends on the moral commitment of individual citizens – but the flip side of this is that ‘backwardness’ is to be seen as reflecting an individual or collective lack of moral fibre. Murphy (2007) has examined the way in which such messages have been propagated through the Party’s discourse on *suzhi*, or population ‘quality,’ shifting blame for the backwardness of much of rural China onto the shoulders of rural residents themselves.

For reasons that should require no elaboration, little attempt is made to relate the vision of socialism presented in the volumes on ‘Cultural Life’ and, more especially, on ‘Economic Life,’ to the social or political agenda of Marx or other founding fathers of Communism. More extensive discussion of Marx, Engels and other prominent Communist thinkers is conducted at a highly abstract and theoretical level in the final volume of the course, on ‘Life and Philosophy’ (PEP, 2007d). Here they are cited in support of a resolutely ‘realist,’ ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ approach to the world – rejecting ‘unscientific’ superstition and religion. Ancient Chinese philosophers such as Confucius (ibid., 74), as well as Western thinkers, including Einstein (ibid., 67), are also invoked to reinforce messages concerning the relationship between dialectical reasoning and human progress. The implications of dialectical materialism for a socialist reordering of society are not explored – rather, grasping the principles of dialectical thought is represented as one of the pre-conditions for attaining the inventiveness and creativity seen as essential to national prosperity and strength.



The prosperity and material security that a command of technology can bring would probably be considered worthwhile in themselves by most Chinese teachers and students. However, the text emphasises that the importance of scientific and technological progress lies not only – nor even, perhaps, primarily – in any impact on individual livelihoods, but in the impact on the nation. The link between science, development and national strength is underlined by a juxtaposition of images of imperialist invaders (equipped with topis and swagger-sticks) marching through the Chinese countryside during the suppression of the Boxer Uprising of 1900, a picture of Chairman Mao announcing the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China from Beijing's Tiananmen Gate in 1949 ('the Chinese people have stood up!'), and the ultra-modern skyline of contemporary Shanghai (ibid., 61). The message is clear: China's mastery of science and technology, and the economic strength this brings, both symbolise the new status of China, and ensure that the nation will never again suffer humiliation at the hands of foreign aggressors. Moreover, the text emphasises that both economic and technological progress itself and the ability to deploy the fruits of that progress to defend the nation against foreign threats ultimately depend on the adherence of the masses to a collectivist rather than an individualist ethos. The historic contribution of the CCP lies in successfully embodying this collectivist ethos, and in drawing together the advanced and progressive forces of the entire Chinese nation.

### *Political life (zhengzhi shenghuo)*

As with the course as a whole, the volume on political life adopts a concentric structure – beginning with a unit on the 'political life' of individual citizens and communities (and the forms of their 'democratic' participation in local affairs); then a unit on the theme of 'the government that serves the people' (*wei renmin fuwu de zhengfu*); thirdly a unit devoted to 'constructing socialist political civilization'; and finally a unit on 'contemporary international society'.

### *A Government for the People*

The first chapter – 'Life in a country where the people are sovereign' – briefly contrasts the squalor and suffering of pre-revolutionary China, where the rich looked after themselves and the government did nothing for the poorest, with the situation in 'New' China, where the government cares for all the people. The contrast is driven home with descriptions of the response to great floods on the Yangtse River in 1931 and 1998 – in the former case, we are told, almost 1.5 million people lost their lives, and we are shown a picture of wealthy citizens being borne aloft on palanquins above the floodwaters. However, in 1998 'only' 3,004 people died as a result of the flooding, because of the valiant efforts of soldiers, officials and ordinary citizens working together – illustrated with a picture of soldiers battling the floodwaters: 'The masses with one heart – together resisting the flood' (*wan zhong yi xin, gongtong kang hong*) (PEP, 2007b, 4). Comparisons are then made between the grinding poverty of life in the countryside before 'liberation,' and the comfort and prosperity which the text claims are enjoyed by many farmers today.

