

# **Moral Education in Contemporary China: Cultivating Character through Ideology**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In Chinese classrooms, a dynamic and complex interplay occurs as knowledge transmission converges with the shaping of the nation's moral compass. Educators have a responsibility to not only nurture young minds, but also align their teaching practices with the nation's ideological framework. This significant endeavor involves addressing a central issue that forms the essence of this dissertation: How can educators effectively integrate the current ideological framework into their teaching strategies amid the complex and diverse ideological landscape of China?

This study is about moral education, a field that combines an intricate fusion of tradition and contemporary perspectives with the ever-changing societal context. It is a field where past wisdom intersects with present ideologies, and where the objectives of a global superpower meet the complexities of individual lives. The aim is to examine the relationship between constructed realities in the classroom and the ideological framework that underpin moral education in China. Using sociological theories and insights, this study aims to illuminate the sociocultural factors that influence the educational setting. The goal is to delve into the complexities of moral education and unveil the subtle dynamics that affect educational decisions in order to create a synthesis where theory and practice meet. Yet a significant challenge arises: didactic approaches used by teachers often struggle to connect educational ideals with the lived realities of students.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate objective of this academic pursuit is the frontline of education itself: the classrooms. Here, the dissertation conducts fieldwork examining the experiences of teachers and the intricate web of student interactions.

This dissertation explores the fundamental premise that individuals' realities are not just shaped by their personal experiences, but also by the dominant influence of institutional authorities and social norms. This complex process occurs through the imposition of normative guidelines and the existence of an overarching ideological framework. This framework essentially gives the appearance of free will and voluntary action, while individuals are actually navigating and operating within pre-established boundaries and limitations. In this context, educators have a significant responsibility to communicate the prevailing ideological constructs to their students. Moreover, educators must cultivate an environment where students are informed of this framework and motivated to comply with it. The central argument of this thesis posits that *reality* is a constructed notion, designed to align with an idealized framework. This framework, in turn, serves as a guiding principle for shaping the perspectives and behaviors of future generations. The objective of this dissertation is to investigate diverse aspects of moral education in China, tracing the interaction of sociocultural factors, academic methodologies, and the development of moral awareness.

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<sup>1</sup>To maintain a consistent style and avoid using age- and system-specific nouns to refer to school children, the term "student" is employed throughout this dissertation. This term encompasses all school-age children unless otherwise specified, and also conveniently reflects the Chinese usage (*xuesheng* (学生)).

This dissertation's central thesis proposes that what is perceived to be outdated pedagogical approaches, which still dominate the educational system in China, are seen to struggle to address the diverse perspectives and experiences of Chinese students. This inherent limitation presents a difficult challenge for educators striving to integrate moral education into the current framework of pedagogical ideals. China's present educational environment is largely influenced by what Chinese education planners regard as outmoded teaching paradigms. These didactic approaches, while providing a standardized and structured curriculum believed necessary to cater for a vast student population, does fail, so they think, to engage with the dynamic and diverse life experiences of students within the evolving social landscape. Despite significant progress in global recognition, the education system in China still struggles with the undiminished challenge of reconciling the ideological framework with classroom practices. Teachers often struggle to incorporate real-life relevance into their students' moral education due to the constraints of predetermined content and assessment-driven agendas. The intersection of education, ideology, and moral development is complex, yet scarcely touched upon in current literature on Chinese education in terms of how teachers in China view their role in their students' moral education.

Sociological theories provide several credible and effective approaches to moral education in China and its integration within an ideological framework. They facilitate comprehension of why specific structural processes are present and how they have evolved, displaying logical consistency during several decades. This research in summary aims to contribute significantly to the academic discussion on moral education and societal ideologies in China through new insights into how the complex social structures that impact moral education intersect with students' perspectives and how educators must navigate the interplay of sociological forces, pedagogical methodologies, and ideological trends while aligning moral education within existing pedagogical ideologies.

## **1.1 Design and methodology of the study**

Because "moral education" plays an important role within the school curriculum of the People's Republic of China (PRC), I give priority to exploring the curriculum item *Morality and the Rule of Law*, which combines a pre-established ideological framework in China with the necessary qualities and knowledge required to cultivate a "good" citizen within the Chinese context. The analysis of the institutional mechanisms responsible for aligning the "socially constructed reality" with Chinese societal ideals is achieved by examining the role of teachers in aligning educational policies with the development of individual character. Its aim, to establish a dynamic framework for reality construction that conforms with prevailing social norms, is explored through a case study analysis of moral education classes at schools in Beijing, China.



### 1.1.1 Research question, hypothesis and open-ended approach

Moral education faces various challenges including the need to adapt to shifting societal values, provide adequate teacher training, and engage students from diverse backgrounds and interests. The task of instilling significant values in students is complex, as it requires balancing ideological and ethical viewpoints while addressing resource limitations and external pressures. To achieve this objective, moral education maintains a standardized approach to provide students with a foundation for their actions within ideological thinking. To address the significance of moral education in China effectively, I propose the following **research question** for this dissertation:

**Why does the integration of moral education into the school curriculum pose challenges in aligning individuals' constructed realities with the prevailing ideological framework in China?**

This dissertation **hypothesizes** that teachers of moral education are challenged in aligning individuals' constructed realities with the prevailing ideological framework in China because didactic guidelines fall short of the students' actual experiences, while rigid normative curriculum directives restrict the teachers' professional flexibility in the classroom.

It posits that teachers play a central role in bridging the gap between moral education and dominant ideologies. Their instructional methods, interactions, and guidance influence the way that students understand and internalize this prevailing framework, shaping individuals' constructed realities. The necessary **methodical approach** I have chosen involves situating the construction of reality within sociological theory and identifying the underlying conditions involved. Utilizing these theoretical foundations, the next step involves conducting a detailed analysis of how moral education is integrated in the social construction of reality. This involves a thorough investigation of the educational policies that impact moral education content, as well as the teaching methods that enact or perhaps rather *carry* out those guidelines. To clarify teachers' daily journey through this complex field, it is essential to explicate ideal types and the guiding ideology through a comprehensive review of existing literature. Finally, this dissertation examines the current state of education, with a focus on classrooms and conducts comprehensive research on the experiences of teachers. The aim is to gain a first-hand understanding of how Chinese teachers perceive their role in the intricate web of moral education.

This dissertation adopts an **open-ended approach** to study the construction of realities in Chinese schools. Such an approach allows for the consideration of multiple explanations and viewpoints, thereby enhancing the explanatory power of the analysis and interpretation of findings without imposing rigid definition, in order to allow for openness to new information that may challenge the initial hypothesis or assumptions. In this spirit, the focus is on the implementation of policies and the involvement of education bureaus, as they change over time and call for incremental, holistic and non-judgemental understanding, by implication obviating the need for independent evaluation of the appropriateness of policies or decision-

making processes, and instead constitutes an in-depth analysis of governmental decisions, educators' perspectives, and observations. The study focuses specifically on schools located in the Beijing Municipality fieldwork conducted from October 2022 to July 2023.

The **objective** of this study is to gain a better understanding of Chinese society and its educational institutions, which may seem remote and unapproachable to outsiders, in particular of moral development in Chinese schools and provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of their impact on the moral and behavioral patterns of Chinese students in the broader social context.

This research is based on practical experience and intuitive insights, avoiding heavy reliance on formal, structured data analysis methods. Thus, it falls under the heuristic category of case studies, defined by George and Bennett (2005) as a means of “inductively identifying new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal pathways” (p. 75). Due to its case study nature, the aim of this dissertation is to provide insights into the causal mechanisms of curriculum-based instruction and its performance during teaching within the observed schools. The findings of this study shall serve as a basis for further comprehensive analysis and extended fieldwork to reinforce the patterns and conclusions discussed in this dissertation.

### 1.1.2 Case study design

To address the central research question of this dissertation, I have employed a case study methodology to the analysis of specific cases from schools in Beijing, with a focus on teaching methods, student-teacher interactions, and the overall school environment. This methodology made it possible to examine how schools and educators implement policies within the current ideological framework. It also enabled a detailed exploration of educators' perspectives and how they align these policies with their teaching methods in the school setting.

Case studies, defined as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is - at least in part - to shed light on a larger class of cases” (Gerring, 2007, p. 20), is not a new, as Odum already in 1929 described it as “a technique by which individual factor whether it be an institution or just an episode in the life of an individual or a group is analysed in its relationship to any other in the group.”<sup>2</sup> There are some advantages and limitations associated with case studies that should be briefly outlined. Primarily used in qualitative methods, case studies are small-N investigations that focus on selected cases rather than broad sample populations. These cases are purposefully selected to allow for in-depth observations. Case studies not only allow for the exploration of social dynamics, but also facilitate the validation of existing social theories or the development of new ones through grounded theory. They aid in the formulation of hypotheses alongside the collection of data in authentic settings, which in turn allows for a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral patterns of the subject under study. In addition, case studies offer the flexibility to employ one or more research methodologies (Kothari, 2004, p. 115). Gerring (2007) and George and Bennett (2005) further state that case studies are useful for approaching new phenomena, they allow us to

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<sup>2</sup>Can be found in H. Odum, *An Introduction to Social Research*, p. 229, 1929.

consider more details, can establish internal validity of causal relationships, and are a good choice when data on the whole population are rare. Case studies also allow us to use a variety of methods and data sources for exploration and investigation (Chadderton and Torrance, 2011).

However, there are some limitations associated with case studies. Some scholars point out that case studies have a kind of subjective bias in collecting data and influencing findings and conclusions by holding a personal point of view. Besides, case studies may present issues with objectivity, comparability, and could lead to false conclusions (Babbie, 2014; Kothari, 2004; Neuman, 2014; Singh, 2006). According to Gerring (2007) and George and Bennett (2005), this approach is unlikely to falsify hypotheses or produce results that are representative within a population, but as George and Bennett (2005) correctly argue, “case researches do not aspire to select cases that are directly “representative” of diverse population” (p. 30). Gerring (2007) also advises researchers to take advantage of case studies, but not to lose sight of the whole population of cases. He also suggests combining what is likely to be a more superficial analysis of a larger study with an “intensive case study” (p. 22). This could be a small-N case study combined with a literature-based introduction. In addition, Thomas (2011) states that “the quality of a case study depends less on ideas of sample, validity and reliability and more on the conception, construction and conduct of the study” (p. 71). Initial ideas, selection of appropriate cases, thoroughness in describing the context, selection of appropriate methods of analysis, and the nature of arguments in drawing conclusions are some of the important aspects involved in case studies. In case study research, illustrative ideal-type cases represent hypothetical constructs that embody essential characteristics or norms associated with a phenomenon. They are not exact replicas of empirical reality but rather serve as benchmarks for researchers. Ideal-type cases can provide conceptual clarity by defining key characteristics of the phenomenon and guide case selection, which aids researchers in selecting real-world cases that align or deviate from the ideal. They allow for comparing and contrasting real and ideal scenarios, exposing differences. They aid in the normative evaluation of how closely real cases adhere to ideal standards. They assist in formulating conclusions and recommendations based on normative observations. They also aid in refining or expanding existing theories, contributing to theory development. In essence, ideal-type cases play a significant role in case study research. They enable researchers to objectively evaluate and comprehend real-world cases in relation to normative ideals, resulting in more informed conclusions and contributing to a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon. This is the approach for the case study research: merging a thorough examination of the overall situation with a detailed analysis of a number of *demonstrative* cases.

### **Case study on schools located in Beijing**

This study examines the effects of moral education classes in schools situated in Beijing Municipality, China. The analysis consists of two distinct parts: First of China’s standardized processes and curricula for moral education, which are characterized by a consistent conceptual framework applied nationally and in local jurisdictions. This part shall scrutinize

policy implementation during the past decade, underscoring the importance of moral education within the contemporary compulsory education system in China. This conforms with remarks by Chadderton and Torrance (2011) note that in certain cases, data must be acquired from beyond a physical location. To address this, they suggest examining the direction of vertical “core”, which involves analyzing and interpreting central policies from local authorities to their implementation at the local level. My study here examines course content and other elements such as classroom structures, teacher training, and factors that contribute to the moral development of Chinese students in the school environment. The analysis of China’s education system is followed by an analysis of key policies and advancements implemented in Beijing Municipality, supported by an examination of classroom design, textbook structure, and statistical data.

Second of the practical examination of this theoretical framework in two selected schools within Beijing Municipality, in addition to classrooms, also the broader school environment, such as equipment and school buildings. This part aims to explore the content of students’ learning, perceptions, and understanding within the school context and the methods that influence them, considering visible factors, such as teacher-student interaction, and concealed dimensions, such as the genuine influence of educational policies and curricular designs on classroom organization, to offer insights beyond theoretical policies to practical implementation. Adopting Chadderton and Torrance (2011)’s viewpoint, this study aims to examine the complex dynamics of social and educational activities, and capture the nuanced interpretations attributed to these settings by individual social actors. They emphasize that case study methodology is based on the idea that “social reality” evolves from social interactions, situated within specific contexts and historical backgrounds. Therefore, the main objective is to present descriptive information prior to conducting any analysis or theoretical inquiry (p. 53). It is important to consider that schools with different standards have access to specific resources, which influences diverse learning environments for students.

To fulfill the case study design, two schools were selected for in-depth analysis. While representativeness cannot be generated, and randomization for the purpose of representativeness is unreliable, the two selected schools can be used to aid in answering the research question (Gerring, 2007, p. 87). Where these observations did not directly relate to moral education in schools, but provide contextual information to support specific arguments and findings. Additionally, the research examines the textbooks used in moral education classes. A content analysis shifts the focus from *what* students learn to an investigation of *how* they learn. This examination also provides insight into the ideological framework integrated into textbooks that form the foundation of school curricula and align with authoritative guidelines.

### **1.1.3 Fieldwork at schools in Beijing**

This section briefly outlines how various data collection methods were used in this research and will discuss the particular challenges and impediments experienced during the research in China, hurdles which impacted both field accessibility and the resulting findings.

### **Written materials collected prior to entering the field**

Before beginning fieldwork in Beijing schools, a thorough examination of literature and materials available on moral education and character development among Chinese students was conducted. Official government documents were gathered, and familiarity was established with the Ministry of Education and the local Beijing Municipal Education Commission's announcements. Furthermore, recent scholarly articles were scrutinized and a comprehensive bibliography was created. The analysis of textbooks plays a significant role in this research. Therefore, the necessary textbooks for compulsory moral education courses were obtained beforehand to gain information regarding their content, structure, and teaching approaches.

### **Visiting schools and conducting classroom observations**

The exchange university in Beijing organized school visits in a structured format. During each visit I was accompanied by either a school principal or a director of moral education, and followed a consistent protocol. The visits began with a warm welcome by designated staff upon our arrival on campus, after which we undertook a comprehensive tour to become acquainted with the school's environment, awards, values, and other relevant aspects. Subsequently, a moral education class was observed, and detailed notes were taken. Following the observation, the teachers were engaged in a discussion. The school visits involved observing classrooms, taking detailed notes, and documenting visual representations that captured the essence and unique features of each institution.

During the school observations, various areas of interest were examined. The structured school tours of the campus, hallways, and classrooms provided valuable information about the school environment. The open-ended approach allowed for the creation of unbiased notes, which, when cross-referenced with existing literature, helped to discern patterns. A structured approach was utilized when observing moral education classes. As outlined by Thomas (2011), this approach focuses on particular behavior categories. In my role as an observer, the specific elements requiring observation were identified. These included actions, verbal expressions, for example, exchanges between students and teachers, or the language used during instruction (p. 165).

### **Interviews**

The interviews carried out aimed to gain the perspectives of different individuals involved in moral education. At first, the objective was to obtain a comprehensive outlook on how various stakeholders perceive the goals of moral education in Chinese schools. Subsequently, the aim was to explore the complexities of issues, emotions, ideas, and viewpoints that relate to moral education. Naturally, the questions varied in scope, contingent upon the interviewee. The study comprised interviews with teachers, parents, and students. It is essential to note that the interviews followed various structures, influenced not only by specific circumstances but also by the given guidance.

The first interview group was composed of moral education teachers, and the conversations

were formal and structured. At one school, they recommended sharing the interview guideline ahead of time to allow the teachers adequate preparation. Although the study aimed to foster a natural dialogue, the participants' concerns were recognized and the purpose of the research was emphasized. Discussions held during school leader-led campus tours were utilized to explore students' moral development beyond formal courses, complementing formal interviews with elaborate notes based on these interactions. The second group consisted of students, and their interviews were informally conducted through notes. Within the given context, these discussions were developed organically and without any predetermined structure. Students participated willingly in dialogues, especially after being introduced to English and German vocabulary to enhance their language proficiency. This fostered trust and excitement, resulting in insightful discussions about their hobbies and involvement in moral education courses. The third group interviewed consisted of parents. These interviews took the form of casual conversations, as recommended by local guidance. Parents were the most responsive during these discussions. A limited number of questions were asked as parents spontaneously shared their experiences regarding their children's moral education both at home and school. Despite moral education classes receiving less attention due to the final exams, these conversations provided valuable perspectives on parents' educational beliefs.

Apart from formal interviews, active participation in diverse discussions occurred with individuals from various regions of China, including residents of Beijing. Additionally, conversations were held with exchange students at the university who displayed interest in the research topic. These interactions broadened the perspective, presented different viewpoints, and revealed a significant lack of understanding regarding the topic of moral cultivation in several areas.

### **Difficulties before and while working in the field**

The fieldwork presented more challenges than anticipated, including stringent school visit regulations necessitating complex entry permits. The ongoing pandemic compounded these difficulties. Moreover, my arrival in China coincided with a severe period of campus lockdown that made it impossible to leave campus, while numerous faculty members were prohibited from entering. Following the relaxation of restrictions, the holiday season resulted in limited availability from targeted schools, and even after the holidays, the exchange university remained hesitant about scheduling school visits. The extended lockdown, existing obstacles, and demanding school schedules presented difficulties in coordinating visits. As a graduate student, my status further complicated matters. Fortunately, I navigated the intricacies successfully and gained access to the schools with the help of a Chinese graduate student, who assisted with the gate checks. Despite the highly structured nature of the visits, a diverse range of materials was gathered, thanks to interactions taking place in various educational settings and environments with a number of individuals.

Despite the limitations on visiting schools, conducting thorough classroom observations, and gaining extensive access to interviewees, this dissertation creates a strong foundation for future fieldwork. The data was primarily collected from moral education teachers, which may

limit a broader understanding of the educational landscape. Although attempts were made to prolong classroom observation periods, schools were unwilling and proposed reviewing video recordings of the observed classes instead. The opportunities were valued despite the numerous obstacles and challenges. Data was gathered that provides reassurance about drawing conclusions relevant to the research questions. The insightful and contrasting results provide valuable findings, though interpreting them requires caution due to time constraints. Additionally, the results may not only be surprising but also helpful for future research efforts and methodological approaches.

#### **1.1.4 Data analysis**

According to Pole and Hillyard (2016), researchers dedicated to advancing knowledge in their respective fields must have the ability and willingness to evaluate research findings and determine their inherent value (p. 83). Furthermore, Willig (2013) asserts that each interpretation is underpinned by the interpreter's assumptions about the significance, areas worthy of focus, and scope of the data's potential knowledge (p. 137). In the analysis of the data, the principles of "grounded theory" are followed. Pole and Hillyard (2016) say about grounded theory "what initially starts with making descriptions moves to the generation of abstract concepts that then are reinforced to become theoretical explanations" (p. 132). Coding can be described as the categorizing of segments of data with short names that summarize each piece of data. These codes should be close to the data and show actions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43).

According to the principle stated by Charmaz (2006), the grounded theory comprises two parts: initial coding and focused coding. The former is the study of fragments, such as words, lines, or segments, using different kinds of coding methods; it requires to be "open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities we can discern in the data" (p. 47). The latter is concerned with selecting the most significant codes and testing them against extensive data, comparing data with data and data with codes and creating a framework that explains the relationship between these categories. It "relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding" (p. 60). For this analysis, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* by Saldana (2013) served as the reference. This source not only introduces the coding process but also presents various coding methods, some of which were applied in this study. Memo writing was integrated throughout the research process, encompassing the stages before, during, and after data analysis. It played a role in expediting the analysis, promoting early data examination and coding, and capturing thoughts, ideas, comparisons, connections, and potential research directions (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72).

During the first round of transcript analysis, the methodology employed was initial coding to break down data for further examination and comparison, while facilitating note-taking through line-by-line analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 120). This method allows to "keep open for any possible theoretical direction" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Simultaneously, the method of in vivo coding was employed, proving especially valuable when working with non-

native language interviews. This approach involved highlighting specific words or phrases, reducing the risk of prematurely imposing personal interpretations or value judgments. Instead, it facilitated a thorough examination of these linguistic elements. Notably, some phrases were striking enough to warrant further verification of their meaning through discussions with local Chinese individuals for accurate translation and interpretation. In the second coding round, the technique of versus coding was integrated and adapted. Versus codes are used to “identify in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, [...] in direct conflict with each other” (Saldana, 2013, p. 115). The use of versus coding was not intended to emphasize conflicts, but rather to highlight differing viewpoints. The goal was to compare meanings, opinions, and understandings. After completing the initial coding round, recurring disparities in participants’ statements were carefully analyzed. In the final step, code mapping was utilized. Initially, the codes from the first two coding rounds were consolidated, followed by their classification in a second iteration. A third iteration was conducted to further refine the categories, ultimately resulting in the identification of concepts during the final iteration (Saldana, 2013, p. 194-98).