A prominent theme of this text is the ‘accountability’ of the government at various levels to the people, and the mechanisms that ensure such accountability. Shue and Wong (2007) note that many of the problems with China’s governance, and particularly with the provision or lack of various public goods, arise from the way in which lines of political accountability in fact run in precisely the opposite direction – with local cadres subject to a rigidly top-down and highly centralised system of performance appraisals. However, in this textbook Mao himself is depicted and quoted endorsing democracy (PEP, 2007b, 3), and the institution of elections for local officials is dated back to the early 1950s. Incidentally, nowhere in these texts is reference made to the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution, and the political excesses and famine that resulted from these mass movements. However, for the current Chinese leadership memories of these catastrophes remains fresh, and are often invoked to illustrate the dangers of handing over too much power to the masses.<sup>v</sup> The chaotic nature of ‘unguided’ democracy at village level is illustrated with a sequence of cartoons showing the various problems and irregularities that beset a village in the process of organising its own elections (ibid., 32). The caption underneath this sequence explains, ‘After three elections, [this village] still had not managed to elect a chairman of the village committee. Finally, under the guidance of the local government they completed the election task.’

‘Accountability’ is also represented as involving a responsibility on the part of government to keep people informed, and a role is acknowledged for the media, along with the judiciary, the Peoples Congresses, ‘state bodies’ and ‘society and citizens’ in ‘supervising’ the government. The consequences of such supervision for a corrupt official are illustrated with a cartoon sequence showing the official raking in huge piles of cash, building a private villa for himself, but ending up handcuffed in court with a sign over his head reading ‘death penalty’ (ibid., 43). However, the assumption throughout is that the key vehicle for the exercise of the People’s sovereignty is the Party itself, animated as it is by the ethos of ‘serving the People’ (*wei renmin fuwu*). The handling of the SARS crisis of 2003 is again invoked as an instance of the successful fulfilment by the government (and Party) of its responsibilities to the people, and of open and accountable governance: a photograph depicts a grinning official from the World Health Organisation inspecting the situation at a clinic (ibid., 36).

The legitimacy of the CCP is represented as deriving from ‘the choice of history and of the people’ (*lishi he renmin de xuanze*) (ibid., 62) – the ‘history’ in question being the story of China’s vicissitudes during the early twentieth century, culminating in the Civil War with the Kuomintang and the final overthrow of China’s ‘feudal’ political and social systems. But the continuing fulfilment of the mandate that the Party thus received is also explicitly linked to its vaunted success in recent years in achieving modernisation and economic growth, bringing China to the level of ‘economic sufficiency’ (*xiaokang shehui* – literally ‘a prosperous and secure society’) (ibid., 64). China’s ‘multi-party system with Chinese characteristics’ (whereby several other ‘democratic parties’ allied with the Communists are permitted to continue in existence) is explained, as is the system of People’s Congresses. This peculiar ‘multi-party system’ is ‘definitely not the so-called one-party system of Western propaganda, just as it is fundamentally different from the multi-party system of the West. It is a party system that suits the national situation (*guoqing*) of our country, and it has already demonstrated its powerful vitality and superiority’ (ibid., 71).

*Trusteeship in minority regions – a dual mandate with Chinese characteristics?*

Performance legitimacy is also the principal plank of the legitimacy of the Party's rule over the ethnic minority regions and peoples of the PRC. The chapter on 'Our Country's System of Autonomous Ethnic Regions and Religious System' begins with a triumphant passage on the 'historic leap [forward] of the snowy high plateau [i.e. Tibet]'. This trumpets the epochal shifts in Tibetan society, from the 'feudal' dispensation prior to 1959 which is also the year of the flight of the Dalai Lama – who is not mentioned by name), to the present day when the government of Tibet is elected by the local people (statistics illustrate the numerical dominance of representative organs in Tibet by members of 'minority nationalities'). However, the principal emphasis is on statistics that demonstrate the economic and technological development of Tibet. These statistics demonstrate the massive increase in the generation and use of electricity (a picture shows the Electricity and Telegraph Building – *dianxin dalou* – in Lhasa), the large investment in the region by the central government, and the number of programmes supporting Tibetan development involving organisations (business and government) from all around China (ibid., 73). Photographs of minorities – always wearing traditional dress, always smiling, usually female – further underline the message that these backward brother (or sister) nationalities are the grateful recipients of benefits bestowed by the (predominantly Han) Party. The autonomy of the minorities in their own regions, as well as their full and enthusiastic participation in the organs of the central government, especially the National People's Congress, is also emphasised, with the nature of the relationship between these peoples of the periphery and the centre illustrated by a photograph of a fountain installed on Beijing's Tiananmen Square: the central water feature is surrounded by a circle of heart-shaped floral arrangements which is 'a symbol of the solidarity of the people of all races' (*ge zu renmin wanzhong yixin de xiangzheng*) (ibid., 79).

Celebration of the solidarity of all of China's nationalities, and their different contributions to the common goals of national development – Xinjiang gives its oil, Inner Mongolia its pastoral products – depicts relations between the 'advanced' *neidi* ('China Proper') and these peripheral regions in terms somewhat reminiscent of the 'dual mandate' vision that informed much early 20<sup>th</sup>-century British thinking about colonial governance. In other words, metropolitan control is justified in terms of enlightened trusteeship, whereby in the Chinese case the 'advanced' (Han) Party leadership brings civilization, modernization and development to backward regions, while the primary produce of these regions contributes to further industrial development in the metropolis.

As with enlightened British proconsuls of the Lugard school minus the muscular Christianity, the mission of the Chinese state in 'minority' regions is also linked to its attempts to gently guide these peoples away from the untrammelled influence of 'superstition'. Religious faith is key to the identity of significant 'minority nationalities' such as the Tibetans and the Uighurs – and to the tensions in their relationships with the Party. 'Our country's religions have a tradition of patriotism' declares the text (ibid., 81), before noting that China legally guarantees religious freedom. The text also points out that respecting religious freedom does not mean encouraging religious belief – rather, it is 'our' responsibility to respect the principles of materialism, and to treat religion 'scientifically' (ibid., 84). In an implicit allusion to the association of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism with – respectively – 'imperialist'-sponsored missionaries, Uighur

terrorists and Tibetan separatists, the text also notes that religion in the 'New China' has undergone fundamental reform and democratisation. So it is no longer a tool of 'imperialist or feudal forces'; rather, religious groups are now under the control of the masses of the believers themselves, and have become an important component of the patriotic forces backing national unification and socialism with Chinese characteristics (ibid.). But the leadership of these forces, we are reminded again, lies absolutely with the Communist Party itself, which according to the 'important thought' of the 'Three Represents' (*san ge daibiao*) stands at the vanguard of all 'advanced' elements working for the achievement of 'socialist political civilization' (*shehuizhuyi zhengzhi wenming*). It should also be noted that the later 'Life and Philosophy' volume rather undermines any message of religious tolerance and diversity with its denunciations of the obstacles posed by religion and superstition to 'science' and 'objectivity'.

*A modern Chinese nation takes its rightful place in the world*

Having dealt with issues relating to domestic politics, the volume on 'Political Life' concludes with a unit devoted to China's place in the wider world. An image of the United Nations headquarters in New York decorates the opening page of this section, and China's active and prominent role in various international organisations is celebrated. However, the text stresses that the authority of these international institutions is clearly circumscribed by the principle of 'national sovereignty', independence, and equality between sovereign states. It is explained that the basic principle underlying international relations is 'national interest' (*guojia liyi*), and this is illustrated with pictures showing a meeting of the Group of Eight leaders, a cultural exchange (a classical concert) between China and unspecified 'foreign' countries, meetings between Chinese leaders and their Western counterparts, and a report of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq (ibid., 95). Students are then asked to reflect on the factors that determine international collaboration or conflict – having already been primed to respond that the key factor is 'national interest'.