A dual approach was employed to analyze video recordings of teachers’ lessons, involving the combination of two methods. Following Jones and Somekh (2011), the first step was to watch the entire recording, followed by analyzing specific segments in depth. This process included open coding, transcription, and visual notation, although it was limited to selected segments due to time constraints. However, Jones and Somekh suggest a holistic approach to video analysis that involves discussing video clips without transcription (p. 134). This method improves understanding of classroom dynamics, interactions, activities, and broader content, providing valuable context for selected segments. It is important to acknowledge linguistic challenges in Chinese research related to official and unofficial language codes, as noted by Thøgersen (2006) and Resch and Enzenhofer (2018).<sup>3</sup> Data findings should be presented in the language of collection while considering language barriers and codes that affect the results. To comprehend the nuances in teachers’ language choices, materials will be discussed with teachers and assistants to validate understanding and enhance translation insight.

Examining the research process and its underlying goals, this analysis aimed to provide a higher level of abstraction that surpasses surface-level data interpretation. Its purpose is to investigate how intended ideal-type roles are deliberately implemented within the data and to identify the associated intentions, limitations, and practices. To optimize the usefulness of the data at hand, certain concepts were employed. For example, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of teachers’ roles and their perspectives, both conventional data analysis techniques and a focus on participants’ personal narratives and self-reflections were employed. Through comparing the ideal models with official policy decisions, limitations and inadequate implementation were uncovered. Additionally, the study compared the ideal models presented in the textbooks to the materials actually supplied to educational establishments by triangulating the data.

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<sup>3</sup>The first version of *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* in 2014 did not include this chapter, indicating that this is an issue in current qualitative research that needs to be addressed.



### 1.1.5 Ethics

A final remark should include ethical considerations in the collection and analysis of data. Ethical guidelines must be followed in conducting qualitative research, as specified in research handbooks that outline the required protocols and raise potential concerns that necessitate thorough attention (Miller et al., 2012; Piper and Simons, 2011; Pole and Hillyard, 2016). Silverman (2010) states that qualitative research should strive for “voluntary participation and the right to withdraw; protection of research participants; assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants; obtaining informed consent; not doing harm” (p. 153). Piper and Simons (2011) summarize the most common ethical concepts as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and prepublication access (p. 26). Furthermore, Pole and Hillyard (2016) emphasize the significance of reviewing research rationale, design, and methodology to ensure reliability. Additionally, the evaluation should take into account the existing knowledge in the field and the contribution of the research to ongoing debates (p. 84). Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) further acknowledge the risk of studying unfamiliar cultures and the unconscious violation of cultural norms through one’s own lens (p. 5-6). Hence, it is crucial to contextualize ethics in research disciplines by taking an integrative, interdisciplinary, and interpretive approach, rather than a prescriptive one (Russel, 2013, p. 113).

Two ethical principles should be elaborated on. The exchange university upheld the principle of informed consent by organizing school visits and interviews and by providing detailed explanations of the research in person. Each interviewee fully comprehended the research purpose and its potential implications. As stated by Miller et al. (2012), “informed” refers to understanding research objectives and “consent” indicates voluntary participation. I focused on attaining clarity via university channels and personal interactions to establish the research objective prior to conducting observations and interviews. I faced difficulties in establishing direct connections with the schools and had to depend on a third party to accompany me during the visits. I disclosed the research purpose and interview guidelines to my exchange university and provided supplementary information as required before scheduling the visits. The second principle involves safeguarding participants from potential harm, particularly when “sensitive topics” are involved. Anonymity will be maintained by using anonymous identifiers for schools and interviewees, ensuring confidentiality.

## 1.2 Literature review and research gaps

Scholars have contributed significantly to research on citizenship, citizenship education, and moral education. This literature review evaluates various perspectives and contextual backgrounds among scholars to identify research trends and dimensions relevant to the PRC which have escaped attention. Even though scholars outside the PRC may thus not have direct experience with moral education in China, this review aims to improve our understanding of the complex sociopolitical contexts in the PRC that influence the manifestation of generic concepts. It emphasizes the important connection between citizenship and moral education, emphasizing their interdependence. This review gives an overview of significant

concerns, viewpoints, and relevant trends within the societal context of China, drawing on various scholarly sources. Prior to delving into the literature, it is imperative to differentiate between scholars of Chinese background and those of non-Chinese background. “Chinese background” refers to scholars who hold Chinese citizenship and publish in Chinese, whereas “non-Chinese background” encompasses those who predominantly publish in English. PRC scholarship often present government policies in a positive light, while non-PRC scholarship often scrutinizes the underlying concepts that shape the policies.

### **1.2.1 Historical perspectives and contemporary approaches of citizenship**

Scholars consider citizenship in multifaceted ways and debate its attributes and goals, including its potential to foster “good” citizens through education (Kerr, 2003; Wilkins, 199). There is no universally accepted approach to citizenship and its education, as it is subject to context and time (Cogan et al., 2002). Scholars’ perspectives vary widely, leading to diverse analyses. Today, many problematic dimensions of citizenship have been identified, focusing on its evolution, rights, responsibilities, acquisition, loss, and associated challenges. We can observe a significant proliferation of descriptions of the noun “citizenship”, including ecological, global, sexual, multicultural, and so on (Isin et al., 2008, p.02). Scholars analyze various dimensions of citizenship, such as institutional, constitutional, and lived factors, encompassing civil, political, and social rights, as well as responsibilities of citizenship like taxation and compliance with the law. For example, Isin et al. (2008) emphasize the influence of history on citizenship development regarding employment, public service, and familial responsibilities. Isin and Turner (2011) underscore how the redefinition of citizenship intersects with inquiries of inclusivity and the essence of citizenship.

Globalization sparks debates on multicultural and cosmopolitan citizenship, revealing tensions between state-centered views and international legal definitions. Conventional citizenship faces challenges from globalization, prompting the emergence of concepts such as global citizenship that gain research attention (Brodie, 2004; Reid et al., 2000; Veugelers, 2011; Harshman et al., 2015). Cosmopolitan citizenship emphasizes global interconnectedness and individual responsibility for issues such as human rights and environmental sustainability, challenging the focus of the nation-state. According to studies, this shift introduces uncertainty in understanding and educating about citizenship (Banks, 2004; Lee et al., 2004). Schools are challenged to balance between local citizenship education and fostering global perspectives. A comprehensive citizenship theory is necessary to unify diverse developmental aspects. Citizenship requires an integrated perspective on social life that recognizes individuals as active participants (Isin et al., 2008, p. 103). Multicultural citizenship has gained prominence in response to the increased diversity within society. It recognizes and embraces cultural, ethnic, and religious differences within a political community, advocating for equal rights, cultural recognition, and inclusive citizenship for all members of society.

Citizenship is a multifaceted and continually developing concept influenced by history, society, and politics. The dynamic nature of citizenship education allows for various interpretations. This education provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and comprehension to

effectively engage in diverse aspects of society and communities. It cultivates active, knowledgeable, and accountable citizens, molding their civic identities, values, and political perspectives. This type of education boosts self-assurance and encourages acknowledgement of civic duties. Studies investigate the content and structure of citizenship education, examining its effects on students' civic awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities for successful national participation (Fairbrother, 2003; Heater, 1999; Beiner, 1995). Additionally, comparative research demonstrates that many countries include citizenship education in their national curricula (Ainley et al., 2013; Eurydice, 2005, 2017). The literature discusses goals for citizenship education, including fostering democratic values, encouraging civic engagement, improving critical thinking, and preparing for global participation. Heater (1990) emphasizes the role of schools in preparing young people for civic life, while McCowan (2009) highlights the goal of citizenship education in fostering attributes such as knowledge, skills, and values.

As Merry (2018) observes, schools are tasked with cultivating “good” citizens and equipping them for civic participation beyond school ground. Arthur et al. (2008) identify a common concern regarding the challenge of balancing nation-state-specific education with preparedness for local and global involvement. Macedo (2003) examines civic ideals across societies, while Merry (2018) emphasizes the role of schools in providing foundational political system knowledge, such as constitutional rights and government functions, for citizenship. Crick (1999) highlights the significance of active citizenship education, particularly crucial for free societies. It prompts inquiries into individuals' abilities, authority, and public power, and how these develop into practical skills. These discussions touch upon introspective decision-making, various citizenship contexts, and the cultivation of sophisticated decision-makers and dedicated civic participants (Arthur et al., 2008; Banks, 1997; Banks and McGee-Banks, 1999). In addition, more recent scholarship has focused on the integration of the concepts of morality and character into citizenship education and the effect of citizenship education on one's own morality (Berkowitz et al., 2008; Halstead and Pike, 2006; Oser and Veugelers, 2008). As an ongoing debate of whether citizenship education and moral education are two separate subjects or subjects that are interrelated, scholars show that many countries have a tendency to integrate morality into their citizenship education program (Ainley et al., 2013; Veugelers, 2011).

Hence, studying how students acquire knowledge, align it with their moral values, and explore diverse actions is essential. Scholars stress that *becoming* a citizen is gradual and that education is pivotal in nurturing civic awareness and practical morality. It shapes how the world is influenced through virtues, ideologies, habits, and skills (Halstead and McLaughlin, 1999; Banks, 2004). Transmitting knowledge is not sufficient; students must comprehend and consciously apply it. The manner in which knowledge is internalized and implemented is crucial. Education imparts not only theoretical foundations but also fosters practical application within the nation-state. Although citizenship is politically mediated, its influence on diverse identities often goes understudied. Globalization permits comparisons, but shifts in national identities under common citizenship frameworks are essential. Balancing the implications of personal identity and citizenship is a complex task.

## Conceptualizing citizenship: A review of relevant studies and their implications

Several large-scale cross-national studies on citizenship were conducted in the 1990s. The Civic Education Study, which occurred during this time, provides an essential reference point for exploring citizenship education in China. This international study, conducted by the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements* (IEA)<sup>4</sup>, illuminates several vital conceptual and methodological issues that are relevant to China's context. Under Judith Torney-Purta's direction, the study commenced in 1994. It was a cross-national two-phase endeavor that took place in twenty-eight countries to investigate the preparedness of young individuals for democratic citizenship. The research centered on civic knowledge, attitudes, and socio-political engagement (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 13). The study comprised of in-school activities like classes and discussions and primarily community-based out-of-school activities. Phase one involved a qualitative case study examining the context and meaning of civic education across various countries. The objective was to determine how socio-economic and political changes have impacted civic education policies and practices. In phase two, a civic knowledge test and survey measuring civic engagement were conducted for statistical analysis. The study comprised 90,000 14-year-old students across 28 countries in 1999. It evaluated various domains, ranging from comprehension of democratic principles to faith in the government. Key findings include the following: Students are generally knowledgeable about democracy, though often superficially or detached from life; there is a positive relationship between students' knowledge of democracy and their voting behavior within countries; educational practices contribute significantly to citizenship preparation; teachers recognize the value of citizenship education and consider it crucial; Teachers advocate for better materials, more professional development, and additional classroom time to improve civic education; young people see good citizenship as obeying the law and voting, but the importance of conventional political participation is considered low; students are receptive to unconventional civic and political engagement; students with greater educational resources tend to have more civic knowledge (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 176).

Another significant study, conducted in 1997, involved twelve countries, mostly from Asia, as well as the United States, Russia, and Mexico. Led by William Cummings, this research explored the perspectives of the educational elite on values education, using a sigma international elite survey questionnaire. This approach recognizes the diversity of views within different cultural and national contexts. The survey focused on values and inquired about various values related to citizenship. Key findings indicated that the educational elite placed a notable emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy, valuing "understanding all political and social viewpoints" more than "teaching respect for hierarchy and support for the government". There was consensus on the importance of "promoting and understanding and love of the nation", while "generating heroes and promoting national pride" received less enthusiasm. In addition, "fostering an understanding of all religions" received more support than "gain a deeper understanding of their own religion". Moreover, countries with multi-ethnic policies showed greater support for values associated with tolerance than those without such policies

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<sup>4</sup>The first IEA study of civic education was conducted with data collection in 1971 (Torney et al., 1975).

(Lee and Fouts, 2005, p. 07). In addition, 2016 saw the second cycle of the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), which examined how different countries are preparing young people to fulfill their roles as citizens in the second decade of the 21st century (Schulz et al., 2010). The study focused on students' knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship, as well as their related attitudes, perceptions, and activities.<sup>5</sup> The ICCS builds on previous IEA studies on civic education and covers students, teachers and schools.<sup>6</sup>

The journal *Citizenship Studies* was established in 1997 to “focus on debates that move beyond conventional notions of citizenship, and treat citizenship as a strategic concept that is central in the analysis of identity, participation, empowerment, human rights and the public interest” (Isin et al., 2008, p. 01). Scholars have analyzed various historical models of citizenship. In ancient Greece and Rome, citizenship referred to political engagement and membership in the polis, while Roman citizenship emphasized legal rights within the empire. These early concepts influenced later Western political thinking. The growth of political rights in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the emergence of the modern nation-state, the rise of liberalism, and the expansion of social rights have influenced the formation of the liberal concept of citizenship. It emphasized individual rights, legal equality, and the social contract between citizens and the state. In his text *Citizenship and Social Class*, Marshall (1950) defined citizenship and class as fundamental aspects of modern capitalist societies. Although he primarily referred to the British system, his conceptualizations of citizenship resonated with many countries. Marshall defined citizenship as full membership in a community, encompassing civil, political, and socioeconomic rights. Social citizenship emerged as a response to the challenges of industrialization, providing wider access to welfare, education, and health care.<sup>7</sup> During the 1990s, scholars introduced sophisticated ideas regarding citizenship. This introduction highlighted four significant aspects, namely membership, legal standing, rights, and participation, that delineated the political core of citizenship (Arthur et al., 2008; Banks, 2004; Isin and Turner, 2011; Kivisto and Faist, 2008). Turner (1997) distinguished sociological, political, and cultural dimensions of citizenship in modern societies. The evolution of citizenship, from historical antecedents to contemporary perspectives, serves as a testament to its complex nature and remarkable adaptability. This process emphasizes how citizenship has changed throughout time, adapting to the social dynamics and influencing the function of individuals in their respective nations and communities.

Educational practices are crucial in shaping citizenship education in China's education system. To develop effective strategies, it is essential to comprehend the specific approaches used to foster civic knowledge and engagement among students, as disclosed by the Civic Education Study. This approach acknowledges the diversity of opinions within various cultural and national contexts, providing a valuable foundation for comprehending the Chinese scenario.

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<sup>5</sup>The first cycle took place in 2006 and the 2016 study is a continuation and extension of the earlier study Schulz et al. (2008, 2010).

<sup>6</sup>In the 2016 conducted study, 24 countries participated, of which three were from Asia. Mainland China did not participate in this study, but we can find the Republic of Korea, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong SAR.

<sup>7</sup>These elements have been included in the constitutions of many nations and serve as a measure for assessing a country's democracy, adherence to the rule of law, and provision of social welfare for its citizens. Despite the presence of these provisions in the Chinese constitution (seen in the 1982 constitution), there remains a significant disparity between how they are interpreted and their implementation in reality.

The emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy, as highlighted in the study led by William Cummings, should be investigated in the Chinese context. To what extent are these values promoted within the existing curriculum and teaching approaches? Teacher perspectives are an essential aspect to consider when evaluating citizenship education. The Civic Education Study has highlighted the crucial role of educators in this field, making it imperative to comprehend their viewpoints. Examining their perspectives can help illuminate the practical aspects of implementing citizenship education in China, including potential barriers or facilitators encountered by teachers. The preference for “understanding all political and social viewpoints” over “teaching respect for hierarchy and support for the government” is another crucial concept to explore. How does China strike a balance between these perspectives, and how does it impact citizenship education? Research should delve into how national identity and love for the nation are integrated into citizenship education. Defining “good” citizens is a crucial aspect of this research. The Civic Education Study examined whether students tend to associate good citizenship with conventional actions, including obeying laws and voting, or if they are receptive to unorthodox forms of civic and political participation. This probe provides valuable insight into student values, expectations, and their alignment with modern citizenship ideals. Finally, the research is framed within the context of contemporary and evolving notions of citizenship, as emphasized in “Citizenship Studies”. This perspective underscores the importance of moving beyond conventional notions of citizenship. Linking citizenship to moral education and adapting to the changing dynamics of contemporary society is crucial, and the research explores how citizenship education in China aligns with and adapts to these evolving notions.

### 1.2.2 Approaches and strategies in citizenship education in China

In China, “citizenship” and “citizen” lack a universal definition which can lead to confusion and uncertainty among individuals, as pointed out by Keane (2001). Translations vary depending on political contexts, making it a challenging topic shaped by history, politics, and culture.<sup>8</sup> This study will examine the changes in citizenship and its understanding after the reform and opening-up period in 1979, including a brief survey of earlier developments dating back to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. This overview is intended to prevent misunderstandings and omissions of vital information. The intricacies of the historical development preceding this period are beyond the scope of this dissertation. China’s citizenship is a complex concept, influenced by politics, society, and culture. In contrast with Western societies, there is no clear-cut definition of Chinese citizenship, Chinese education faces the task of navigating the interplay between state power, social dynamics, and individual agency. According to Lee and Ho (2005), citizenship education in China prioritizes moral education over the term “civics” due to its perceived Western connotations. The Chinese understanding of citizenship has an emphasis “on public good over individual benefits, collectivity over self-interest, and responsibilities over rights” (p. 218). Contrastingly, Feng (2020) emphasizes the rise of the “in-

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<sup>8</sup>The concept of citizenship has been translated into *gongmin zige* (公民资格) (citizen qualification), *gongmin shenfen* (公民身份) (citizenship status), *gongmin quan* (公民权) (citizenship rights), *gongmin xing* (公民性) (civility), and many other terms (Guo, 2014).

dividual person” in China’s market economy, resulting in a shift towards self-interest rather than collective consciousness. Despite this trend, Feng highlights the significance of incorporating public values such as cooperation and participation into education. According to Hu (2020), effectively implementing public values poses a challenge. Although students may be exposed to socialist core values<sup>9</sup>, their lack of deep understanding and genuine belief in their origins can hinder proper practice.

There is a wide range of studies on the reform of China’s education system (e.g. Mok, 2005; Wang, 2003; Postiglione, 2006), discussions on the possible phenomenon of school-based decision making (e.g. Law, 2011), and whether there is any possible room for school-based decision making given on the limited autonomy of schools (e.g. Wong, 2006). While national education policy in China is set by the state and the Ministry of Education, local authorities can also create and enforce local education policies as long as they are consistent with national guidelines. Much research has been done on citizenship and moral education in the Chinese context. For instance, Liu (2011) examined the customization of citizenship education to the Chinese context and its incorporation into the prevailing education system. Likewise, Lee (2005) thoroughly analyzed citizenship and moral education by researching educators’ viewpoints on citizenship in Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong. Lee discovered that mainland China places great emphasis on classical and national elements, while Hong Kong emphasizes social citizenship. Law (2011) traced the development of citizenship in China, which was influenced by Confucianism and Taoism and later aligned with socialist values after the rise of the Communist Party in 1919. This transformation emphasized the moral attributes of citizens. Studies have also examined the depiction of socialist values in different educational subjects (Lee and Ho, 2005; Lo, 2004). After the implementation of compulsory moral education in primary and secondary schools, scholars have begun to create the objectives and content of this education (Ban, 1999; Lu, 2000), in addition to exploring the substance of this subject (Ye, 2001; Zhu and Qi, 2004). Additionally, scholars have investigated the advancement of Chinese citizenship education in contrast to Western methodologies (Zhu, 2006).<sup>10</sup> Efforts to integrate moral education into schooling have prompted scholars to probe the roles of students. These studies explore students’ requirements, instructional content, and the merging of traditional culture with contemporary societal expectations (Cheung and Pan, 2006; Wan, 2004).

Over the last 20 years, moral education has undergone significant changes alongside China’s reform and opening-up policy. The curriculum has adopted innovative approaches, influenced in part by Western ideas. As Lee and Ho (2005) suggest, modernization policies have transformed China’s political and social scenery by increasing openness and promoting a gradual inclination towards democratization. Lee and Ho identify three stages in the development of moral education curriculum: political orientation, simultaneous emphasis on political and

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<sup>9</sup>The socialist core values have been promoted by the Communist Party of China since the 18th National Party Congress in 2012 and comprise a set of moral principles. The socialist core values represent three different levels: the state, society, and individual citizens. At the state level, China must be a country of prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony. For society, it should be a country of freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law. And for individual citizens, it needs patriotism, professionalism, integrity, and good will. When talking about socialist core values in the ongoing thesis, one should keep in mind these twelve core values.