There follows an abstract discussion of the political, economic, cultural and military aspects of international relations, concluding with an unequivocal condemnation of any and all attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of another sovereign state. Such interference is always motivated by a desire on the part of the interfering state to promote its own national interests, but 'in the long run' it is the interests of the latter and its citizens that will suffer. By way of illustration, the following passage is inserted at this point:

'From 1990 onwards, the United States and some Western countries repeatedly filed reports regarding the issue of the so-called Chinese human rights problem in the United Nations Human Rights Committee. As a result of the combined efforts of China and the majority of righteous (*zhengyi*) countries, these anti-China reports were repeatedly defeated. The schemes of these Western countries to interfere in China's internal affairs have still not succeeded (*wei neng de cheng*) [the implication being that such scheming is ongoing].' (ibid., 96)

Other instances of American interference in China's internal affairs are then listed alongside other, more positive events in Sino-American relations: the 'Taiwan Relations Act' of 1979; the suspension by the United States of bilateral relations, including military exchanges, in June 1989

(no allusion is made to the post-June 4 crackdown as the reason for this); and the NATO bombing of China's Belgrade Embassy in 1999 (again, the context for this incident – the intervention to halt atrocities in Kosovo – is not mentioned).

Having established that other countries are out to pursue their own national interests, often at the expense of China, this chapter concludes with a section detailing 'the steadfast protection of our national interests.' 'To protect our national interests is to protect the fundamental interests of the broad masses,' declares the text, before listing these as 'security interests, such as national unification, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; political interests, such as the stability of our country's political, economic, cultural and other systems; and economic interests, such as our national interests in the use of [natural] resources, in economic activity (*jingji huodong*) and in the expansion of our national material base (*guojia wuzhi jichu*)' (ibid., 97-8). This is followed by a declaration that China also respects the rights of other countries to pursue their own interests. However, as we have seen, previous passages emphasise that Western countries in particular habitually fail to respect China's rights in this regard. Examples presented here of the successful pursuit of China's national interest include the awarding of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing, and Deng Xiaoping's insistence in talks with Mrs. Thatcher in 1982 that Britain accept the principle of China's sovereignty over Hong Kong, leading to the latter's return to the Motherland in 1997.

China's 'peaceful development' and the promotion of 'world peace', progress and development, are represented in the concluding chapter of this *Political Life* volume as complementary objectives. However, the text makes plain that China's unequivocal commitment to world peace is not shared by other world powers: 'Hegemonism (*baquan zhuyi*) and power politics (*qiangquan zhengzhi*) have new manifestations, and under the cover of slogans such as "freedom," "democracy" and "human rights," some powerful countries often violate the sovereignty of other countries, and interfere with their internal affairs' (ibid., 100). Unlike China, a number of Western countries have evidently not learnt the lessons of the Second World War regarding the importance of world peace (the chapter opens with a passage on the horrors of this war, and observations regarding the importance of peace to development). These Western countries have foolishly complicated and aggravated existing ethnic and religious 'contradictions' and territorial disputes. The text implies that they are thus responsible for the rise in global terrorism which is currently fuelling social instability, rising poverty and the drug trade in many parts of the world. Reflecting the Marxist view of history as dialectic, the text asserts that each era of history is characterised by a fundamental 'contradiction,' and that the uneven development of 'North and South' constitutes the outstanding 'contradiction' of the contemporary world. China is here clearly identified with the cause of the developing world, and with opposition to war in general.

Having raised the issue of the need for a 'new international order' in the post-1991 era (i.e. in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, though the collapse of the old Communist bloc is not directly alluded to), the text sets out the principles that guide the Chinese government's engagement with the rest of the world. Broadly speaking these involve 'mutual respect' in the areas of politics, economics, culture and security: in other words, nations should refrain from foisting on each other their own political opinions, economic policies, or cultural practices, and should seek to bolster security on the basis of trust and dialogue. This line, of course, stands in

stark contrast to the aforementioned ‘hegemonism’ of ‘some powerful countries’, thus the emergence of a ‘multi-polar world’ is broadly to be welcomed. The poles of this new world order, illustrated with a map and accompanying text, include the United States (the world’s most powerful state), Japan (an economic superpower with aspirations to become a political power as well), an increasingly unified Europe, Russia (which, the text tells us, possesses huge economic and technological potential as well as military power), and China itself (ibid., 102). India, interestingly, does not figure as a major player in the worldview presented here, though it features in passing in this chapter as one among a number of ‘neighbouring countries’ with which China is keen to bolster ‘peaceful relations’ in order to secure a favourable environment for continued economic development.