<sup>10</sup>The third chapter of this thesis will explore the precise details of diverse citizenship and moral education concepts within China while constructing a connection between the two.

moral education, and moral orientation. According to Qi and Tang (2004) traditional moral education neglected students' needs by prioritizing obedience over individual interests. Contemporary moral education emphasizes elements of international education, democracy, and legal education while prioritizing personal well-being within society. It is deemed crucial to integrate moral education into basic education and to develop teaching materials to foster socialist builders and successors (Han, 2020). Scholars such as Yang (2022) emphasize the seriousness and intricacy of the matter, stressing the necessity for precise guidance for young people in moral judgement. The significance of teachers in educating students for the nation underscores the need for enhancing teachers' awareness of the communication of moral education content. Enhancing the effectiveness of moral education, improving teachers' comprehension of the curriculum, advocating for the curriculum's significance, refining students' ideological comprehension, and integrating moral education systematically across educational levels are essential topics of discussion (Gao, 2020a; Yang, 2020; Shen, 2020).

The primary emphasis lies in the education of people and the development of an educational system capable of accommodating all individuals. Yang and Yan (2020) highlight the significance of comprehending students' developmental stages and integrating political and ideological theories. Wang (2020) stresses the need for value-based education aimed at enhancing students' affective qualities while cultivating healthy personalities. Tan (2015) conducted a thorough investigation into citizenship and moral education, identifying three dimensions, which he called "trinity" of citizenship, that influence citizenship and civic consciousness: socialist values, Chinese traditional culture, and absorption of knowledge from advanced civilizations. Tan has published works that include moral and civic education, as well as teacher ethics. A noteworthy publication is the co-authored book *Conspectus of Citizenship Education: International Experience, Historical Transition and China's Choice* (2011), which provides valuable research-based perspectives on citizenship education. Ban and Tan (2015) conducted an in-depth investigation of civic literacy among secondary school students<sup>11</sup>, specifically examining civic rights and virtues. Ban and Tan critique superficial research and emphasize the significance of distinguishing common from civic virtues to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the latter. Interestingly, according to the study, students tend to prioritize self-interest and cooperation when it benefits them.<sup>12</sup> This behavior extends to civic courage, in which personal interests are defended more often than those of the public. They suggest that levels of moral behavior are influenced by self-interest in the real world. They highlight a gap between knowledge and action, with students being hesitant to apply their knowledge, which provides intriguing insights.

In a modern moral education curriculum that emphasizes the cultivation of values associated with a "good" citizen, teacher training plays a crucial role in improving their understanding of citizenship concepts. According to Li and Tan (2017), well-prepared teachers are vital to address the needs of students and curriculum requirements, guiding them effectively

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<sup>11</sup>The surveys were conducted in secondary schools and funded by Project 985 at Beijing Normal University.

<sup>12</sup>For this study, they utilized questionnaires as the primary research method, implementing a multi-stage stratified sampling approach (including area sampling, school sampling, and student sampling) that involved both junior and senior high school students.



based on their professional judgment. Defining a “good” citizen, which aligns with modern Chinese students’ daily life, remains crucial. Modernized textbooks with global content provide a way to execute this curriculum. In the work by Tse (2011), a noticeable shift in the approach to moral education is observed. This shift aims to decrease blind emulation by diversifying role models and promoting independent judgment, emphasizing real-life individuals. Tse conducted an analysis of primary school moral education textbooks in China between 1999-2005. The study found that while China has maintained the ideological and political functions of moral education, it has also broadened its educational strategies by incorporating various teaching techniques and providing teachers and students with greater autonomy. Further textbook analyses thoroughly examine moral reasoning, strengths, weaknesses, structure, and methods with the aim of enhancing its use in youth education (Liang, 2016; Li and Li, 2022). According to Wang and Zhang (2022), up to 89% of classes focus on moral education content, stressing patriotic devotion, discipline and law, protection of the environment, and respect for others, elders, and youth. Over the past 25 years, scholars have examined moral education in Chinese middle schools from multiple angles (Zhan and Ning, 2004) while also investigating moral education in primary schools (Lu and Gao, 2004a). Moreover, scholars have explored specific aspects of moral education such as the cultivation process and social responsibility of primary school students (Kuai, 2021). Recent research in moral education focuses on updated curriculum standards. Scholars are analyzing the latest changes, comparing them to past standards, and highlighting the strengths and methods involved (Shi and Wang, 2021; Li and Ke, 2022; Zhou and Yan, 2022). Understanding the impact of modernization involves considering interconnected elements objectively. To fully understand Chinese moral education, both macro-level elements (institutions, laws, curricula) and micro-level elements (principals, teachers, students) must be taken into account (Li, 2009). The discourse notes a growth in individual autonomy and flexibility (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005; Anagnost, 2004). Scholars aim to promote active participation in the classroom by shifting students from passive “objects” to active “subjects”. Quality education, commonly referred to as *suzhi education* (素质), emphasizes student empowerment and self-expression (Cui and Huang, 2002; Sun, 2001). The inclusion of real-life moral experiences and the improvement of student self-expression are crucial topics for discussion in the 21st century (Ban, 2002).

### **Moral education research in Beijing: A brief review of current findings**

China’s education system adheres to standardized guidelines of the Ministry of Education, but research on the influence of moral education in Beijing’s schools is limited. The revision of curriculum standards and integration of core competencies in 2022 requires thorough investigation that encompasses the views of policymakers, educators, and learners to address current transformations and challenges. Research often focuses on China as a whole rather than individual cities. However, some scholars concentrate on moral education in universities in Beijing. They emphasize the significance and successful implementation of virtues.

For instance, Cao and Fu (2009) researched moral education for education majors, emphasizing self-education, content, and integration in accordance with scientific developmental

principles. Zhang et al. (2008) examine the association between moral education and student development utilizing Beijing University of Technology as a case study. They analyze content design at various developmental levels, including growth, talent, and success, which are crucial for holistic development. Shou (2011) investigates moral education management in a Beijing school and recommends a transition from a “dual-line management model” to a “block management model” by assigning departmental vice-principals to oversee moral education. The study presents the establishment of the system but does not delve into the impact on personnel or their perceptions. Wang (2000) evaluated moral education’s effects in high schools by examining student and teacher satisfaction. Wang proposed five enhancements: emphasizing social practice and individual development, adapting methods to students’ ages and characteristics, using engaging educational approaches, and improving the quality of teaching. These enhancements aim to promote students’ awareness of personal perspectives and foster individual student development. The study also identified limited integration of primary-secondary school moral education and age-appropriate understanding gaps among teachers. Scholars stress the importance of relevant, student-centered moral education to make it meaningful. Similar findings are reflected in Meng et al. (2008)’s work, which stresses the need to adjust and reinforce citizens’ ideological and moral education. Wu (2006) explores mechanisms for moral learning, while Rong et al. (2022) analyze guidelines for constructing integrated moral education. Pan (2017) investigates curriculum change through international exchange of ideals and practices in a narrative documentary study.

However, it is important to consider three significant points that arise from this review. Firstly, there exists a shortage of comprehensive micro-level analyses inclusive of diverse school types. While China has been featured in numerous comprehensive international studies (Harshman et al., 2015; King and Guerra, 2005; Bénéi, 2004), most of them offer a general overview without exploring nuanced specifics or focusing on the unique impact of moral education on different types of schools across various cities. Secondly, regarding this matter, Dello-Lacovo (2009) discusses the disparity between schools in China, including regular schools and distinguished schools, also referred to as “shining examples” (p. 244). School quality differs not only between urban and rural areas, but also within urban areas. And thirdly, moral education in Chinese schools is given lower priority compared to other subjects such as math, Chinese, English, and history, not only for students but also for parents. Since subjects other than moral education are more important in terms of academic grades, they are deemed to have a higher priority than participation and performance in moral education (Liang, 2016; Zhan and Ning, 2004).

### **1.2.3 Exploring sociological perspectives**

The sociology of knowledge focuses on the influence of social processes on the production, dissemination, and reception of knowledge. This offers a valuable perspective for understanding moral education in China, providing insights into social dynamics, cultural contexts, and structural elements. By analyzing these factors, it sheds light on the transmission of moral values within institutions such as families and schools. Moreover, the sociology of knowl-

edge investigates the impact of knowledge on reality, as well as the relationship between the two. While classical sociologists like Marx, Durkheim, and Mannheim have different perspectives compared to modern scholars, both can be utilized to underscore the significance of examining moral education within social contexts. Collective practices, rather than individual thinkers, are essential for comprehending social thought processes (McCarthy, 1996). According to Buczkowski and Klawiter (1986), the field concerns three perspectives: the mechanisms that generate beliefs, their dissemination, and their relationship to practical activities. The sociology of knowledge has developed through various periods, some of which are interconnected and simultaneous.<sup>13</sup> The definition of the sociology of knowledge as a distinct field faces certain difficulties (Lieber, 1965, p. 82), however, its main objective is to examine the connections between existence, knowledge, theoretical comprehension, and society (Lieber, 1965, p. 82).<sup>14</sup> It aims to establish standards for correlating thought and action and formulate a theory applicable to practical circumstances, integrating non-theoretical knowledge elements (Mannheim, 1970, p. 109). It does not completely detach from traditional ideology; rather, it examines both accurate and inaccurate knowledge, opposing one-sided viewpoints (taking inspiration from Marx's concept of ideology in false consciousness) (Lieber, 1965, p. 92).

The early period saw a separation of religion and science, with Francis Bacon's reformation efforts paving the way for the sociology of knowledge's focus on ideology. In the 19th century, Karl Marx spoke of ideologies as "class's false conceptions or *false consciousness* of itself" (emphasis in original)" (McCarthy, 1996, p. 34). The early ideas of this initial period are most accurately described as historical-philosophical concepts that examine the growth of rationality and the advancement of knowledge. The second period examined traditional knowledge and questioned the division between nature and history. History was viewed as a result of human activity. Emile Durkheim's and Max Weber's religious studies marked the beginning of empirical investigations in the sociology of knowledge. Durkheim and German sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1926) developed theories that emphasized the social shaping of thought over individual action. Gumplowicz (1926) assumes that thoughts within individuals are influenced by the social environment. Durkheim emphasizes that thought and knowledge are collective processes, with individual thought emerging from social knowledge processes (Crittenden, 1965). Max Weber, renowned for his work on religion, adopts historicism in the sociology of knowledge. The historicist approach separates natural sciences from humanities, as emphasized by Dilthey (1982): "we explain nature, we understand inner life". This distinction values the apprehension of external and internal experiences rooted in distinctive domains. While questionably useful, historiography comparatively stands less favorable after World War I. The third period represents societal fragmentation and the height of the sociology of knowledge. Karl Mannheim made significant contributions through his work

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<sup>13</sup>A concise overview can be found in Meuser and Sackmann (1992). The authors provide insight into the historical progressions within the sociology of knowledge.

<sup>14</sup>Some scholars note that a sociology of knowledge is primarily concerned with the origin of ideas, rather than the validity of ideas (Stark, 1958; Rueschemeyer, 1981). They describe the sociology of knowledge as a positive-descriptive-historical discipline. The same statement can be found in the work of Berger and Luckmann, who claim that a sociology of knowledge must "concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such "knowledge"" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) (emphasis added by author).

*Ideology and Utopia*. In his writings in 1929, Mannheim expanded on the Marxist conception of ideology. He defined ideology as a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that reflect the interests and perspectives of particular social groups. These beliefs are used to legitimize and uphold their social and economic power. The fourth and final period is characterized by the constructivist sociology of knowledge, as exemplified by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who emphasize the role of knowledge in constructing reality. This period is pivotal, as knowledge comes to the forefront and separates from ideology. Berger and Luckmann move the sociology of knowledge beyond social determination of ideas (Mannheim) and towards the idea of knowledge guiding everyday life and constructing socially constituted reality (McCarthy, 1996).<sup>15</sup>

Socialization theories provide insight into how individuals acquire values, beliefs, and norms through social interactions. They aid in comprehending how moral education in China is influenced by multiple agents, including family, schools, and peers. George H. Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism explains how individuals develop moral identities and internalize norms through social interactions. In the classroom, shared moral meanings guide dynamics and promote morality and social navigation. Peer interactions facilitate moral negotiation, reasoning, and values clarification, all of which foster moral identities and empathy. Consistent with Mead's ideas, these interactions are critical in shaping individuals' moral development. Hayhoe (2015) has extensively studied Chinese education, emphasizing the role of socialization agents in transmitting moral values. Hayhoe examines the impact of cultural influences, specifically Confucianism, on values and institutions such as schools and peers. Her study primarily examines how Confucianism impacts moral education, emphasizing the importance of virtues. Additionally, Hayhoe delves into family-based primary socialization. Yeung (2022) explores family dynamics and the role of parenting in transmitting values. Other studies have explored the areas of moral development, education, and the influence of family and school (Wu, 2004; Wu and Han, 2010), whereas Chen (2023) merges psychology and sociology in an examination of the construction of moral knowledge, emphasizing socio-emotional aspects. Evidently, studies have examined the social and cultural aspects surrounding moral education, although not all were conducted within the Chinese context or with a sociological orientation providing valuable perspectives (e.g. Halstead and McLaughlin, 1999; McLaughlin, 2000). The scholars offer insightful perspectives on the influence of social processes, cultural factors, and institutional dynamics on moral education and knowledge in China. Their research, enriched by a cross-cultural perspective, enhances the field by providing broader contextual insights into moral education.

#### **1.2.4 Summary of the literature review and research gaps**

The literature review explores various viewpoints on citizenship, its education, and the changing priorities in moral education in China. These differing perspectives underscore the complex and contested nature of citizenship and its educational facets. A sociological perspec-

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<sup>15</sup>Both Karl Mannheim's and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's concepts will be further investigated in this dissertation.

tive is appropriate for understanding how social processes, cultural factors, and institutions influence the dissemination and establishment of moral values.

A potential first gap in the literature is the differentiation between citizenship's varied political and moral implications. Interpretations in liberal democracies and authoritarian states may cause confusion due to this divergence in conceptualization. It is worth noting that, in both scenarios, research concentrates on the context and content of education, rather than on teaching approaches, pedagogy, and teacher-student interactions. Although researchers such as Banks (2004) highlight the necessity for guidelines in citizenship education, little attention is given to the pedagogical elements that facilitate effective implementation. The present review underscores a disparity between theoretical notions of citizenship education and practical curriculum guidelines. Therefore, there is a necessity to explore teaching and learning methods to reach practical conclusions and suggestions. The relationship between teaching, learning, and knowledge significantly influences citizenship education, highlighting the importance of instructional approaches in shaping the type of citizens individuals become. It is significant to comprehend the history of moral education in China. The Chinese education system's directives heavily impact it, leading to an ideological framework that restricts both institutions and educators. However, the significance of the ideological background and structural framework of the educational curriculum is overlooked in the current literature. This oversight could potentially result in misinterpretation of the effects and influences on students.

A second gap in the current literature concerns insufficient research on moral education in Beijing. Although domestic scholars have studied this topic, there is still limited research available. Significant areas of inquiry such as student-teacher relationships, teacher expectations, student experiences, and principals' management of moral education require further exploration. This represents an important opportunity for research, not only at the national level, but also through comparative and localized investigations across provinces, cities, and regions. Moral education is subject to specific social and cultural contexts, where political ideology is promoted as a critical aspect. To achieve this, there needs to be consistency in both content and practice. China has centralized its teacher education system, which is enforced through top-down government reforms, resulting in a strictly regulated teacher education program. The Chinese government places emphasis on the diversity of education in terms of student orientation and teaching methods. However, current literature points out the standardized nature of Chinese moral education. The main objective is still to instill the principles and values of the Party leadership. To balance between centralized reform and diverse education, teachers and principals should have more independence. Although Chinese policy documents are abstractly stated, yet precise, recent revisions in the curriculum standards and the goals set forth by the Ministry of Education have expanded the possibilities for local curriculum choices. At this point, it is possible to investigate how these changes have been implemented in relation to previous decisions and curricula. Investigating how these changes affect moral education in Chinese schools and the impact on teachers and students is an important area for research.

The third gap in this thesis emerges from synthesizing the previous two gaps and underscores the process of student socialization in the contexts of citizenship and moral education. Socialization occurs not only within the family but also in the school setting, where educators play a crucial role. According to Biesta et al. (2015), many teachers find it challenging to contextualize their work within the wider domain of education. Although educational objectives can be attained through methods that are either short-term or long-term, their effectiveness continues to be a challenge. Although curricula and agreements define teachers' role in the classroom, uncertainties still exist regarding their agency. To improve our understanding of the interplay between education and socialization, it is essential to examine the teachers' perceptions. Research on how teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions translate into classroom practices is limited. The purpose of moral education is to cultivate in students positive life perspectives and constructive behavioral patterns. Therefore, there is a pressing requirement to investigate how teachers can perform their essential duties of serving their country, adhering to their individual beliefs, and catering to students' unique needs and interests effectively.

Fourth, the socialization process reaches its end by developing civic consciousness, which enhances awareness and comprehension of the knowledge obtained in the educational context. Essentially, this can be perceived as the result of the educational socialization journey, in which individuals obtain civic and moral education to uncover their societal roles. It represents the intricate interplay between individuals and society. While engaging in the socialization process and dealing with the dynamics of civic and moral education, students ought to acquire the skill of intentional decision-making and build an awareness of moral obligations that are not only limited to their nation-states but also applicable globally. As students progress beyond school, these competencies must be ingrained, despite socialization remaining an ongoing process. Examining the transformation of acquired skills into actionable capabilities is imperative to understand how students internalize knowledge and enhance their capabilities. Guiding and facilitating students' introspection about their roles in society is an important aspect for educators, as emphasized by Arthur et al. (2008). Assessing students' societal efficacy becomes crucial by analyzing the outcomes of student-centered and interactive classrooms. Current research lacks emphasis on direct perceptions of moral education as expressed by students themselves. Despite policymakers' emphasis on students' interests in education, students' perspectives remain relatively marginalized. Cultivating meaningful dialogue with students is essential because of this oversight. This is a dimension that needs to be explored further.

In the upcoming chapters, it is crucial to examine China's historical context and ideology to comprehend the educational paradigms shaped by these decisions and frameworks beyond politics. Although theoretical frameworks have been discussed, there is a need for more research on their practical implementation, particularly on how they appear in curricula and teaching methods. Additionally, the perspectives of teachers and students, which have been somewhat overlooked, present an opportunity to be included. Furthermore, it is essential to investigate how cultural norms and values influence the interpretation of moral principles in the Chinese context for a comprehensive understanding.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

In this dissertation, an analysis is presented on how the ideological framework influences individuals' constructed realities within the subject of moral education, as well as the roles and challenges faced by teachers in aligning ideology guidelines with lived experiences. The analysis is based on a case study conducted in Beijing, comprising six chapters. The structure follows a logical progression, commencing with an introduction presenting the sociological framework and how moral education is represented in China. It then examines the interaction between the sociology of knowledge and moral education through the ideological framework, followed by an analysis of the case study results and subsequent discussions. This investigation aims to improve comprehension of moral education, sociological perspectives, and knowledge generation in China. Each section is succinctly summarized to give an overview of its essence.

In the following chapter, the sociological background of this study will be introduced, exploring the significant role that social influences play in shaping knowledge and our understanding of reality. The analysis will encompass the development of a sociology of knowledge, considering the roles of ideal types and ideologies in knowledge formation, as well as how modern methodologies address the complexities of reality construction. The examination also covers the influence of socialization on individual views and behaviors, clarifying how social factors contribute to the formation of self-concepts and worldviews. In addition, interdisciplinary dimensions will be explored, examining the integration of Chinese philosophical thought in moral education and its significance in current discussions of Communist Party of China ideology. This chapter establishes a theoretical foundation, providing the sociological framework for the subsequent empirical research.

The third chapter presents a theoretical framework for examining moral education regarding citizenship in China. It explores the historical development of citizenship in general and in education, scrutinizing the intricate relationship between citizenship and moral education. The chapter considers the influence of policy implementation and education reforms on moral development in contemporary China. The framework will be reinforced by incorporating empirical data from schools in Beijing. Additionally, it will analyze the crucial roles that curriculum standards, teaching materials, and teacher training play in shaping the landscape of moral education. This theoretical framework, with the sociological framework, provides the foundation for the fourth chapter.

Chapter four extends the exploration of theoretical foundations from the previous chapters by investigating the dynamic interplay between sociological perspectives and moral education. This chapter examines how ideology in China has influenced the shaping of moral values and norms. Additionally, it dissects the intersection of ideal types and guiding norms within the Chinese context to clarify their collective influence on moral education. The examination will broaden its scope to encompass sociological perspectives on moral education and socialization, with a particular focus on the role of education and educators in China. The chapter will outline exemplary "ideal" characteristics deemed necessary in moral education based on both literature and policies related to moral education. Subsequently, the chapter will act as

a conduit between theoretical frameworks and empirical research, furnishing a basis for the field study conducted in Beijing schools.

The central focus of this dissertation is chapter five, which comprises the empirical research conducted in Beijing schools. The empirical analysis is based on a variety of sources, such as interviews with teachers, students, and parents, direct observations in the school environment, and information obtained from the textbooks utilized in these educational institutions. The chapter begins with a section presenting the findings of a comprehensive textbook analysis, with a specific focus on the content and tasks integrated into the classes of *Morality and the Rule of Law*. The second part of this chapter offers a detailed analysis of the observations collected in the case study schools. This analysis covers several aspects, such as the educational setting, classroom interactions, and the effectiveness of moral education approaches. Additionally, the third section investigates how external factors, such as parental guidance and teacher preparation or the perception of one's own role in moral education, affect the moral development of students.

The final chapter of the dissertation combines the findings to establish a connection between the theoretical framework and empirical data. Taking a reflective perspective on the research objectives, the first section of this chapter reexamines the position of moral education in China, considering it within the broader context of knowledge production and sociological perspectives. One crucial aspect that is addressed is the intricate balance that teachers in China must achieve between *servicing* the ideology of the Communist Party and *guiding* students' moral growth. The second part will analyze the effectiveness of Chinese education by proposing a pedagogical approach that includes *educational ideological conditioning*. This approach suggests moving away from pure indoctrination and towards interactive classrooms, while adhering to a pre-defined ideological framework provided by the Communist Party of China. The third section will examine how students shape their constructed realities by incorporating ideal knowledge, ideological guidance, and various aspects significant in Chinese society. This completes the cycle of how Chinese society progresses and how future citizens of China are shaped within the educational setting through moral education. Finally, this chapter provides insights for future research opportunities in this field.



## Chapter 2

# A Sociological Lens: Knowledge Production and Reality Construction

In the realm of Chinese moral education, teachers face the difficult task of reconciling the values of new generations with the dominant ideological framework, which poses interesting challenges to any sociological analysis. The approach chosen allows for an investigation into societal ideologies and their impact on the formation of individual moral development. By utilizing knowledge theories within the field of sociology, information can be gained on the cognitive and behavioral growth as individuals fulfill their social roles. Within this broad approach, the aim is to explain the effects of ideologies and their consequences within Chinese society. Special emphasis is placed on the socialization of students through moral education, the related institutional framework, and the roles of key actors in this context.

With both teachers and students actively involved in constructing meaning and practicing moral education, analyzing how social reality is constructed and the impact of institutions on knowledge and beliefs provides valuable insights into the transmission of moral values in the Chinese educational system. Social reality, in this context, results from the interplay between individuals and institutions, demonstrating how institutions can significantly influence knowledge and beliefs. The development of knowledge, the interaction between societal understanding and action, and the dissemination of information and roles all contribute to the construction of social reality. This fabricated reality arises from human interactions and is influenced by habitual behaviors. Maintaining social order relies on individuals consistently engaging in various activities. The linkage between knowledge, society, and individuals fosters diverse shared understandings that surpass national borders.

Socialization theory provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the impact of an ideological framework on the formation of students' reality. Insights into the dynamics of moral education can be gained by examining how teachers and students negotiate their roles, identities, and moral values through ongoing social interactions and communicative processes. This approach enables an exploration into the process of students' absorption of moral values throughout their education and an evaluation of the influence of significant individuals, such as teachers and peers, on their moral growth within this framework. Understanding how knowledge is shaped and transmitted to students is essential to the concept of socialization. It is crucial to delve into the intricacies of this process for insights into the roles that teachers play in shaping students' values. Teachers operate within a framework of action, guiding students not only to adopt its values but also to form their own beliefs and roles within it. This complex process plays a pivotal role in the workings of moral education, profoundly affecting the development of students.

The contributions of Chinese philosophy, specifically the emphasis on the unity of knowledge and action, offer profound insights into the development of moral values and their

implementation in Chinese society. These insights deeply resonate with the challenges of teachers and students in moral education, as they strive to align stated moral values with actual practices. This study acknowledges that the acquisition and application of knowledge are closely tied to individuals' actions and behavior in society. Upon analyzing the ways in which students and teachers involve themselves in moral education and the related ideological framework, it becomes apparent that knowledge is a constantly-evolving force that influences decision-making and social interactions. Certain ideologies, such as those promoted by the Communist Party of China (CPC), advocate for a strong connection between knowledge and action, emphasizing the integration of values into behavior. This research differentiates the ideological methodology of the Communist Party of China, with a focus on the unity of knowledge and action, as a component of the subject matter being investigated instead of its analytical concepts. Based on the sociology of knowledge and Chinese philosophy's unity of knowledge and action, this study examines how the projection of this unity interacts with individuals' constructed realities.

## **2.1 Exploring the interplay: Uniting approaches in the sociology of knowledge**

The sociology of knowledge<sup>1</sup>, together with related sociological perspectives, provides valuable insights into how individuals construct their realities, particularly in the context of moral education in China. This approach addresses the challenge of integrating moral education into students' constructed realities by revealing the interplay between social ideologies and ethical development. It employs sociological theories to examine the dynamics of moral education in China. Max Weber's ideal types, along with the inclusion of Max Scheler's insights on knowledge paradigms, aim to analyze societal perspectives on reality and norms. This allows for a clearer understanding of the significant impact of dominant ideologies on the structure of moral education in China. Karl Mannheim's concept of social determination of knowledge then helps to clarify how political ideology shapes the social reality in which moral education operates. This serves as a basis for exploring the development of ideal types and broader characterization of ideology, especially from the standpoint of Chinese philosophy's unity of knowledge and action. Additionally, based on Alfred Schütz's examination of everyday knowledge, this framework examines how political ideology, guided by knowledge paradigms, influences individuals' beliefs and their alignment or deviation from societal norms in moral education. Moreover, Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger's sociological framework of the social construction of reality scrutinizes the institutional aspects of political ideology. It unveils the organizational and perpetuating mechanisms that significantly influence the structure and functioning of moral education. This approach permits exploration

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<sup>1</sup>As Merton (1957) asserted quite early on, the sociology of knowledge is in constant development and is influenced by social conditions. Thus, it is concerned with the impact of specific cultural and social conditions on society. He says that "with increasing social conflict, differences in the values, attitudes and modes of thought of groups develop to the point where the orientation which these groups previously had in common is overshadowed by incompatible differences. Not only do these develop different universes of discourse, but the existence of any one universe challenges the validity and legitimacy of the others." (p. 368)

of how individuals construct their realities within the prevailing ideological framework. It highlights how students and teachers navigate cognitive processes and engage with moral education and ideological framework. This will be emphasized by utilizing an approach from George H. Mead. By accounting for the role of teachers, the analysis prolongs beyond individual construction and examines the guidance provided by teachers within these structures. Essentially, this comprehensive framework provides an in-depth comprehension of the numerous challenges and intricate dynamics that delineate moral education in the Chinese context, considering the viewpoints of both students and teachers involved.

### **2.1.1 Ideal types and the social determination of knowledge**

Ideal types, as a conceptual framework introduced by Max Weber, are invaluable tools for simplifying complex social realities by highlighting essential characteristics in the analysis of social phenomena. In the context of moral education in China, the application of ideal types enables an understanding of the relationship between social ideologies, particularly the guiding influence of CPC ideology, and the construction of moral realities. This approach provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing how dominant ideologies shape moral values in society. In the broader landscape of sociological thought, insights from Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim additionally enhance the understanding by allowing an exploration of how various social groups within China's society interpret and construct moral realities. Considering the significance of CPC ideology in influencing these methods, this not only clarifies the pivotal role of dominant ideologies in shaping moral values but also emphasizes the imperative need to address these complex dynamics for a more comprehensive approach to moral education in China.

#### **Max Weber's use of ideal types**

Max Weber's sociology centers on causally analyzing social phenomena and emphasizes studying individual actions within groups, rather than in isolation. Weber highlights the significance of comprehending cognitive frameworks that guide individuals within his framework (Knoblauch, 2010, p. 84). His sociological perspective revolves around the core concept of *Verstehen* (comprehension). In human actions, there exist both ends and means that are intricately interwoven with the purpose of the action, allowing for a better comprehension of its objectives. In addition, groups hold shared perceptions that can significantly impact their collective cognitive processes. Weber's scholarly analysis examines the objective motivations driving the actions of members of society and the resulting impact of these actions on the social structure. Additionally, he explores the enduring continuity of society through these actions (Weber, 1947, p. 9). In his theoretical framework of action, Weber categorizes different forms of knowledge in relation to types of action, establishing a critical link to the field of sociology of knowledge. Weber distinguishes four types of action: instrumentally rational, value rational, affective, and traditional. Instrumentally rational action calculates options based on expected benefits, value rational action adheres to societal beliefs, affective action stems from emotions, and traditional action depends on habitual knowledge (Weber,

1947, p. 12).<sup>2</sup> Weber identifies regularities in social action that are shaped by the actors' subjective meaning, including motives, reasoning, and visible behavior.

This initial understanding of individual motivations and reasoning in social action provides the foundation for Weber's utilization of ideal types in his methodology. Ideal types enable sociologists to recognize repetitive patterns within purposeful actions and move from evaluating isolated actions to comprehending the complexity of society as a whole. Ideal types may shed light on whether individuals' constructed realities regarding moral education coincide with or contradict the prevailing ideological framework in China. According to Weber, ideal types are conceptual constructs or models that sociologists use to understand and analyze social phenomena; they are not meant to represent actual individuals or societies as they exist in reality, but are constructed as theoretical tools. Ideal types are used to identify "individual concrete regularities" and "unique phenomena" (Kalberg, 2006, 2017). Weber aimed to develop a methodical approach for sociologists to comprehend complex social realities by identifying real-world patterns and characteristics, instead of creating an abstract model of societal functioning. Weber's inquiry begins with the most rational forms of reality and evaluates how well theoretically derived rational outcomes correspond with actual occurrences. Within his historical comparative sociology, he employs ideal types as heuristic tools, which are vital for causal analysis. Weber also presents mixed ideal types that combine rational and traditional characteristics. These mixed types allow for a detailed analysis of how moral education practices in China may integrate rational guidelines with traditional values, and how an individual's constructed reality can interact with this combined structure. Weber says that

An ideal type is formed by the one-side accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent, concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct [...] In its conceptual purity, this mental construct [...] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality (Shils and Finch, 1949).

Sociologists can use ideal types by selectively emphasizing certain dimensions while neglecting others, creating a unified analytical construct. Max Weber's ideal types involve a deliberate exaggeration of essential features in patterns of action, integrating these characteristics into a coherent and logically structured concept. They are not just summaries or classifications but instruments for comparing and quantifying real-life social phenomena (Kalberg, 2017). Coser (1977) describes an ideal type "as [an] analytical construct that serves the investigator as a measuring rod to ascertain similarities as well as deviations in concrete cases" (p. 223). Weber's ideal types offer a valuable analytical framework for the research. They allow for selective emphasis of certain dimensions in moral education practices while disregarding others, creating a unified construct for analysis. Ideal types can be used to describe the essential and typical characteristics of moral education in China. By comparing observed behavior within the Chinese educational system to these ideal types, it is possible to assess conformity

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<sup>2</sup>Critics, such as Balog (2012), argue that instrumentally rational action is inherent in every action, regardless of the driving motive.

or deviation from the idealized forms. This approach facilitates a precise definition of empirical patterns of moral education and helps identify variations and deviations within the data.

### **Max Scheler's exploration of knowledge paradigms**

Max Scheler's work highlights the effect of subjective meanings on individuals' comprehension of the world. This perspective is relevant for understanding how moral education is perceived and interpreted within the Chinese educational system. It underscores the idea that individuals' constructed realities may be impacted by the subjective meanings they attach to the knowledge taught during moral education. Scheler's approach, grounded in phenomenology, explores human consciousness and reinforces the importance of interpreting one's surroundings. He acknowledged that human knowledge is not solely a reflection of objective reality; rather, it is also impacted by social and cultural factors. Scheler's sociology of knowledge posits that individuals purposefully construct meaning, which is subsequently shaped by prevailing social values, norms, and cultural influences. He studied how personal convictions are shaped by the cultural environment and analyzed the interplay between individual and collective knowledge. Max Scheler argues that

In some way or other, any knowledge, and especially all common knowledge of identical objects, determines in many ways the specification (*Sosein*) of the society. But all knowledge is ultimately also conversely determined by the society and its structure (Scheler, 1970, p. 170).

Max Scheler's sociology of knowledge emphasizes certain elements that describe the connection between knowledge and society: (1) mutual understanding is intrinsic to the nature of society; (2) all knowledge about the same objects determines the nature (*Sosein*) of society; and (3) social structure determines knowledge (Becker and Dahlke, 1942). Some authors have argued that Scheler's claims seem ambiguous, the first element seems to describe the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and society, the second and third elements then seem to be a strengthening argument with the determination of society by knowledge and knowledge by society (e.g. Henckmann, 1978). Scheler further asserts the three main axioms of the sociology of knowledge as follows: (1) any knowledge that a person has as a *member of society* is a priori knowledge, "no *I* without a *We*; and genetically, the *We* always has content before the *I*" (Scheler, 1970, p. 171).<sup>3</sup> (2) The empirical relations of a person's participation in the experiences of others depend on the essential structure of the group, which can be seen as the first pole of identification and, as the second pole, inference by analogy from the bodily gesture to the specification of experience. And (3) the origin of our knowledge of reality is based on a fixed structure (Scheler, 1970). Max Scheler leaves it open whether there are other factors that occur outside of one's consciousness of transference. He is certain that there is no such thing as innate knowledge of certain objects, but only innate functions for the acquisition of knowledge. He speaks of two categories essential to the sociology of knowledge: the *group*

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<sup>3</sup>Emphasis added by author.

*soul* and the *group mind*. Group soul and group mind are descriptive terms used to distinguish cultural growth and transmission on two levels: the unconscious and the conscious, and to define the cultural content involved in each (Becker and Dahlke, 1942).

Max Scheler introduced the law of order<sup>4</sup> in 1926 to illustrate the complex interaction of social knowledge, highlighting the duality between *ideal* and *real factors*, a dualism of objective mind and real living conditions. Ideal factors refer to the subjective experiences, values, and meanings that individuals attach to the world around them. These factors are shaped by human consciousness and include emotions, beliefs, perceptions, and cultural norms; they are deeply intertwined with an individual's inner life and personal experiences. Real factors, on the other hand, refer to the objective aspects of social reality. These are the external, tangible elements of the world that exist independently of the individual's consciousness. Real factors include observable phenomena, social structures, economic systems, and institutional arrangements. While ideal factors are subjective and vary from person to person, real factors are relatively stable and external to individual consciousness. They are the concrete manifestations of social life and provide the framework within which human interactions and experiences occur (Scheler, 1926, p. 5). According to this distinction, ideal factors have no change of being advanced to the existence of society, they can be factors of determination, but are not able to become factors of realization. Real factors, on the other hand, are able to gain power and become reality with a special combination of real factors, power relations, economic factors of production and the relation of population and within the interest and collective drive. In the realm of moral education in China, ideal factors could refer to the subjective experiences, values, and meanings that individuals, such as students and teachers, associate with moral education. These ideal factors may consist of personal beliefs, emotions, and cultural norms. Conversely, real factors could represent the objective aspects of the educational system, such as the curriculum, institutional arrangements, and societal expectations. Scheler's framework proposes that ideal factors, such as personal values and beliefs about morality, can significantly affect how individuals perceive and interpret moral education, which may not always align with the actual factors present in the educational system. He underscores the interactive nature of ideal and real factors, whereby ideal factors affect the perception of real factors and vice versa.

### **Karl Mannheim and the social determination of knowledge**

Karl Mannheim's sociological approach to comprehending knowledge explores the multifaceted relationship between thought and knowledge through the introduction of the concept of ideology, placing emphasis on how belief systems impact social order and individual perceptions. From this perspective, China's prevailing ideological framework, such as CPC ideology, bears significant influence on people's perceptions and on constructing their realities in the field of moral education. Mannheim analyzed how various social groups produce knowledge and interpret reality within their distinct cultural and historical contexts. This analysis yields

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<sup>4</sup>With this, Max Scheler divided sociology into cultural sociology (*Kultursoziologie*) and real sociology (*Realsoziologie*).

an understanding of how CPC ideology influences this intricate process. The sociology of knowledge is based on the premise that knowledge is created through social processes, leading to the investigation of social and institutional mechanisms that shape these intellectual constructs. Karl Mannheim understands knowledge as something that contains an “activist element”<sup>5</sup>, he claims that

Idealistic philosophy was not upset by the discovery that the type of knowledge represented by pure theory was only a small segment of human knowledge, that in addition there can be knowledge where men, while thinking, are also acting, and finally, that in certain fields knowledge arises only when and in so far as it itself is action, i.e. when action is permeated by the intention of the mind, in the sense that the concepts and the total apparatus of thought are dominated by and reflect this activist orientation (Mannheim, 1985, p. 265).

In addition, Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge explores how ideologies relate to the creation of knowledge. He believes that ideologies are not just abstract beliefs, but are intertwined with the social structures and interests of certain groups. Mannheim is especially interested in how ideologies shape social consciousness and how dominant ideologies can impact the production and dissemination of knowledge in society.<sup>6</sup> He argues that there is a relationship between different forms of knowledge and social structure (Mayo, 1990, p. 24). Considering Chinese society, it is arguable that the prevailing ideologies have a significant impact on knowledge production and dissemination in educational contexts. This prompts an inquiry into how these prevailing ideologies shape societal awareness of moral education. For example, when considering the influence of socialism, it highlights values such as collaboration, social responsibility, and equitable resource allocation. Students in this scenario may be taught about the significance of actively participating in enhancing the welfare of all members of society to increase their awareness. Knowledge and ideas, which are assumed as existentially determined, are bound to place, which includes differences, social setups, and the historical process. Mannheim says that thinking can be considered as “group thought” because it is rooted in “group action” and further claims that “knowledge is from the very beginning a cooperative effort of group life” (Mannheim, 1985, p. 29). Mannheim posits that social existence is documented in knowledge. His conceptualization of ideology underscores this principle, as he sees ideology as devoid of intrinsic meaning; rather, its meaning emerges when viewed through the lens of the actor’s perspective (Knoblauch, 2010, p. 107). Ideologies

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<sup>5</sup>We can find other scholars who consider and even expand upon Karl Mannheim’s understanding. For example, Stehr (2001) speaks of knowledge societies as “worlds made of knowledge” and Adolf and Stehr (2017) continue with their own definition of knowledge as “a generalized *capacity to act* and as a model *for reality*” (p. 18, emphasis in original). Nico Stehr aimed at revealing the activist element of knowledge.

<sup>6</sup>Louis Althusser emphasizes the material existence of ideologies in relation to social practices. Ideologies are not just abstract beliefs, but are lived through actions, attitudes, and behaviors. Dominant ideologies play a crucial role in maintaining the status quo and are believed by all classes or groups. Althusser also examines how ideologies are formed and perpetuated in social institutions such as schools, and how they give individuals identities. He draw attention to the interconnectedness of ideas, practices, and rituals within ideological apparatuses. According to Althusser, ideologies provide frameworks for interpreting experience and navigating social conditions (McCarthy, 1996).

no longer act *behind* someone's head, as in Karl Marx's theory, but rather, they are produced *by* the people themselves.

In his analysis, Karl Mannheim highlights Marx's view that pure theory is challenging in the realm of historical and political issues. He argues that all theories are shaped by collective perspectives influenced by interests and social contexts. Utilizing Marx's idea of ideology, Mannheim illustrates how collective thinking is inseparably linked to social and existential circumstances. Mannheim suggests that the impact of individuals' social position on their thinking should not be considered incorrect. Rather, it can lead to valuable political insights. He views the recognition that political thinking is intricately connected to social life as the core of the ideology notion. This perspective is aligned with Marx's claim that individuals' social existence shape their consciousness, rather than vice versa. Additionally, Mannheim examines the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, asserting that communist theory is a result of the process of development. Initially, theory arises from a particular social impetus and aims to clarify the current situation. When this theoretical framework is implemented into real-world scenarios, it has the potential to initiate transformations in the existing reality. The outcomes resulting from these changes, regardless of whether they are successful or not, will subsequently trigger a reevaluation of the current theory, ultimately leading to the emergence of a new one. Mannheim describes this in a cyclical process: theory arises from social reality, guides action, action alters reality, and this transformation of reality leads to the development of a new theory (Mannheim, 1985, p. 110-13). Additionally, this perception can be found in Mao Zedong's writings a few years later, used within his specific context (Mao, 1937). Both Mao and Mannheim stress the dynamic and evolving relationship between conceptual frameworks and their application to the real world is underscored by the dynamic interplay between theory and practice. Mannheim explains that in the sociological context, conduct is primarily manifested in domains where rationalization is not fully exerting its influence. Consequently, individuals face a challenge in making decisions in situations that lack established norms and conventions. This is where the intricate relationship between theory and practice is genuinely tested. Therefore, the crucial question is: How do theoretical frameworks, frequently developed in structured fields, apply to the practical realm of unregulated decision-making? The complex interplay between theory and practice arises in uncharted territories, where behavior plays a significant role (Mannheim, 1985, p. 102). Mannheim stresses the impact of diverse ideologies and worldviews in shaping and influencing social reality, resulting in concrete action plans and strategies. This process ultimately culminates in the formulation of a "truly strategic plan" and will be experienced as an "intellectually and volitionally controllable phenomenon" (Mannheim, 1985, p. 222).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>In contrast, Hegel's dialectic centers around the concept of "sublation" (*Aufhebung*) which refers to the process of resolving a conflict or opposition between two ideas or states by uniting them in a higher synthesis. The concept of sublation characterizes the relationship between the new content of thought and the preceding one. Constitutive is the relationship between the *I* and the *Non-I*, and through reflection, the *I* becomes self-aware. Then, the *I* reflects toward the object of knowledge, the *Non-I*. In the process of knowledge, the *I* and the *Non-I* are posited as thesis and antithesis, and knowledge is attained when they are sublated in synthesis. Sublation can have three meanings: (1) in the sense of eliminating or abolishing, (2) in the sense of preserving, and (3) in the sense of an act of grasping. This leads to the development of ideas and the transformation of states over time. Dialectics is the method Hegel employs to analyze the development of ideas and changes throughout



Following Marxist theory, power, status, and interests impact the consciousness of economic classes or groups. These factors shape ideological beliefs that align with political and economic aims. The term ideology refers to a set of convictions, which can take on ideological traits in contexts of conflict, interest, and power struggles, despite not being inherently ideological. In practical terms, ideas and beliefs may develop into ideological expressions that support particular agendas and interests within society. Karl Mannheim regarded ideology as a term often used to denounce political opponents, suggesting a link to group interests and power-seeking. Ideologies can hide essential information about a group's conduct and motivations, rationalizing their actions while hiding their actual intentions from scrutiny (McCarthy, 1996). Marxism, as Mannheim puts it, sees theory as a function of the process of becoming and thus as a function of reality. A theory influences actions that, if successful, change reality, or, if unsuccessful, lead to a reevaluation of the theory. According to Schurmann (1966), ideology can be defined as a way of thinking characteristic of an *organization* rather than just a *class* or *individual*.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, he asserts that Karl Mannheim explicates the concept of ideologies as ideas originating from individual or collective unconscious processes.