Considerable space is devoted to discussion of European integration, but this is regarded solely as an economic phenomenon rather than as a political and cultural project as well. The strengthening of Europe’s economic performance vis-à-vis America between the 1950s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is presented as an instance of successful adaptation in the context of the intensifying competition seen as characterising international relations. If European integration holds lessons for China, these apparently do not include the lesson that the pooling of national sovereignty can carry benefits, and this aspect of European integration is not explained. Rather, the key conclusion drawn is that the strengthening of Europe as a counterweight to American ‘hegemony’ is a good thing. Just as a strong Europe is better able to stand up for its members in the international arena, so a strong China will be better placed to promote its own interests. These interests, the text repeatedly emphasises, require China to adhere to the path of ‘peaceful development’ (*heping fazhan*), but the promotion of peaceful development also involves strengthening the army, navy and air force in order to reinforce national defence (ibid., 110). Here and elsewhere in texts for this and other school subjects, such as History, the globalising world of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century is depicted as offering great opportunities to China, while also posing actual or potential threats to the state’s internal harmony and rightful position within the international concert of nations. The importance of national unification, a strong state, and the relationship between state weakness and ‘national humiliation,’ are concerns that constitute the subtext to curricular representations of the relationship between the citizen and the state in China.

## ***Conclusion***

There is a long tradition in China whereby the state defines the purpose of its involvement in education in terms of a civilising mission – spreading the benefits of mainstream Han culture to benighted peasants in the countryside, or to border peoples wallowing in various depths of uncivilised ignorance and barbarity (Schneewind, 2006). Analysis of the ‘Thought and Politics’ texts currently in use in Chinese high schools appears to indicate that this sense of the state-led mission of education, and its capacity and duty to bring about moral transformation, is alive and well – at least in the minds of curriculum developers and Party officials. This no doubt reflects the persistence in China of what Fong and Murphy, citing Aihwa Ong, term a ‘pastoral’ model of state-society relations (Fong and Murphy, 2006). In other words, the state is cast in the role of a stern but benevolent form-master, and the citizens are cast as his (ideally) respectful, attentive and dependent pupils. However, though this idealised vision of the state-society relationship may have remained relatively constant, the content of the moral and political catechism set before

students has changed significantly. In contrast to the egalitarian rhetoric of socialism and class struggle that predominated thirty years ago, the central message now is of the need to pursue 'comprehensive national strength' with all possible speed, largely irrespective of the social costs this might involve.

A 'pastoral' approach to state-society relations is certainly not unique to China. It is shared, for example, by the other 'Confucian' societies of East Asia, where moral education and political socialisation are also accorded prominence as state-mandated goals of schooling, and where history is also typically used to inculcate a fairly chauvinist national narrative (see Vickers and Jones, 2005). However, a key difference between China's current developmental strategy and those pursued earlier by its East Asian neighbours is that in postwar Japan, Taiwan and Korea, 'all for one and one for all' rhetoric was generally accompanied by policies that actually did produce a relatively equitable distribution of wealth (Green et al., 2007). In China, by contrast, the collectivist rhetoric which continues to permeate school texts has clashed with a widening urban-rural and class divide in the world outside the school gates and, indeed, within them as well. In this context, an all-pervasive emphasis on state-centred patriotism above all legitimises – or is intended to legitimise the entrenchment of established political authority, and aims to do so by depicting the domestic and international situation as beset by various perils requiring the subordination of all other goals to the strengthening of the state.

History is replete with examples of regimes that have pursued an analogous legitimisation strategy, but in some ways the closest and certainly the most uncomfortable parallel to the Chinese case is perhaps that of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. There too, an intensely Darwinian vision of the international order reinforced a concerted drive for rapid economic development with the overriding purpose of strengthening national power and status; and, there too, an entrenched political elite assigned a central role to moral and patriotic education in justifying a labour-repressive model of development without democratisation or effective mechanisms of political accountability. This comparison raises some interesting and disturbing questions, which it should be the purpose of further research to elaborate and explore.

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- Thought and Politics 1: Economic Life (sixiang zhengzhi 1: jingji shenghuo)*. (2007a).
- Thought and Politics 2: Political Life (sixiang zhengzhi 2: zhengzhi shenghuo)*. (2007b).
- Thought and Politics 3: Cultural Life (sixiang zhengzhi 3: wenhua shenghuo)*. (2007c).
- Thought and Politics 4: Life and Philosophy (sixiang zhengzhi 4: shenghuo yu zhexue)*. (2007d).