Based on Mannheim, ideologies represent a particular worldview or set of beliefs that arise from specific social positions and interests. It reflects the dominant values, interests, and ideologies of a particular group or class in society. Ideologies serve as a framework through which individuals interpret and make sense of the world. They shape their perceptions, beliefs, and judgments and influence how they understand social reality and their place within it. Ideologies provide a lens through which individuals view and interpret their experiences and guide their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes.<sup>9</sup> Mannheim also emphasized the role of social and historical contexts in shaping ideologies. He argued that ideologies are not static, but evolve over time as social conditions change. Different historical periods and social contexts give rise to different ideologies that reflect the particular challenges, values, and aspirations of those times. He identified two conceptions of ideology: the *particular* view, which involves conscious distortions or self-deception and focuses on specific features of knowledge based on individual interests. And the *total* view, which reflects a group's all-encompassing worldview and takes into account the widespread thought systems of entire societies. Mannheim states that

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history, emphasizing conflict and the development of opposites that ultimately lead to synthesis (Vollmers, 1995, p. 50).

<sup>8</sup>Schurmann's definition of ideology is derived from a general definition that prioritizes individuals over organizations. He maintains that organizations are essentially rational tools created for specific purposes, and individuals conceive and use these organizations based on their underlying ideals. These ideals inevitably lead to actions, as the ultimate goal of organizing is to enable and guide human action. He posits the existence of two categories: ideologies related to organizations and those related to classes and individuals. He goes on and defines the organizational ideology as "a systematic set of ideas with action consequences serving the purpose of creating and using organization" and further states that "the ideology of the Chinese Communist party is one of the great organizational ideologies in the modern world" (Schurmann, 1966, p. 18-19).

<sup>9</sup>On the other hand, Clifford Geertz's contribution to the theory of ideology was to see ideologies as metaphors that carry social meaning. He emphasized the symbolic nature of ideologies, seeing them as multilayered symbols of reality that bring together complex ideas. Geertz's approach was more anthropological, focusing on understanding their crucial role in shaping social meanings and values. And how they act as lenses through which individuals and groups interpret their experiences, social relationships, and the larger social context. Ideologies provide a framework for understanding power dynamics, social roles, norms, and the overall structure of society (e.g. Geertz, 2003).

The particular conception of ideology is implied when the term denotes that we are sceptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent. They are regarded as more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation, the true recognition of which would not be in accord with his interests. [...] Its particularity becomes evident when it is contrasted with the more inclusive total conception of ideology. Here we refer to the ideology of an age or of a concrete historico-social group, e.g. of a class, when we are concerned with the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group (Mannheim, 1985, p. 49).

These two concepts have common and distinctive elements. The most common element seems to be the inference to the subject, whether individual or group, and its thinking and understanding as a function of its position in society. A distinctive element is that the particular concept of ideology refers to only a part of the opponent's claims as ideologies, while the total concept of ideology calls into question the opponent's total *Weltanschauung* (worldview) (Mannheim, 1985, p. 50). Another distinguishing element is that the particular conception is an analysis on a purely psychological level, while the total conception refers to fundamentally divergent systems of thought. The third main distinguishing element lies in the description that the particular conception operates primarily with a psychology of interests, while the total conception uses a more formal functional analysis (Mannheim, 1985, p. 51). With his interpretation of ideology, Mannheim goes beyond the definition developed by Karl Marx, the definition of *false consciousness*. Rather, Mannheim sees ideology as the deliberate distortions created by human interest groups, and his study of ideologies is the unmasking of these distortions. Also, while Karl Marx's conception of ideology analyzes only the ideas of the opponent, Mannheim's general formulation of the total conception of ideology includes one's own views, and therefore perspectival views, since it recognizes that these views are socially determined (Hammersley, 2022).<sup>10</sup>

For Mannheim, the sociology of knowledge is both a theory and a historical-sociological method of research.<sup>11</sup> He broadened the scope of the sociology of knowledge to examine the impact of social change and historical transformations on the production and dissemination of knowledge. He argued that different historical periods produce distinctive patterns of thought and systems of knowledge, which in turn influence the way individuals perceive reality and construct their worldviews. As a theory, it can appear in two forms, first as a

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<sup>10</sup>In the concept of *false consciousness*, Karl Marx suggested that members of the proletariat have a distorted understanding of their real position in society, leading to a misunderstanding of their class identity and interests within the social relations of capitalism. Broadly speaking, it denotes the inability of people to recognize their real position in a capitalist society (factors such as inequality are neglected) because they recognize their position in society as a natural cause of things (Eyerman, 1981). Karl Marx himself did not use the term false consciousness, but he paid attention to the related ideas of ideology. Karl Mannheim, however, supported the idea that social positions influence the forms of knowledge they embody, these material biases nevertheless leading to a falsification of social reality.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Mannheim follows a social-constructivist understanding of the social world, he says that "In as much as man is a creature living primarily in history and society, the "existence" that surrounds him is never "existence as such", but is always a concrete historical form of social existence. For the sociologist, "existence" is [...] a functional social order, which does not exist only in the imagination of certain individuals but according to which people really act." (authors' emphasis) (Mannheim, 1985)

purely empirical inquiry, the analysis of how social relations influence thought, and second as an epistemological inquiry concerned with the validity of these relations (Mannheim, 1970, p. 111). The historical-sociological method of research is supported when we ask *when* and *where* certain assertions of human thought have arisen. These usually arise within a period of history, and by analyzing this concrete period it becomes clear *why* the world presents itself in this way during the period of history.<sup>12</sup>

By considering only the first form, Karl Mannheim presents the sociology of knowledge as a theory of the social or existential determination of critical thinking. Mannheim introduces the term “existential determination of knowledge” (*Seinsverbundenheit des Wissens*), with its concrete meaning left open. He describes the determination and the correlation between life situation and thought process as something that only empirical investigation can show us (Mannheim, 1985, p. 239). Mannheim asserts that external factors, which he calls existential factors, shape knowledge and that it is not solely a product of historical development. He emphasizes the crucial role of social processes in influencing knowledge, as well as the importance of prior human experience in formulating problems. Additionally, Mannheim highlights the role of an individual’s will in the process. He ultimately reinforces that these forces and attitudes are not solely individual but are rooted in collective group goals (Mannheim, 1985). He comes to the conclusion that “[...] a large part of thinking and knowing cannot be correctly understood, as long as its connection with existence or with the social implications of human life are not taken into account” (Mannheim, 1985, p. 241).

In Mannheim’s view<sup>13</sup>, individuals take collective historical experience for granted, and individual thought arises from this collective thinking, but this should not be classified as “group mind” because there is not only one collective mind, but several that can exist simultaneously. If these existential factors are integral to the development of knowledge, he goes on, then knowledge can be dated and located as a product of a particular epoch, with content and form determined by that epoch. And to reinforce this, he argues that formulation and abstraction are bound up with social existence. With the general formulation of the total concept of ideology, Mannheim asserts that all thought is ideological in character, and thus the theory of ideology develops into the sociology of knowledge. This can be understood as follows: a given social group recognizes the “situational determination of knowledge” (*Seinsgebundenheit des Wissens*) of its opponent’s ideas. By recognizing this fact, it can be elaborated that the thought of each group can be seen as an emergence from its living conditions. The task of sociological analysis is to study the factors of the actual social situation that can influence thinking. With such a historical-sociologically oriented analysis, it may be possible to provide individuals with a view of the whole historical process.

Mannheim sees ideologies as ordered and systematic structures of thought, not merely the

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<sup>12</sup>Kettler et al. (1984) further emphasize that the validity of social knowledge, as seen in Karl Mannheims understanding of social history, cannot “be separated from the work of historical interpretation itself” (p. 75).

<sup>13</sup>There have been several critiques of the sociology of knowledge constructed by Karl Mannheim. One of them might be found in Merton, as he states that Mannheim’s approach lacks of empirical grounding and its failure to “delimit the cognitive ambitions of its *sociological* inquiry into knowledge” (authors’ emphasis) (Stehr and Meja, 2018, p. 144) and that it is a necessary condition to separate philosophical or epistemological questions from sociological questions in order to develop a positive sociology of knowledge.

sum of individual views. He embraced *relativism*, acknowledging that all thought is linked to the thinker's concrete historical context and lacks objective universality. However, he rejected the idea that all thought could be dismissed as subjective, proposing instead *relationism*. This approach recognizes the contextual nature of thought and the absence of absolute truth in social and historical matters.<sup>14</sup> Relativism, for Mannheim, "is a product of the modern historical-sociological procedure which is based on the recognition that all historical thinking is bound up with the concrete position on life of the thinker (*Standortsgebundenheit des Denkers*)" (Mannheim, 1985, p. 70).<sup>15</sup> He says that relationism "states that every assertion can only be relationally formulated" and that relationism "signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal interrelationship in a given frame of thought" (Mannheim, 1985, p. 270). Relativism is seen as a non-evaluative general total conception of ideology, and according to Mannheim, it is found primarily in historical investigations where no judgments are made as to the correctness of the ideas being treated. According to Mannheim, we must "ask ourselves how it comes about that a given type of social situation gives rise to a given interpretation" (Mannheim, 1985, p. 71). The ideological element in human thought is always bound up with the existing life situation of the thinker; human thought, in this view, arises in a certain social milieu. The task of the study of ideology, therefore, is to unmask the individual point of view and the interplay of distinctive attitudes in the total social process. In this context, Mannheim recognizes the influence of different social contexts and positions on ideologies (relativism), while advocating critical rationalism to objectively analyze and understand these frameworks. Mannheim's approach encourages a balanced perspective and rational inquiry to understand the complexity of social reality.

Max Scheler emphasized how emotions and values influence the formation of ideologies, while Karl Mannheim looked at ideology through a sociological and historical lens, focusing on social structures and historical contexts (Remmling, 1975, p. 40). According to Mannheim, social groups and classes hold different worldviews and ideologies based on their unique experiences and interests. Ideologies, according to him, are expressions of social conflict and struggles for power and dominance. Scheler's focus on emotions and values complements Mannheim's emphasis on social structures and historical contexts, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how ideologies are formed and maintained in different social settings.

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<sup>14</sup>Other scholars, such as Barnes (1974), make the remark that relativism, despite Mannheim, has never been an issue for sociology. In terms of the reconstructed sociology of knowledge as we see it today, relativism seems no longer relevant to the sociology of knowledge and has more to do with the logic of the sociology of knowledge (Stehr, 2018; Stehr and Meja, 2018).

<sup>15</sup>Coser (1968) criticizes the assumption that all knowledge and ideas are bound to a place with its social structure and historical process as leading to universal relativism, saying that "if it is assumed that all thought is existentially determined and hence all truth but relative, Mannheim's own thought cannot claim privileged exemption" (p. 430).

### 2.1.2 New approaches in the sociology of knowledge

The works of Alfred Schütz, Peter L. Berger, and Thomas Luckmann present a nuanced and detailed exploration of how reality is socially constructed through everyday experience. Their perspectives highlight subjectivity's primacy, the significance of reflexivity, and the potential for social change in the ongoing construction of reality. As a result, they can improve the understanding of how social reality is constructed by emphasizing the impact of prevailing ideologies, subjective interpretations, and social interactions on individuals' constructed realities. This suggests that the alignment of moral education with the ideological framework is impacted not only by top-down directives but also by how individuals subjectively perceive and navigate these educational practices in their social contexts. Furthermore, the focus on subjectivity and reflexivity within these perspectives may suggest that individuals in China could engage with and contest the moral education integrated into the curriculum. This highlights the potential for social change in the ongoing development of moral values, which is crucial for comprehending how moral education may adapt to societal shifts and individual interpretations.

#### Alfred Schütz's exploration of everyday knowledge

Alfred Schütz examines how individuals perceive and interpret social reality through their everyday experiences. He offers useful insights into how knowledge is constructed within a social context by examining the multifaceted interplay between subjectivity and shared meanings. These insights provide a valuable direction for understanding how individuals, within the Chinese educational system, construct their perceptions of moral education and navigate the interplay between their subjective interpretations and the shared meanings influenced by prevailing ideologies. New sociological approaches to knowledge can be considered as being oriented towards phenomenology.<sup>16</sup> This sociology of knowledge, led by Alfred Schütz<sup>17</sup>, takes into account the problem of intersubjectivity, how one consciousness is connected to another consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

Alfred Schütz aims to comprehend the complex and interdependent structure of daily life. He emphasizes that our world is influenced by historical experiences, shared by others, and easily taken for granted. In addressing this concern, Schütz aims to "achieve a rationale of the essential structure of daily life through examination of its manifold typifications" (Natanson, 1967, p. XXVI). Schütz's integrative sociology of knowledge connects sense and action as the intertwined bases for his perception of the social world.<sup>19</sup> He speaks of a central con-

<sup>16</sup>According to Natanson (1968), phenomenology can be briefly characterized as "an effort to establish the outlines of a conception of meaning whose constitutive character is grounded in the reality of inner-time consciousness" (p. 219)

<sup>17</sup>I will not be able to provide a comprehensive overview of Alfred Schütz's theory in this space. For a more detailed analysis, I recommend referring to available academic resources, such as handbooks authored by Staudigl and Berguno (2014) or Endreß (2006), which offer a thorough examination of the subject matter.

<sup>18</sup>Berger (1966) further describes the sociology of knowledge, as indicated by Alfred Schütz, as a sociological critique of consciousness, concerned with the social construction of reality in general. Such a critique then includes the analysis of both objective reality and its subjective correlates, which brings the sociology of knowledge and social psychology together by their inner logic of nature.

<sup>19</sup>Natanson (1968) points out that Alfred Schütz's work *The Phenomenology of the Social World* is also an attempt

nection between knowledge and action: meaning is something that guides and orients action and designates behavior as action. Knowledge, then, is not something outside of action, but rather constitutive of action (Knoblauch, 2010, p. 146). He examines how the acquisition and dissemination of shared knowledge is possible in the social world. Schütz builds on Weber's concept of social action, but focuses on understanding typologically ordered meaning rather than different types of social action. He criticizes Weber's definitions for lacking depth and clarity.<sup>20</sup> He says

Weber makes no distinction between action as sequence and completed action, between the meaning of creation and the meaning of the product, between the meaning of internal and external action, or between internal and external experience, between self-understanding and foreign understanding (Schütz, 2004, p. 87).<sup>21</sup>

One goal of Schütz's analysis is to clarify the understanding of *sense* as a precondition for understanding social action. Schütz goes on to say that while Weber contrasts the subjective sense of an action with its objective meaning, he does not take into account possible variations of meaning that may arise from the interpreter's perspective, including the perception of the perspective given to individuals. Schütz sees the social world as something that is not homogeneous, rather he distinguishes between one's own behavior, the experienced behavior of the environment, and the indirect knowledge of the social and primordial world. The position of an individual can be described as "essential differences, especially between the self-interpretation of experiences by the own person and the interpretation of foreign experiences by the pointing alter ego" (Schütz, 2004, p. 88).<sup>22</sup> Schütz undertakes an analysis of the activity of one's consciousness in experiencing the social world. He makes use of the concept of action as seen in the writings of Max Weber by providing a philosophical phenomenon for the sociology of *Verstehen* (Natanson, 1968).

His concept of social action is embedded in his analysis of the structure of the social world. "The term "action" shall designate human conduct as an ongoing process which is devised by the actor in advance, that is, which is based upon a preconceived project" and he further says "the term "act" shall designate the outcome of this ongoing process, that is, the accomplished action." In general, he describes the analysis as "a process by which an actor in daily life determines his future conduct after having considered several possible ways of action" (Schütz, 1967a, p. 67).<sup>23</sup> For Schütz, action is based on temporal development, and its full meaning lies in the subject and the actor's intention. The act is then object-oriented, with a meaning that

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to justify and deepen Max Weber's theory of social action by providing a philosophical foundation.

<sup>20</sup>Natanson (1968) summarizes the shortcomings of Weber's definition of action as follows: first, it lacks a philosophical analysis; second, Weber took intersubjectivity for granted and neglected the temporal structure of action and the distinction between ongoing action and the completed act; and third, the status of meaning in Weber's understanding of action has not been fully clarified because the structure of intention has not been philosophically examined (p. 221-22).

<sup>21</sup>own translation

<sup>22</sup>own translation

<sup>23</sup>Emphasis added by author.

can be grasped by others (Natanson, 1968).<sup>24</sup> *Meaning* becomes an integral part of action and act, it is bound to the conception of action and its temporality. Meaning indicates “a peculiar attitude on the part of the ego toward the flow of its own duration” (Schütz, 2004). Schütz sees a dialectical relationship between action and act. Social action has its orientation towards certain goals, Natanson (1968) describes these as “project-directed” (p. 223). The individual projects his anticipated or desired goal as already been fulfilled and completed in the future perfect tense. The projection takes place in the present, but the meaning of the goal is not intended in consciousness and is independent of the intention of the ego part.

Action is driven by projecting future actions based on past experiences, with motives categorized as *in-order-to* or *because* motives.<sup>25</sup> Common-sense thinking often relies on habitual actions and may not thoroughly consider alternative approaches. It may favor familiar means and ends, even if the interrelationships are not clearly defined, due to their past success. At first glance, it appears that common-sense thinking is seldom rational; instead, we rely on our pre-existing knowledge. Rational calculation only comes into play when the usual rules no longer apply to expectations. Schütz identifies three forms of common-sense thinking: sensible, reasonable, and rational behavior. He says that we act in a sensible way when the motives and course of action are understandable to us, but this does not presuppose that the actor is guided by insight into the motives and course of action. It becomes reasonable when we have to choose between different courses of action. Rational action, on the other hand, presupposes that the actor has insight into the motives and courses of his actions (Schütz, 1967b, p. 27-28). Schütz concludes as follows:

These very preliminary definitions for sensible, reasonable, and rational actions are stated in terms of common-sense interpretations of other people’s actions in daily life, but characteristically, they refer not only to the stock of knowledge taken for granted in the in-group to which the observer of this course of action belongs but also to the subjective point of view of the actor, that is, to his stock of knowledge at hand at the time of carrying out the action (Schütz, 1967b, p. 29).

Common-sense thinking is generally an act of rational behavior. There are a few characterizations of rational action, Schütz notes that it is most often used interchangeably with “reasonable”, that it is “deliberately”, that it therefore “relates back to the original act”, and with a “pure anticipation of the end”. He goes on to say that rational action can be defined as “plannend” or “projected”, as “predictable” and further as “logic”, and finally it presupposes “a choice between two or more means toward the same end” and “a selection of the most appropriate” (Schütz, 1964a, p. 74-77). A social action, then, is “an action which involves the attitudes and actions of others and is oriented to them in its course” (Schütz, 1964b, p. 13).

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<sup>24</sup>Schütz further distinguishes three temporal dimensions of action. Actions can take place in present experiences that come and go. Actions can be intended, in the sense of future experiences. And action can be completed, as a completed act with experiences that exist in one’s memory (Schütz, 2004).

<sup>25</sup>*in-order-to* motives are directed to future events and are motivated by the project, *because* motives are related to past experiences and are motivated by the project itself. Schütz further distinguishes between “pseudo-because statements”, *because* motives that are translatable to *in-order-to* motives, and “genuine because statements,” which are not translatable and therefore lie in completed experience in the past (Schütz, 2004).

Our actions are directed not only to the physical existence of others, but also to the actions we expect to provoke in them. This forms the *in-order-to* motive of our actions and establishes intersubjective connections in social relations. Schütz explains

As I have to orient my own social acts to the because motives of the other's social acts oriented to me, I must always find out their in-order-to motives and disentangle the texture of social interrelationship by interpreting other people's acts from the subjective point of view of the actor (Schütz, 1964b, p. 15).

A mutual understanding of *in-order-to* and *because* motives forms the foundation for social action. Schütz concludes that common-sense rational action occurs within an unquestioned framework of constructions, only reconsidered when the situation deviates from the usual routines and regulations. Typifications, motives, means and ends of the course of action and the individuals involved are taken for granted, not only by the actor but also by the other. Only when these routines and regulations are no longer oriented towards solving the problem, do the actors have to take into account the "definition of the situation", the rational examination of something that was previously taken for granted (Schütz, 1967b, p. 33).<sup>26</sup> In everyday life, common-sense thinking involves individuals perceiving various dimensions of the social world in which they live. This knowledge is fragmentary because it is limited to certain parts of the world, it is also inconsistent within itself, and it also lacks all aspects of clarity and distinction from "knowledge about". Despite differences among individuals and social groups, common-sense thinking extends to cultural objects, social institutions, and social reality, as the social world is an intersubjective world with socialized knowledge (Schütz, 1967c, p. 55).<sup>27</sup> Schütz highlights the significance of lived experiences and common sense knowledge in shaping perceptions and actions. Common sense plays a fundamental role in constructing our social reality and facilitating interactions in everyday life.

### **Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's exploration of the social construction of reality**

Berger and Luckmann's sociological theory of knowledge is rooted in Schütz's emphasis on constructing social reality from everyday experiences through common-sense knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Berger and Luckmann examine how people collectively produce shared meanings that shape

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<sup>26</sup>Schütz (2004) says the taken-for-granted "is always that particular level of experience which presents itself as not in need of further analysis. Whether a level of experience is thus taken for granted depends on the pragmatic interest of the reflective glance which is directed upon it and thereby upon the particular Here and Now from which that glance is operating."

<sup>27</sup>Schütz (2004) says that "the word of the We is not private to either of us, but is our world, the one common intersubjective world which is right there in front of us. It is only from the face-to-face relationship, from the common lived experience of the world in the We, that the intersubjective world can be constituted."

<sup>28</sup>Holzner (1972) and his book *Reality Construction in Society* has also focused on the social construction of reality, although his book has received less attention. In his analysis he focuses on the subject's past, present, and future experience and interpretation of reality. He defines knowledge as "the communicable mapping of some aspects of experienced reality by an observer in symbolic terms" (p. 165). Holzner is particularly interested in socially constructed cognitive activity and its impact on social structure and the social construction of working and ideological knowledge.



the realities of society that are taken for granted and influence human behavior. This, in turn, can be used to explore how individuals collectively produce shared meanings within the Chinese educational context, which not only shape the taken-for-granted realities of moral education but also influence the behavior and perceptions of individuals in response to the prevailing ideological framework. Berger and Luckmann emphasize two vital terms in their approach: “reality” and “knowledge”.<sup>29</sup> They define reality as “a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot “wish them away”)” and knowledge as “the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 13). They go on to claim that a sociology of knowledge has “to concern itself with the general ways by which “realities” are taken as “known” in human societies. [...] The process by which *any* body of “knowledge” comes to be socially established as “reality””<sup>30</sup>(Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 15).<sup>31</sup>

Berger and Luckmann introduce a theory of *institutionalization* to explain the emergence, maintenance, and transmission of social order. *Habitualization* is one origin of institutionalization. Habitualization refers to the process of developing patterns through repeated actions. Once actions become habitual, they are easily reproduced without conscious effort, integrated into a routine in the individual’s general stock of knowledge, yet retain their meaningful character<sup>32</sup> and can be taken for granted for future actions. Berger and Luckmann state that

While in theory there may be a hundred ways to go about the project of building a canoe out of matchsticks, habitualization narrows these down to one. This frees the individual from the burden of “all those decisions”, [...] [and] provides the direction and the specialization of activity that is lacking in man’s biological equipment. [...] the background of habitualized activity opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 71).

Every process of habitualization precedes the process of institutionalization. In this context, Berger and Luckmann ask the question: How do institutions come into being? They define institutionalization as the mutual typification of habitualized actions by actors. These typifications become shared institutions within a social group, shaping individuals and actions. Institutions, rooted in history, control human behavior with predefined patterns, and this control exists in all aspects of institutionalization. Berger and Luckmann state that “institutionalization is incipient in every social situation continuing in time” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 73). Habitualized actions are institutionalized through shared and ongoing social interactions, ultimately achieving objectivity beyond individual involvement by historically evolving into institutions.<sup>33</sup> Berger and Luckmann’s concept of institutionalization could be

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<sup>29</sup>It is no coincidence that they use quotation marks for the two words. We can understand “knowledge” as a category of everyday life: knowledge is everything that actors account as knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 14).

<sup>30</sup>Berger (1966) says that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the dialectics of social structures and the worlds in which individuals live.

<sup>31</sup>Emphasis added by author.

<sup>32</sup>The term “Wissensvorrat” (stock of knowledge) was introduced by Schütz.

<sup>33</sup>Berger and Luckmann explain that the conceptions that previously appeared as *ad hoc* conceptions of two individuals now become historical institutions.

applied to the process of integrating moral education into the school curriculum in China in several ways. First, one could argue that the integration of moral education represents an attempt to institutionalize certain moral and ideological norms within the education system. Second, it could be argued that the prevailing ideological framework in China has historical roots and is institutionalized within the education system. This framework shapes behavior by establishing predefined patterns and norms. Or third, the concept could explain that teachers encounter challenges because ideological norms are already institutionalized within the education system, thus making it difficult for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies to students' real-life experiences. As a result of this regulation, teachers' professional flexibility is limited. Berger and Luckmann explain that "institutions are now experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external coercive fact" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 76). Individuals shape their social world, which initially seems transparent to them. However, socialization transmits this world to future generations, establishing it as a new reality that may not be entirely clear to those who were not part of its creation. Only in this way is it possible to speak of a social world, "in the sense of a comprehensive and given reality confronting the individuals in a manner analogous to the reality of the natural world" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 77).

In Berger and Luckmann's view, institutions exist outside of humans and cannot easily be changed, despite being a result of human creation and construction.<sup>34</sup> They refer to this as *objectivation*: "The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 78). The relationship between the producer (individual) and the product (social world) involves a process of *externalization, objectivation, and internalization*. Knowledge is constructed through these processes, where the product (social world) is brought back into consciousness through internalization, which requires legitimation to explain and justify the institutional world. Legitimations are essential for transmitting the meaning and objective structures of action to the next generation. As the circumstances of the world's construction become *hearsay* to them rather than actual experience, consistent and meaningful interpretations are necessary to ensure that each new generation hears the same. Legitimations serve as the cohesive formulas for maintaining the institutional order. Berger and Luckmann further distinguish between *types* and *roles*. *Types* encompass both the acting self and the acting others, making it inappropriate to reference unique individuals. *Roles* come into play when a collective of actors shares an objectified

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<sup>34</sup>In contrast to the sociological concept of institutions, in his work, (Schurmann, 1966) examines the dynamic relationship between ideology and organization amidst China's evolving social system. He states that social systems entail unified patterns of human interaction and intrinsic components that operate independently of constant individual intervention. Conversely, organizations are structured entities with distinct roles, exercising systematic power. Complex societies have intricate political systems of roles that serve as organizational structures for enforcing directives and ensuring conformity. These organizations are purposeful constructs that require ongoing attention to maintain effectiveness. In stable societies, social systems facilitate the growth of organizations, which in turn promote the advancement of societal objectives. A society's ethos, which is imbued with values and norms, serves to uphold social systems and influence human behavior, much like authority. The process of internalizing values and norms is known as socialization. Important components of a social system include ethos, status groups, and modal personality. He asserts that in China, ideology has replaced ethos, acting as a belief system with sociopolitical values. Organizational leadership in China aligns with traditional societal status (p. 1-3).

body of knowledge. The actor identifies with the socially objectified typifications of behavior *during* his or her action, but reestablishes a distance to this behavior *after* his or her action and reflection.

Institutions are embodied in individual experience of roles. The roles, objectified linguistically, are an essential ingredient of the objectively available world of any society. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 91).<sup>35</sup>

The common stock of knowledge comprises shared standards of role performance that shape roles when reciprocal typifications of behavior emerge. Berger and Luckmann say that “*all* institutionalized conduct involves roles” and “roles *represent* the institutional order” (authors’ emphasis) (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 92).<sup>36</sup> Roles represent the institutional order on two levels: the performance of roles represents itself, and the role represents the institutional nexus of behavior. Roles enable the existence and transmission of institutions across generations. However, *some* roles have greater significance in representing the institutional order, integrating all institutions into a meaningful world, and maintaining traditions in society. These roles, often rooted in political or religious institutions, play a crucial role in shaping the collective consciousness and behavior of members of society. Playing a role introduces actors to socially objectified knowledge, equipping them with norms and values specific to that role. This social distribution of knowledge consists of common sense knowledge and role-specific knowledge. Berger and Luckmann offer two perspectives for analyzing the relationship between roles and knowledge. One focuses on roles as mediators of institutional order and objectified knowledge, while the other examines roles with their own socially defined knowledge. Both perspectives share the essential dialectic of society (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 96). This demonstrates the possibility of integrating the dialectic into the field of moral education in China. In particular, examining the interplay among teachers, educational institutions, and social values and norms could illuminate the dynamic tension between the established institutional order and the individually constructed realities of students.

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<sup>35</sup>Tillmann (2006) says about institutions that they provide support and a sense of security, but they also present objective realities that individuals must navigate. Failing to adequately navigate these institutions may result in the application of coercion. Therefore, individuals must learn to navigate these institutions effectively. Institutions can serve as both sources of support and potential burdens, as they establish behavioral norms and impose organized forms of social control (including predetermined, functionally oriented, and often hierarchically structured modes of communication). The fulfillment of mutual role expectations is ensured and, when necessary, enforced by institutional structures. In every institution, individuals communicate and collaborate, shaping their personalities as they mutually influence each other. As such, all institutions function as fields for socialization processes (p. 110).

<sup>36</sup>This study emphasizes the role of organization within institutional sociology, enabling a deeper understanding of how institutions operate and influence individual behavior. The focus on processes and roles also provides valuable insights into the structural and organizational aspects of institutions, while avoiding debates about performativity. Performativity emphasizes the way language and actions not only describe but also actively construct social realities. Some discussions debate the performative nature of institutions, where the focus shifts from their structure and processes to how they actively create and reiterate social norms. By emphasizing processes and roles in the field of institutional sociology, it is possible to maintain a clear and structured understanding of how institutions operate instead of being diverted by discussions on the performative aspects of language and behavior in them, as found in works by Judith Butler.

*Internalization* is the third moment in Berger and Luckmann's trias, where objective reality becomes subjective for the individual. Individuals are not born *as* members of society; they must *become* one through the process of internalization, an individual is born only with a predisposition to sociality. This process is regulated by internalization: "The immediate apprehension or interpretation of an objective event as expressing meaning, that is, as a manifestation of another's subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful to myself" and it is then "the basis, first, for an understanding of one's fellowmen and, second, for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful and social reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 149-50).<sup>37</sup> Berger and Luckmann state that this process is not a creation of meaning by autonomous individuals; instead, it begins with *taking over* a world already lived and created by others. Individuals *understand* both the subjective processes of others and the *world* they live in, which also becomes their own world. For internalization to occur, two conditions are necessary: time, since the process requires extended periods of sharing, and a comprehensive perspective to connect intersubjective sequences of situations. When internalization is complete, individuals not only understand each other's definitions of situations, but also mutually determine them, leading to continuous mutual identification (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).<sup>38</sup>

Berger and Luckmann explain the process with *socialization*<sup>39</sup>, which integrates individuals into the objective world of society. They distinguish between primary socialization in early childhood (usually in the family) and secondary socialization, which introduces already socialized individuals to new sectors of the objective world.<sup>40</sup> The basic structure of secondary socialization is similar to that of primary socialization. Berger and Luckmann's theory of socialization is based on the ideas of George Herbert Mead.<sup>41</sup> They claim that individuals are born into an objective social structure and encounter significant others who are responsible for their socialization. Internalization of this social world occurs through identification with significant others, involving cognitive and emotional processes. By adopting the roles of significant others<sup>42</sup> to their *own* roles, individuals are able to identify themselves and acquire a

<sup>37</sup>We can find this approach as *Verstehen des Anderen* in the writings of Alfred Schütz.

<sup>38</sup>Frank III (1979) raises interesting questions that should be acknowledged and might find an answer with this thesis (he states that these questions are from the opposite side, but concern the same issue: the structure of social life): The first question is "How much active agency do individuals enjoy in "constructing" social realities?" and second, "How malleable are most "realities" to the constructive activities of members?" If there is room for constructive activity, can members then define situations differently? Getting to the bottom of this requires an analysis of social structure (p. 167-68).

<sup>39</sup>Berger (1966), in an article published on the problem of identity in the sociology of knowledge, describes socialization as a process that not only ensures that the individual is "real" to himself, but that the individual will respond to his experience of the world with patterns appropriate to this "reality". So-called psychological reality can best be described as an ongoing dialectical relationship with the social structure, which arises in social processes and can only be sustained by virtue of social processes (p. 106-7).

<sup>40</sup>Talcott Parsons was one of the first sociologists to distinguish between primary and secondary socialization. He argued that primary socialization takes place within the family, where children learn the particular norms and values of the family and community. Secondary socialization takes place through a variety of socializing agents, such as the educational system, and children now learn the universalistic values of society as a whole (Parsons, 1959a,b). There are a number of scholars who have contributed to the theory of primary and secondary socialization.

<sup>41</sup>I will address his assertions in greater depth in the next section, so for now, I will omit his outline and definitions.

<sup>42</sup>This stage of socialization is called primary socialization. The child's first encounter with significant others (e.g., the family).

plausible identity. The self mirrors the attitudes of significant others, shaping the individual's identity.<sup>43</sup> This process involves identification with others and self-identification, blending objectively assigned and subjectively appropriated identity.<sup>44</sup> Berger and Luckmann refer to this as the general dialectical society, in which individuals take on the roles and attitudes of significant others and internalize their world. During primary socialization, abstractions occur, shifting from norms of *only* significant others (e.g., parents) to attitudes *in general* in the child's consciousness. When additional significant others (e.g., grandparents) support the parents' opinions, the norms extend to a generality of others, allowing the child to identify with society as a whole (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 152).

The formation within consciousness of the generalized other marks a decisive phase in socialization. It implies the internalization of society as such and the objective reality established therein, and, at the same time, the subjective establishment of a coherent and continuous identity. Society, identity *and* reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 153).<sup>45</sup>

After reaching the generalized other, primary socialization ends and secondary socialization begins. Secondary socialization involves the acquisition of role-specific knowledge and the internalization of institutional "sub-worlds". According to Berger and Luckmann, it presupposes an already formed self and internalized world, which can become problematic when new content conflicts with pre-existing norms and attitudes. Conceptual procedures are needed to establish different bodies of knowledge during secondary socialization. Unlike primary socialization, secondary socialization does not require emotionally charged identification with significant others; it only requires enough mutual identification for communication. Secondary socialization does not rely on specific individuals; for example, teachers represent institutionally specific meanings and can be interchangeable in transmitting knowledge. The roles become anonymous, and the child realizes that the world can be transformed into another reality. The interaction between teacher and student can be formalized (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 161-62). In secondary socialization, formality and anonymity make content less inescapable than in primary socialization. The individual can create a distance between the total self and the role-specific self.<sup>46</sup> Primary socialization instills knowledge with a natural focus on reality, while secondary socialization requires pedagogical methods that make it relatable to children and foster their awareness of objective reality.<sup>47</sup> The reality

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<sup>43</sup>Charles H. Cooley describes this process as the "mirror-effect" or the "looking-glass-self" (Cooley, 1902).

<sup>44</sup>Language is not only the basis and instrument of the social construction of reality, it is also a primary means by which individuals are socialized and become part of the world they share with others. Conversation makes the common world plausible to individuals, and linguistic means are the basis for cognitive and moral norms, value systems, and the reinterpretation of worldviews and in their totality of "collective representations" (Berger, 1966).

<sup>45</sup>Emphasis added by author.

<sup>46</sup>Furthermore, Berger (1966) speaks of "inevitable structures of the individual's own consciousness" (p. 107).

<sup>47</sup>Scholars have acknowledged that it is questioned whether the distinction between primary and secondary socialization is sufficient in today's world, and whether the concept needs to be broadened to include socialization throughout our lives, rather than being reduced to a concept that leads to adulthood (e.g. Flecha et al., 1989).

of everyday life is maintained in two ways: it is embodied in routine actions and it is reaffirmed in the interaction of an individual with other individuals.<sup>48</sup> Interaction with others can be divided into significant others and the *choir*, with significant others having a higher impact and a privileged position on the subjective reality of the individual. This interaction in the process of maintaining reality involves both interaction among individuals and their interaction with the subjective reality they aim to validate (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

Socialization lays the foundation for a subjective reality, often referred to as the *socially constructed reality*, from the perspective of each individual. Socialization enables a symmetry between objective and subjective reality and objective and subjective identity.<sup>49</sup> Socialization is an ongoing process where internalized elements are consistently influenced by an individual's subjective reality. Developing mechanisms to sustain this reality in a dynamic society is essential to maintain a balance between objective and subjective realities. Subjective reality is constantly confronted with crisis situations, and Berger and Luckmann propose two ways of securing reality: routine maintenance and crisis maintenance. While routine maintenance is outlined for the maintenance of internalized reality in everyday life, crisis maintenance is outlined for the situation of crisis. Crisis situations can lead to resocialization, involving a shift in significant others or legitimations. Resocialization necessitates a strong identification with significant others to reshape subjective reality fundamentally (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 177). This requires a legitimating apparatus for each stage of the process and continued conversation with the new significant others or their representing community.<sup>50</sup> Socialization shapes identity and its structure, affecting both the stability of identity and its representation of objective reality. Berger and Luckmann claim that in societies with a simple division of labor and minimal distribution of knowledge, socialization produces predefined and highly profiled identities. However, predefinition does not guarantee individual agreement or satisfaction with the identity. Berger and Luckmann give the following distinctive description of identity:

Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality and, like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it. Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men with specific identities (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 194).

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<sup>48</sup>Berger and Luckmann (1967) draw attention on the importance of language in everyday life, as language achieves "the maximum detachment from the "here and now" of everyday life" (p. 55).

<sup>49</sup>Berger (1966) states that "the psychological reality of the successfully socialized individual thus *verifies* subjectively what his society has objectively defined as real." (author's emphasis) (p. 107)

<sup>50</sup>According to Berger and Luckmann, we can think of this as a "reinterpretation of past biography *in toto*, following the formula, "Then I *thought* ... now I *know*" (author's emphasis) (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 179).

A distinction can be made between identity as a phenomenon in a process between the individual and society, and identity *types*, which are social products emerging from objective social reality and shaped by historical structures. The analysis of identity types requires a theoretical framework for interpretation and contextualization. The individual collaborates with the social structure and individual consciousness to create a socially constructed reality. This process transforms the human organism and produces both reality and individual identity. This process can be interpreted as a joint effort of the organism, individual consciousness, and the social structure established through socialization, guided by theories of identity. With the production of identity, the social construction of reality has reached its final stage: the once isolated individual, born into society, is now aware of the of reality in a socially constructed reality.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2 The role of socialization: Key concepts and theories

The development of reality is influenced by socialization, whereby individuals learn societal norms. Socialization shapes individuals as members of society by engaging with influences and adapting to a dynamic social reality. It is an ongoing process of growth and adaptation between the inner and outer realities of the mind and society. In the realm of moral education, this indicates that socialization shapes individuals' perceptions of reality through the acquisition of societal rules and norms. It highlights that moral education is a dynamic interplay between personal growth and adjustment to both internal and external circumstances. Socialization (of a child) can be understood as a process by "which someone learns the ways of a given society or social group so that he [she] can function within it" (Elkin and Handel, 1972, p. 04). The primary goal of socialization is often considered to be transitioning individuals into adulthood with the purpose of creating well-adjusted members of society (Tam and Lee, 2010). Two fundamental questions arise: "How does a pre-existing society shape individuals to fit within its structures?" And "how do individuals become autonomous within that society?" (Hurrelmann, 2012) Socialization influences how children within the Chinese educational system come to adopt and internalize the regulations and expectations associated with moral education. This process equips individuals with necessary attitudes, skills, and motives to participate in society while navigating the complex interplay between constructed realities and overarching ideological frameworks (Clausen, 1968).