<sup>i</sup> The Chinese authorities at national, provincial and sub-provincial levels faced considerable domestic criticism over the handling of these three major crises or scandals during 2008. February witnessed freak snowstorms in central and southern China (an area where heavy snowfalls are extremely rare), cutting off power and transport links to many rural communities and disrupting the travel arrangements of millions of migrant workers attempting to return home for the Spring Festival holiday. What many saw as an initially slow and incompetent response to the crisis on the part of local government prompted the central authorities to launch an energetic exercise in damage limitation. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao made highly publicised visits to affected areas, and in a speech to stranded rail passengers acknowledged the initial inadequacy of the official reaction to the disaster. Senior Party leaders were far quicker on the scene two months later when a catastrophic earthquake hit Sichuan Province in Southwest China. Official responses to both these crises, and particularly to the earthquake, demonstrated both the increasingly polished nature of the Party's media management operation, and a constant recapitulation of patriotic themes as a means of invoking and celebrating a collective national effort to 'overcome' adversity, and deflecting criticism of any prior government failings that may have exacerbated the crisis. In the case of the earthquake, such criticism centred around the apparently lax application of construction standards for public buildings in the affected areas, demonstrated by the way in which numerous school buildings crumbled, while the residences of local cadres and businessmen nearby remained standing. Initial toleration of protests on the part of parents whose children had been killed by the collapse of school buildings had given way, by the end of the year, to a clampdown on continued expressions of discontent on this issue. Meanwhile, in the period just before and during the Beijing Olympics, news was suppressed of a breaking scandal over the contamination of powdered milk with a chemical designed to boost its apparent protein content. Central government stipulations that only 'positive' news be reported during the Olympics appeared to have prevented or deterred both local officials from taking action, and the Chinese media from publicising this issue earlier. It was only after the Olympics that news of the scandal surfaced and action was taken to withdraw tainted products from circulation, but a number of children died and several hundred were taken ill. Official responses to all three of these crises – the snowstorm, the earthquake, and the tainted milk scandal – thus illustrated the argument of Shue and Wong concerning the way in which bottom-up patterns of official accountability render local authorities hamstrung when it comes to exercising initiative in dealing with local crises, or representing the interests of local communities in dealings with higher levels of government (rather than *vice versa*). The shoddy construction standards of public buildings in poorer areas, as revealed by the earthquake, also graphically illustrated the consequences for poorer regions of this skewed pattern of accountability combined with corruption and under-investment in public goods.

<sup>ii</sup> The 'Three Represents', an 'important thought' (*zhongyao sixiang*) adumbrated by former President Jiang Zemin, was enshrined as a feature of Communist Party orthodoxy at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002. This idea was explained as an assertion of the principle that Party ideology should represent the interests of 'advanced social productive forces', 'advanced culture', and the interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. It was widely interpreted as signaling a further move in the transformation of the Communist regime into a broad-based ruling party tasked with promoting modernization and an enhancement of national strength, and away from its former self-definition as a revolutionary vanguard prioritizing the interests of workers and peasants. In this respect, it was significant that the adoption of the Three Represents as official Party ideology was accompanied by a move to legitimize the granting of Party membership to businessmen – though in practice many 'capitalists' had long been Party members.

<sup>iii</sup> There are also a number of optional modules with corresponding textbooks for the new 'Thought and Politics' course, as for the new senior High History course – but for reasons of space I am concentrating here on the core texts.

<sup>iv</sup> At this point, it may be supposed that some of those teachers old enough to remember the Cultural Revolution might privately ponder how that campaign squares with the moderate view of culture that is here represented as consistent Party policy. The textbook offers no answers – analysis, as distinct from description, of the Cultural Revolution is taboo in Chinese textbooks (the episode is thus effectively portrayed as a freakish disaster, the causes of which are left obscure).

<sup>v</sup> a discourse tapped by Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, when in October 2007 he was grilled by an interviewer regarding the reasons for delaying progress towards full democracy in Hong Kong.