### Development of socialization

The history of socialization has been explored by early sociologists such as Georg Simmel and Emile Durkheim, whose impact on various aspects of sociology laid the groundwork for

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<sup>51</sup>Berger (1966) further describes the sociological understanding of identity, by considering social psychology and the sociology of knowledge with two simple statements: "Identity, with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality, is always identity within a specific, socially constructed world" and from the individual's point of view: "One identifies oneself, as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world" (p. 111).

the development of more fully differentiated theories by later sociologists. In the late 19th century, they studied how complex societies maintained social cohesion amidst industrialization. Simmel emphasized the mutual influence of individuals, which leads to the formation of rules and dependencies that shape a socialized individual. Socialization involves inheriting the societal norms and values into one's personality while maintaining one's individuality (Coser, 1977; Frisby, 1990).<sup>52</sup> Emile Durkheim's approach concentrates on how social integration can be realized by shaping individuals' personalities through a systematic influence on their emotions and attitudes. Durkheim examines the transition from simple societies to organized societies that are based on the division of labor. He emphasizes the need for individuals to internalize social norms and mechanisms without any resistance, enabling them to benefit from social demands. Socialization is essential for an individual to be socially acceptable and for society to function properly. Durkheim also links socialization to education, describing it as "methodological socialization" and an essential tool for the internalization of norms.<sup>53</sup> His ideas laid the foundation for future theories of socialization (Barnes, 1977; Ottaway, 1955; Walle, 2008).

The evolution of the socialization theory is also strongly connected to progress in psychology and sociology. In psychology, Sigmund Freud's model of personality<sup>54</sup> and Jean Piaget's cognitive approach<sup>55</sup> contributed to different perspectives on socialization (Fisher and Greenberg, 1996; Wadsworth, 2004). And in contrast, Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist in the field of developmental psychology and education, emphasized the importance of social interaction, language, and cultural context in shaping human cognition and development. His influential Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept has had a lasting impact on educational practices globally. Some points might arise when examining Vygotsky's potential influence on CPC ideology and moral education. First, Vygotsky's emphasis on sociocultural learning and the role of the community aligns with the CPC's commitment to collective progress and societal advancement. Second, his insights into the role of language in cognitive development seem to conform with the CPC's endeavors to disseminate its ideological principles through a shared language. And third, Vygotsky's viewpoints might indirectly support the CPC's focus on moral education by stressing the importance of cultural instruments and social interaction in cognitive growth, thereby bolstering the party's principles and convictions in the education sector (Newman and Holzman, 1993).

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<sup>52</sup>Georg Simmel's sociology studies patterned interactions and their recurrence in historical periods. He focused on basic patterns that are subject to larger social formations, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, where both influence each other (Coser, 1977).

<sup>53</sup>For further reading of his thoughts I refer to his book *Erziehung, Moral und Gesellschaft* from 1973, the original was published in French in 1902.

<sup>54</sup>In general, Sigmund Freud's model of personality, also known as the structural model, divides the mind into three components: *id*, *ego* and *superego*. He suggests that interactions and conflicts between these three core components create personality, and that they develop at different stages in our lives. The *id* is in our unconscious and is driven by instincts and impulses. In contrast is the *superego*, which represents our sense of morality. The *ego* is the only part of the conscious personality and is part of the *id*, it is directly modified by the influence of the external world. It is the decision maker of the personality (Freud, 1923, 1920).

<sup>55</sup>Jean Piaget developed these stages of cognitive development considering the growth of children's intelligence. He divides cognitive development into four stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. They pass through different ages and begin at birth. In his proposal, the stages are universal across cultures and follow the same scheme (Piaget, 1951)



In sociology, Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism, inspired by Durkheim's ideas, emerged. Parsons' macrosociological theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of subsystems within the social system. In his theory of action, he describes individuals as acting in roles, which is relevant to socialization because they must conform to social expectations. According to Parsons, socialization is the acquisition of the ability to perform in different social roles and to integrate into different levels of society. However, his theory lacks a focus on individuality and the development of identity, prioritizing role conformity over personal subjectivity (Parsons, 1959a,b). Charles Horton Cooley, a proponent of symbolic interactionism, introduced the concept of the *looking-glass-self*. According to Cooley, individuals develop their identities based on how others perceive them socially. This process involves imagining how others see and judge them, leading to feelings of pride or humiliation. Cooley observed social life, including the development of his own children, to shape his theory. He emphasizes the reciprocal nature of interactions in which individuals actively influence how others perceive them. Cooley believes that true humanity emerges through experiences and interactions with others (Cooley, 1902).

Jürgen Habermas combines the ideas of Parsons and Mead to suggest a self-identity that balances both personal and social identities. Personal identity pertains to an individual's life story and ability to maintain consistency in the face of change, while social identity is concerned with the individual's group membership and adherence to role expectations. The attainment of self-identity necessitates the use of reflective introspection and an equitable balance of both personal and social identities in social interactions. Habermas delineated crucial prerequisites for effective role playing, including the capacity to withstand frustration, tolerate ambiguity, and maintain distance from the role. These skills are instrumental in determining an individual's ability to socialize proficiently. Habermas underlines how social conditions and role systems influence the formation of identity. When equipped with these qualifications, an individual can attain a stable self, prompting inquiry into how different conditions impact self-identity development (Abels and König, 2010). Inspired by Mead, Lothar Krappmann defines identity as individuals' continuous self-experience through various life stages and social challenges. By having a realistic self-perception and positive evaluation, individuals develop ego identity, which enables them to take situational action. Personal and social identity are included and must be balanced through socialization throughout one's lifetime. Identity is not static but rather develops through interactions, experiences, and assessments at different points throughout one's life (Abels and König, 2010; Krappmann, 1669).

### **2.2.1 George H. Mead and the self**

George Herbert Mead's social behaviorism goes beyond classical behaviorism by exploring individuals' inner experiences. His work, highlighted in *Mind, Self, and Society*, examines how identity and knowledge are formed within primary groups and through communication and interactions. Mead's framework analyzes the development of consciousness, experience, and communication through social processes. Incorporating his perspective enables exploring how social procedures in Chinese moral education affect aligning or misaligning

constructed realities with dominant ideologies. Mead's analysis illuminates the impact of interpersonal dynamics on individuals' comprehension of moral education. This enriches the examination of cognitive processes that shape moral values and an ideological framework in students, teachers, and institutions. His framework underscores the function of symbols, communication, and social interactions in constructing moral values and aligning them with the prevalent ideological framework. Mead takes a societal perspective when approaching social experience, emphasizing the importance of communication in maintaining social order. His framework considers social experience to be the dynamic reality perceived by individuals participating in ongoing social movements (Natanson, 1973, p. 7). According to Mead's perspective, society comes before individual existence, and both the mind and self are products of social interactions. Mead describes the mind as a *social phenomenon* that forms in the empirical framework of social interactions and is significantly influenced by the meanings formed in those interactions (Mead, 1962, p. 133). Language is the vital connection between the individual organism and the environment, where meaning is dynamically generated as fundamental polarities. Language and gestures play crucial roles in interpersonal communication, with gestures serving as automatic responses that articulate shared meanings and emotions during social exchanges. These nonverbal cues promote adaptation and enhance social consciousness. Mead's focus on symbols such as language and gestures highlights their function in transmitting and interpreting societal norms and moral values in an educational setting. These symbolic exchanges influence individuals' understanding of morality and its congruence with prevailing ideological structures, with students and teachers participating in this impact. Mead says

Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they addressed; and in all conversations of gestures within the social process, whether external (between different individuals) or internal (between a given individual and himself), the individual's consciousness of the content and flow of meaning involved depends on his thus taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures (Mead, 1962, p. 47).

Significant symbols, which are critical to developing thought and the mind, indicate actions or responses expected in social interactions. Mead's concepts of *role-taking* and the *generalized other* demonstrate how individuals internalize these symbols and cultivate self-awareness. Role-taking requires individuals to imagine themselves as others to comprehend reactions and experiences, enabling them to navigate social interactions with ease. This developmental process begins in early childhood, where individuals can reflect on their own language using the perspective of others. This allows for the formation of a reflexive and conscious sense of self, progressing through stages like *play* and *game*. He says, "play in this sense [...] is a play at something" (Mead, 1962, p. 150), and children take on different roles, constructing a sense of self through their responses to stimuli. In the organized game stage, children must now be "ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in the game" and

furthermore “these different roles must have a definite relationship to each other” (Mead, 1962, p. 151). During the organized game phase, children develop a sense of self-consciousness and the *generalized other* by considering the opinions of others involved as they integrate into social communities. This notion represents the shared comprehension of societal norms, which has a considerable impact on individual behavior as children develop into adulthood. Ensuring that the community has control over its members is an integral component in molding people’s thought process. In terms of moral education, institutions and teachers act as part of this community, influencing the moral values of students and their alignment with the ideological framework. To think effectively, the individual must be able to assume the role of the generalized other and conform to the prescribed attitudes. In other words, “each of these thinkers, assuming the role of the generalized other, makes himself intelligible both to himself and to his fellow thinkers by thinking from a non-individual standpoint” (Natan-son, 1973, p. 14). It is important to encourage students to consider societal values from a broader perspective to align their constructed realities with prevailing norms. To achieve the full development of the self, the individual must also consider the attitudes of various social activities at any given time. This process allows the individual to see himself or herself as an object (Mead, 1962, p. 154).

Mead’s theory underscores the reciprocal relationship between the self and society, highlighting how both contribute to the socialization process. He introduces the notion of the *self*, which comprises both the *I* and the *me*. The *I* (the self from the individual’s point of view) represents the impulsive, imaginative side of the self, while the *me* (the self from the community’s point of view) characterizes the assimilated, adaptable aspect that conforms to societal benchmarks and demands. This differentiation establishes a structural correlation within the self, where the *me* has consciousness of itself as an object, impacted by role-taking and conformity to communal standards. The *I* and the *me* collectively compose an individual’s personality as perceived during social encounters. Mead emphasizes that individuals are born into certain objective situations, which make up the *me*. However, with deliberate adaptations, the *I* and the *me* become essential to the social process, impacting the distinct nature of an individual’s actions (Mead, 1962). This relationship between the self and society emphasizes the dynamic nature of social reality and how the self is both shaped by and influences the social process. This is important in comprehending how individuals perceive themselves and their alignment with moral values and the ideological framework within the scope of moral education.<sup>56</sup> In Mead’s perspective, the self and society have a continuously evolving relationship. The self-structure of every individual reflects their experiences and interactions within the wider social context. However, each person’s self-structure also presents a distinctive viewpoint which leads to considerable individual variances. Notwithstanding this variety, there still exists a shared social heritage, and every individual keeps their specific individuality (Mead, 1962, p. 201-02).<sup>57</sup> Mead’s research established the basis for symbolic

<sup>56</sup>It seems not surprising that Berger and Luckmann refer to Mead on several occasions, since they both speak of a reciprocal relationship between the self and society.

<sup>57</sup>The traditional Chinese understanding of the self, informed by Confucian philosophy, differs from the perspective put forth by George H. Mead in that it highlights the interconnectedness of the individual and society. This view encompasses self-understanding and draws comparisons and contrasts with Western concepts. In

interactionism, a significant sociological perspective, which explores how individuals comprehend and construe their social environment by means of communicating and interacting with others.

### 2.2.2 The impact on the individual in the context of education

The educational environment involves an individual's moral values, institutions, educators, and peers. Primary socialization, influenced by parents and family, differs from secondary socialization, which entails exposure to systems like education.<sup>58</sup> Some scholars argue that children's development is contingent on forming strong emotional bonds and establishing consistent behavioral norms (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Secondary socialization in education, including interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators, is informed by the foundational socialization provided by the family. The child's personality, which develops during primary socialization, forms the basis for their journey within the educational system. Recognizing that secondary socialization builds upon the family's primary influence highlights the major roles of both family and society in shaping individuals' constructed realities. This indicates that a child's personality, which is initially influenced by their family, interacts with the educational system. Consequently, it emphasizes the significance of comprehending both family and education in understanding how individuals perceive moral education in China.

Children's transition from a nurturing environment to primary school represents a shift from developing motor and social skills to obtaining cognitive abilities and knowledge. During this period, they establish their identities, socialize with peers, and engage in unstructured play. School personnel and family members, serving as socialization agents, may impact each other's actions during designated activities. Additionally, schools operate as social institutions that are frequently impacted by the state, religious groups, or various interest groups. Teachers are selected based on school requirements and policies in order to facilitate the process of socialization, requiring them to have the appropriate qualifications and training to teach specific subjects. At times, there may be conflicts or tensions between the perspectives and objectives of individual teachers and those of governing policymakers. Ad-

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Confucian thought, the concept of self is embodied in five ideas: *wo* (I), *wu* (I), *shen* (one's person), *ji* (self), and *zi* (self). *Ji* and *zi* pertain to others, while *shen* and *ji* usually refer to oneself. The first three terms imply the subjectivity of the individual, indicating will and actions. The last three signify objectivity in social relations, reflecting mental reactions and social choices. In Confucian philosophy, the self evaluates choices in relation to societal norms and the influence of others, emphasizing the importance of activity over passivity through the concept of *shen* aligned with *ji*. The interdependent relationship between the self, benevolence, and self-interest is rooted in internal factors but also influenced by social values. *Wo* (I) and *wu* (I) reflect individual desires and intentions, embodying consciousness and self-motivation, relying on one's intuition rather than external factors (Jing, 2022, pp. 154-57). While there are similarities to George H. Mead's theory, Confucian thought differs in its emphasis on collective harmony over self-centeredness.

<sup>58</sup>The end of primary socialization and the start of secondary socialization is not clearly defined. Primary and secondary socialization are highly interconnected, and the latter happens immediately after the former. The differentiation, as explained by Parsons, Berger, and Luckmann, is taken into consideration. Therefore, I have divided primary and secondary socialization into first the family and then the educational setting, since the individual is confronted not only with a number of agents, but also with a new sector of the objective world (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Parsons, 1959a). However, between primary socialization in the family and secondary socialization in education, much more can happen than we may be aware of, and secondary socialization in a sense begins much earlier than entering school. It is crucial to consider this intermediate phase and the effect it can have on an individual.

ditionally, governmental or religious oversight of teacher training, selection, and curriculum exerts considerable influence on students' worldviews (Clausen, 1968, p. 154). Schools act as institutions that interact with stakeholders, affecting family dynamics, while adhering to established norms and formal expectations. Consequently, they serve a crucial role in socializing both present and prospective generations within society. The school operates on three organizational levels: learning principles dictate interactions between teachers and students, administrative organization handles decision-making, and macro-organization oversees the entire educational system, which includes programs and schools (Tillmann, 2006, p. 112). Recognizing that schools conform to structured norms and formal expectations underscores the role of educational institutions. Didactic guidelines and curriculum directives not only shape the educational environment but also impact individuals' values, specifically regarding moral education. As a result, teachers within this system may face challenges in aligning individuals' constructed realities with prevailing ideologies due to these constraints. Several decades ago, a study conducted by Hess and Torney (1967) examined the importance of schooling for children and concluded that

The school apparently plays the largest part in teaching attitudes, conceptions, and beliefs about the operation of the political system. While it may be argued that the family contributes much to the socialization that goes into basic loyalty to the country, the school gives content, information, and concepts which expand and elaborate these early feelings of attachment (p. 217).

As state institutions, schools are subjected to administrative and political oversight and play a crucial role in the socialization of individuals. One of their challenges is achieving a balance between historical knowledge and values with the need to adapt to the rapid social changes in industrialized societies. The transmission of outdated heritage may not be adequate for effective socialization in a changing context. The effectiveness of socialization is influenced by various factors, including social status. Decades ago, a debate arose regarding potential challenges in the successful socialization of children from disadvantaged backgrounds due to negative early influences and possible teacher biases, which may affect their educational prospects (Elkin and Handel, 1972). Schools aim to build upon preschool socialization and provide knowledge and skills for social mobility to children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Primary socialization exert significant influence on children, whereas secondary socialization via schools can align their values with societal norms and prepare them to operate competently in society. At the classroom level, educators act as facilitators, shaped by state and school-level factors like the national curriculum and educational policies. While relevant, individual teachers have the autonomy to interpret and implement curriculum plans uniquely. The textbooks frequently used by teachers have a large influence in shaping their teaching methods, often surpassing the influence of the curriculum. Factors and elements at the classroom level, such as teacher behavior, textbook availability, and grouping procedures, may be influenced by the school and even institutional levels, thus affecting educational outcomes (Creemers, 1994, p. 04).

Establishing a personal connection with each student presents challenges since teacher-student interactions tend to emphasize conveying factual information over fostering personal relationships. According to Elkin and Handel (1972), the classroom structure has both short and long-term impacts on children, influencing their interactions with peers and their ability for adapting to classroom situations. This concept is commonly known as the *hidden curriculum*, which denotes a set of unofficial teachings that take place behind children's backs. It covers skills such as waiting patiently, adapting to classroom norms, and engaging in class activities, culminating in a sense of integration into society. Teachers frequently evaluate students' behaviors and progress, giving guidance and correction as necessary. Peer and self-evaluation, along with teacher behavior and classroom management, are critical factors in children's socialization.<sup>59</sup> According to research, it is essential for teachers to align their goals, curricula, and teaching styles with the needs of their respective classrooms. The correlation between a teacher's personal values and societal values has an impact on the motivation and learning outcomes of their students. It also influences classroom management and teaching styles, including the decision to take an authoritarian or permissive approach (e.g. Barni et al., 2018).

Scholars posit that educators play an important part in the socialization of students and hold influential positions in children's lives. They serve as value educators, and their conduct can impact students' abilities, intellect, and social interactions (Thornberg, 2008; Willemse et al., 2005). Disparities in educators' expectations and pedagogical techniques may result in diverse consequences and social interactions in different classrooms. Classroom, group, and individual interactions between teachers and students can vary based upon teacher expectations. In his work, Clausen (1968) identifies five principal socialization goals and activities of teachers that complement parents' efforts. These goals encompass teaching skills, orienting children to the educational system and fostering dedication to it, conveying cultural goals and values, furnishing guidance and models for solving issues, and preparing children to navigate disparities among individuals (p. 156). These objectives and activities are not all-inclusive, as they rely on the particular classroom situation and must be customized accordingly. Bureaucratic regulations can sometimes impede a teacher's capacity to fully engage in interactions and problem-solving with students. Limited time with each group may result in socialization patterns applying to the entire group instead of individual students. Clausen's study highlights that individuals actively partake in the socialization process, which is influenced by both cultural and personal factors, leading to varied outcomes. The examination of the teacher's role and the active involvement of individuals in socialization offers a framework for comprehending the integration of moral education into the Chinese educational system. Moreover, it indicates how individuals' experiences and interactions with teachers contribute to their compliance with the existing ideological framework.

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<sup>59</sup>Veugelers (2000) notes that teachers may face a value conflict, as they may find values that are in line with their own values more important than following the norm of teaching. To avoid such assumptions, teachers need to engage in a process of critical thinking and consciously pay attention to different values that may emerge without considering whether they are in line with their own personal values.

### 2.3 Interdisciplinary approaches: Incorporating Chinese thoughts

Integrating Chinese philosophical perspectives into analyzing moral education highlights the lasting impact of traditional roots in modern times. It centers on two significant schools of Chinese thought: Confucianism, which promotes the cultivation of ethical virtues, the significance of the family and social harmony, and the responsibility of individuals in establishing an organized and equitable society, and Wang Yangming's theory of the unity of knowledge and action, predating thinkers such as Marx, Engels, and Mannheim. These philosophies continue to inform moral education, as Confucian principles gain renewed relevance and Wang Yangming's ideas resonate in contemporary discussions. Confucianism, originally applied in familial and societal contexts, now extends its relevance to broader moral education, demonstrating its enduring significance. On the other hand, Wang Yangming's theory, which emerged during the Ming Dynasty, asserts the interdependence of knowledge and action, underscoring the essential unity of intellectual comprehension and practical application. While its origins predate the rise of revolutionary ideologies, this concept has had a profound impact on various works, including Mao Zedong's essays and current speeches delivered by General Secretary Xi Jinping. This synthesis of concepts underscores the timeless influence of Chinese ideals on ethical considerations and moral education in present-day discourse.

Exploration of Mao Zedong's seminal essays, especially *On Practice*, reveals a discernible theme of the interplay between knowledge and action. While not directly connected to early philosophers such as Wang Yangming, it highlights the lasting importance of this interplay in various discourses, whether societal or political. Theory is not solely an abstract concept; rather, as Mao Zedong asserted, it should maintain a deep and interrelated connection with practice. In his perspective, theory functions not only as guiding principles but also as practical tools, serving as a means to apprehend and instigate meaningful transformations in the world. It is crucial to frequently test theory through practical application to ensure its relevance and rationality. Within Mao's framework, the Marxist understanding of knowledge centers on the inseparable link between comprehension and pragmatic application, especially within the context of production and class struggle. This approach argues that knowledge is tested through real-world scenarios, viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning, and prioritizing practical application to verify knowledge. It acknowledges the successive phases of knowledge development, ranging from sensory perception to logical understanding, all rooted in real-world experiences, such as the realm of production and the crucible of class conflict (Mao, 1937).

From the Marxist perspective, true knowledge is derived from direct observation and participation, with practical activities playing a central role in shaping one's worldview and fostering communal awareness within society. Within this ideological framework, Marxism adheres to the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge<sup>60</sup>, which highlights the intercon-

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<sup>60</sup>The dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge is often associated with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who developed it as part of their larger Marxist framework.

nectedness of material conditions, class struggle, and historical development. Central to the Marxist perspective is the premise that theory should guide action.<sup>61</sup> The significance of theoretical knowledge, according to this view, stems directly from its practical utility and application. Marxism extends the boundaries of knowledge beyond abstract theory to encompass the concrete practices of revolutionaries. These practices undergo continuous scrutiny and evaluation contingent on their tangible achievements. The highest point of this process is reached when individuals put theoretical concepts into practice, effectively overcoming the gap that often separates understanding from action. The fundamental principles of Chinese society function as its guiding ideological foundation. These principles are exemplified in both theory and practice, as demonstrated in speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping, drawing attention on the fundamental link between knowledge and action, which is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture (Mao, 1937; Chinese Government, 2014).

It becomes apparent that the interaction between knowledge and practice, illustrated through the ideological foundations of the Marxist perspective and the interpretations of, for example, Mao Zedong and General Xi Jinping, shares a common groundwork with earlier philosophical movements. Whether intentional or coincidental, Wang Yangming's theory predates and resonates with elements identified in Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong's writings, and contemporary approaches to moral education. Active engagement is emphasized as the central element for achieving full comprehension in these perspectives. Furthermore, they collectively stress the significance of implementing concepts in practical contexts.

### **2.3.1 Wang Yangming's unity of knowledge and action**

During the Ming Dynasty, Wang Yangming (王阳明) introduced the theory of the unity of knowledge and action, *zhixing heyi* (知行合一), which had a significant impact on Confucian philosophy. Wang's theory challenges traditional approaches that separate knowledge and action, highlighting the inseparability of true knowledge and action. When applied to CPC ideology, this perspective underscores its important role in moral education. It suggests that guaranteeing individuals conform to CPC ideals could necessitate a comprehensive educational strategy. This strategy blends both theoretical and practical knowledge to foster a profound comprehension that is closely tied to real-world application, prioritizing a moral education that encompasses the acquisition of knowledge and its application for nurturing individuals whose beliefs and actions align with the party's fundamental principles.

#### **Wang Yangming's perspective on knowledge and action**

Wang Yangming expanded upon the notion that knowledge and action were intricately connected, proposing the theory of the unity of knowledge and action. This theory was influenced by the teachings of Cheng-Zhu scholars from the Song Dynasty (Pan et al., 2016). Wang Yangming's focus on practical implementation and developing inherent moral sense is

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<sup>61</sup>In addition, Alfred Schütz, in his fundamental linking of knowledge and action, spoke of "Meaning is what guides and orients action and distinguishes behavior as action in the first place. Knowledge is therefore not something external to action, but constitutive for action" (Knoblauch, 2010, p. 146).



in line with the CPC ideology, both draw attention on the importance of applying knowledge and give priority to ethical values in personal and social progress.

In Wang Yangming's philosophical theories, three key claims stand out: "the unity of knowledge and action", "the principle of heaven is not outside the mind"<sup>62</sup>, and "there are no things outside the mind". The first claim later evolved into the theory of "the extension of innate knowledge", *zhi liangzhi* (致良知) (Yang, 2023). Wang Yangming's concept of the unity of knowledge and action has substantial implications for understanding the CPC ideology. This concept tackles a common societal issue – the disconnect between knowledge and action. According to Wang Yangming, genuine knowledge necessitates correlated action, reflecting the CPC's dedication to integrating ideology with practical implementation. Both perspectives acknowledge the necessity of connecting theory and practice. Wang Yangming's philosophical position also underscores a critical dilemma: those who act without understanding and those who understand but do not act (Pan et al., 2016; Ding, 2023). Wang's urge for the dialectical unity of knowledge and action is consistent with the CPC's objective of fostering a harmonious correlation between the intellectual and practical aspects of governance. Both Wang Yangming and the CPC view knowledge as the basis for informed action, providing guidance and shaping practical decisions. In Wang Yangming's view, genuine knowledge is not merely an intellectual exercise but is intrinsically intertwined with action. He maintains that thoughts are actions in and of themselves, underscoring the significance of addressing the underlying causes of negative thoughts (Zhang, 2021). This viewpoint aligns with the CPC's all-encompassing governance approach which prioritizes ethical conduct and ideological consistency to drive individual and societal advancement. Yang (2023) discusses three propositions of Wang Yangming's unity of knowledge and action. Firstly, the emphasis on the original state of knowledge, *zhixing benti* (知行本体), highlights the notion that knowledge and action should naturally coexist. The proposition illuminates that external factors such as selfish desires can disturb this unity. Secondly, Wang Yangming's conception of knowledge and action as an ongoing and dynamic process is in alignment with the CPC's commitment to continually adapt and enhance its policies and practices. And thirdly, knowledge guides action, and action, in turn, reinforces and refines knowledge - a feedback loop that is vital for the CPC's flexibility in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Wang Yangming's assertion that "true knowledge must lead to action" embodies the CPC's insistence to implementing its ideology in practical ways. This reflects their belief that ideological purity should translate into tangible improvements in the lives of Chinese citizens.

Pan et al. (2016) discuss the correlation between knowledge acquisition and experiential learning, as exemplified by Wang Yangmings' statements about "loving a beautiful sight" and "disliking a bad smell". These anecdotes underscore that knowledge is not merely a collection of facts, but a result of personal experiences, introspection, and moral development (Zheng, 2023). Wang's emphasis on personal experience as the foundation of knowledge aligns with the CPC's recognition of the influential role practical experiences play in shaping one's comprehension and allegiance to the Party's ideology. Wang Yangming contends that the true

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<sup>62</sup>We can also find this claim under the term "the heart-mind is the principle". Pan et al. (2016) describe the extension of innate moral knowledge as the third claim of Wang Yangming's philosophy of mind.

practical value of knowledge resides in its application, thereby establishing a logical connection between knowledge and action, as outlined by Zhang (2021). Wang argues that a single action comprises two crucial elements: the guiding rationale and the physical execution driven by that rationale. In this context, Wang's focus on virtuous knowledge aligns with the CPC's commitment to fostering moral character as a vital component of socialization. Wang Yangming's philosophical framework highlights the interdependence of the heart-mind, intention, and knowledge. According to his perspective, the heart-mind is the primary governing entity of the body, with inherent intention and knowledge. Wang asserts that action is the embodiment and implementation of knowledge and should not be motivated by self-interest, as it is also highlighted in the CPC's objective of maintaining ideological coherence and ethical integrity within its membership. At the core of Wang Yangming's doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action is the belief that true knowledge and true action are mutually dependent. He emphasizes that moral behavior should stem from one's moral will and consciousness, and that moral virtue ought not to be external to the mind (Yang, 2023; Zhang, 2021).

### **The concept of innate knowledge and conscience**

Wang Yangming underlines two important concepts: innate knowledge and conscience. Innate knowledge is viewed as an intuitive and inherent form of understanding, serving as the cornerstone for moral reasoning and ethical conduct.<sup>63</sup> Conscience, which originates from innate knowledge, assumes a pivotal role in guiding individuals towards making ethical choices. It necessitates active cultivation, achieved through the seamless integration of knowledge and action (Wang and Li, 2016). Innate knowledge is considered the basis for ethical behavior, while conscience actively directs individuals to align their actions with this inner moral compass. The unity of knowledge and action is realized when one's innate knowledge and conscience work harmoniously, resulting in morally principled actions (Zhang, 2021; Zheng, 2023). Wang Yangming defines innate knowledge as the mind's inherent sense of right and wrong that serves as a personal standard (Yang, 2023). It provides a direct awareness of the right course of action without the need for external validation. However, external influences such as social norms can obscure this innate knowledge. To expand innate moral knowing, it is necessary to detach the mind from selfish intentions so that it can function without hindrance (Zhang, 2021). Wang Yangming advocates self-reflection to activate the innate knowledge that enables individuals to discover their moral principles. Cultivating this innate knowledge is essential to the unity of knowledge and action. He encourages individuals to trust and act on their innate knowledge rather than relying solely on external authorities (Zhang, 2021). Zhang and Du (2023) further point out that Wang's theory aims to guide individuals back to moral cultivation and learning from the sages by emphasizing the essence of

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<sup>63</sup>The main distinction between Max Scheler's (as outlined earlier) and Wang Yangming's perception lies in their approaches to innate knowledge. While Scheler acknowledges the existence of innate cognitive functions for learning, he does not believe in innate knowledge about specific objects. In contrast, Wang posits that there is innate moral knowledge that shapes ethical behavior and moral reasoning.

conscience and carrying its spirit forward in the practice of true knowledge. Wang Yangming sees conscience as the essence of learning and the teachings of the sages. He underscores recognizing evil and upholding good in one's conscience. By adhering to one's conscience in all matters and interactions, an individual achieves a state of being "conscientious", which encompasses both knowledge and action, leading to the unity of knowledge and action.

### **2.3.2 The significance of moral cultivation**

Wang Yangming's theory posits that moral character evolves through conscious decision-making and conduct. In line with his emphasis on self-examination and self-improvement, the CPC strives to cultivate individuals who unfailingly conform to moral principles. This promotes lifelong development within the framework of Marxist-Leninist principles. In the party's view, moral education should aim to develop individuals whose beliefs and actions are congruent with their core principles. This approach aligns with Wang Yangming's belief that refining moral character necessitates both learning and application. Additionally, Mao Zedong's perspective on knowing and doing supports the idea that genuine comprehension arises from active practice. Such views coincide with Wang Yangming's focus on aligning actions with moral principles and self-improvement. In both scenarios, the application of knowledge is integral to moral development. Karl Mannheim's notion of ideology further corresponds with Wang Yangming's proposal that collective thinking is influenced by societal and existential factors. Both viewpoints highlight the complex connection between ideology, societal action, and ethical instruction. Wang Yangming's theory provides an interconnected framework that links moral education and socialization, bridging various elements of CPC ideology, Marxism-Leninism, subsequent ideas, and Karl Mannheim's perspectives on ideology, despite predating them.

In 2019, the Communist Party of China articulated that "we should treat China's excellent traditional culture with respect and pride, and make full use of the rich moral resources contained in cultural classics and historical and cultural relics" (CPC Central Committee, 2019b)<sup>64</sup>. General Secretary Xi Jinping references Wang Yangming's school of thought as a significant element of Chinese traditional culture, serving as a foundational element for enhancing the cultural confidence of the Chinese people (Zhang and Du, 2023). Within the CPC's ideology, Wang Yangming's concept of conscience holds substantial moral value, and it is seen as an opportunity for innovative integration with socialist morality and the contemporary spirit. This integration is intended to provide valuable insights for informing modern moral education. The perspective highlights the CPC's deep commitment to its cultural roots and the strategic use of traditional culture as a cornerstone in shaping socialization processes within a unique Chinese context. This traditional culture serves as a dynamic source of moral and ethical values that guide contemporary Chinese society. Wang Yangming's notion of conscience acts as a powerful moral influence that harmonizes with socialist morality and current values, shaping the moral education and principles of present-day Chinese citizens. General Secretary Xi Jinping suggests that

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<sup>64</sup>own translation

In order to promote the excellence of traditional culture, it is essential to uncover its ideological significance, extract fundamental Chinese ideas, and create modern expressions that are easily understood. By assigning new meanings to traditional concepts and adapting them to socialism with Chinese characteristics, traditional culture can continue to prosper in the current era (Chinese Government, 2013).<sup>65</sup>

In line with the CPC's perspective, individuals who prioritize selfish desires above moral consciousness may possess ethical knowledge, yet fall short in translating it into action, setting back the realization of its crucial connection. Gao (2020b) stresses the importance of placing the cultivation of moral consciousness above the instruction of manners and etiquette in moral education. Focusing solely on the latter may engender superficiality and formality. Instead, the prioritization of moral awareness facilitates the attainment of harmonious integration between knowledge and action, aligning with the focus of the Chinese Communist Party on values internalization and application. Li (2019) further highlights the correlation between moral perception and conduct. Li advocates for the combination of action and knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge through action. Within this framework, moral cognition serves as the basis for moral behavior and, in turn, enhances moral cognition. This approach aligns with the vision of the CPC to cultivate individuals who do not merely possess awareness of moral values, but also actively embody them in their conduct. Wang Yangming's philosophy of moral education, as presented under the CPC's ideological context, centers on cultivating conscience and individualized instruction catered to specific needs. According to Frisina (1989), knowledge is not just a representation of the world but a behavior pattern that reflects how one exists in the world. Knowing something means responding to it in a way that integrates it into one's moral framework. The ideology of the CPC draws attention to the significance of students exploring their inner conscience, cultivating their inherent sense of morality, and taking responsibility for their moral behavior. In this perspective, the external world must become an exemplary domain of moral values that aligns with traditional Chinese Confucian culture, specifically Wang Yangming's theory of the unity of knowledge and action, which was highlighted by Wu and Gong (2018). Individuals are encouraged to focus on realizing morality through their own intrinsic abilities and internal moral drive, rather than treating it as a fixed endpoint.

As stated by Gao (2020b), Wang Yangming asserts that establishing a strong aspiration is the starting point for self-education, which subsequently influences one's accomplishments in life. In the context of CPC ideology, this aspiration assumes greater significance, as it steers individuals towards adopting socialist core values and actively engaging in constructing an ethically sound society. To achieve this sense of unity, self-education methods must be developed to empower individuals to participate actively in moral practices and enhance their ideological awareness. Additionally, incorporating traditional Chinese methods, such as Confucian principles of "leading by example" and "inspiration and guidance", is viewed critical for innovative approaches towards moral education. As pointed out by the Ministry of Education, Confucius emphasized the significance of displaying personal conduct rather than

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<sup>65</sup>own translation

solely depending on verbal instruction. In accordance with CPC ideology, modern educators should endeavor to serve as moral exemplars, cultivating self-education and promoting moral values. Effective moral education entails guiding students through cultural practices and traditions, adapting to specific contexts, and evaluating moral standards. Confucius's principles of filial piety provide a prime example of these enduring values. The educational approach proposed by the Ministry of Education combines traditional and modern methods to promote self-improvement, moral development, and cultural continuity (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2017a).

Wang Yangming argues that understanding moral norms is evident through practicing morality, as supported by Li (2019). Emphasizing the cultivation of social virtues and the formation of moral habits through repetitive action is a primary objective. This coincides with the Communist Party of China's aim to instill socialist values and integrate knowledge with practical application. In a recent article on Wang Yangming's theory of moral education, Zhang and Du (2023) underscore its contemporary relevance and alignment with the cultural spirit. General Secretary Xi Jinping's invocation of Wang Yangming's philosophy stresses the importance of upholding a pure and aspirational heart as the foundation of ethical behavior. As quoted by General Secretary Xi Jinping, "the master of the body is the heart", and "the essence is in the heart, and when the heart is purified and the aspiration is high, the power is infinite" (Zhang and Du, 2023).<sup>66</sup> Within CPC ideology, it is visible that individuals must uphold high moral ideals and internalize socialist core values as guiding principles for their actions. The goal of moral education, as highlighted by Wang Yangming and echoed in CPC ideology, is to inspire individuals to cultivate their inner spirit, build a purposeful world, and unite knowledge with action through their personal moral development. However, Dai (2004) notes that the utilitarian approach to moral development in China's socialist market economy has resulted in a need for spiritual grounding. To address this, he recommends turning to China's extensive cultural roots, with Wang Yangming's theory providing practical applications for contemporary moral education. Within CPC ideology, practical morality plays a crucial role in guiding individuals to align their actions with moral standards, while fostering positive moral habits, which are essential for successful moral development. This aligns with Wang Yangming's emphasis on the inherent connection between moral understanding and conduct. General Secretary Xi Jinping illustrates the importance of knowledge and action as follows:

We must promote action with knowledge and knowledge with action. Practice shows that only by insisting on the unity of knowledge and action, by constantly letting ideological consciousness lead to action consciousness, and by letting action consciousness deepen ideological consciousness can the centralized educational work be practical, deep and far-reaching (Chinese Government, 2014).<sup>67</sup>

General Secretary Xi Jinping stresses one of the core principles of CPC ideology - the close relationship between knowledge and action. He explains that practical experiences foster

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<sup>66</sup> own translation

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genuine awareness, which, in turn, deepens one's understanding. This reciprocal connection is crucial in shaping the moral education framework promoted by the CPC, in alignment with the traditional roots such as those of Wang Yangming. Within the CPC's ideological framework, the focus on practical experiences highlights the crucial role of moral education in cultivating students' conscience and seamlessly integrating learning with practical application. This approach reflects Wang Yangming's doctrine, which prioritizes the practical implementation of innate moral knowledge. It highlights the CPC's dedication to a comprehensive approach to personal growth, where education extends beyond intellectual advancement to include the holistic development of individuals. Thus, the fusion of CPC ideology and socialization processes is apparent. This serves as a guide for individuals to achieve moral enlightenment and practical application, ultimately creating a socially responsible and morally-conscious citizenry tailored to the unique context of China.

## 2.4 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, an examination of the integration of knowledge production into moral education in China from a sociological standpoint was presented, aiming to provide insights into the intricate connection between individuals' moral knowledge, their constructed realities, and their alignment with the prevalent ideological framework within the educational system. By examining sociological perspectives, the objective was to comprehend the social mechanisms that may impact moral education and the resulting effect on students' adherence to dominant ideologies. Furthermore, the combination of historical Chinese philosophy and sociological viewpoints revealed significant connections between past and contemporary ideas. This connection led to the development of a coherent structure that allows for examining recurring patterns found in dominant ideological systems, and their significant impact on contemporary moral education in China.

Ideal types, which function as conceptual tools for analyzing social phenomena, provide a valuable framework for simplifying complex social realities. The utilization of ideal types, similar to Max Weber's methodology, aids in comprehending and comparing various aspects of the educational system. This approach aligns with the concept of the social construction of reality, as ideal types facilitate the identification and analysis of fundamental structures and patterns that contribute to shaping social realities. Insights from Max Scheler, emphasizing the subjective meanings associated with knowledge, and Karl Mannheim, acknowledging the influence of social factors such as social class and cultural values on subjective interpretations, are relevant to this research. Their perspectives underscore that knowledge is not an isolated, purely rational process but a social phenomenon shaped by various social, cultural, and individual factors. This perspective highlights the multifaceted nature of aligning students' constructed moral values with the dominant ideology within the education system, stressing the importance of examining the social and cultural context in which moral education occurs and the ways these factors impact individuals' perceptions and experiences.

Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is instrumental in understanding how sociological perspectives and ideology interact to shape the formation of knowledge and practical ac-

tions. Mannheim stresses the intricate connection between ideologies and social structures, arguing that ideologies are not abstract beliefs but are deeply intertwined with the social and individual contexts of specific groups. They exert a significant influence on how knowledge is produced and disseminated in society. This perspective encourages an examination of how prevailing ideologies in Chinese society impact the development and distribution of knowledge, particularly in educational settings where socialist values emphasizing cooperation, social responsibility, and equitable resource allocation are highly significant. Mannheim's view of ideology as a product of social existence highlights the dynamic and context-dependent nature of ideological concepts. Moreover, his analysis of the interdependent relationship between theory and practice aligns with Wang Yangming's assertion that they are unified. Mannheim's perspective provides valuable insights into how divergent ideologies influence social reality and shape practical strategies, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between ideology, knowledge, and practice within a specific society.

Alfred Schütz's sociological perspective focuses on the idea that the reality we experience in our daily lives is constructed socially. This means that our understanding of the world largely depends on how we interpret and share meanings within specific social contexts. When examining the impact of CPC ideology on individuals, Schütz's view suggests that people actively shape their perception of reality by participating in the moral framework of the CPC ideology. This perspective aligns with the theory of the social construction of reality by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. According to their theory, humans are continuously involved in creating and shaping society through socialization processes. In the context of CPC ideology, this implies that individuals play an active role in shaping their moral realities as they engage with the dominant ideology present in the educational system. This process is dynamic and involves individuals navigating the ideological landscape actively. George H. Mead's work offers further insights into how individuals adopt CPC values, norms, and behaviors. Mead stresses the role of social interaction in shaping both individuals and society. Socialization is an ongoing process where individuals interact with symbols and shared meanings within their social environment. Through role-taking, individuals reflect on how their actions might be perceived by others, which enhances their self-awareness and equips them with the skills needed to navigate social situations. Mead's concepts help to understand how students engage with and internalize moral values that align with CPC ideology within the broader context of the educational system.

Traditional Chinese philosophical perspectives have had a significant and enduring influence on modern moral education. Two key schools of thought, namely Confucianism and Wang Yangming's theory of the unity of knowledge and action, continue to shape moral education in present-day China. Confucianism's principles, which stress the importance of filial piety and obedience, extend their relevance beyond the confines of family and society, playing a crucial role in broader moral education. Similarly, Wang Yangming's theory, which predates both non-PRC and PRC ideologies, posits the inseparable connection between knowledge and action. This perspective highlights the enduring impact of Chinese ideals on ethical considerations and moral education in contemporary discussions. Moreover, the concept of

the relationship between knowledge and action is a recurring theme in the writings of Mao Zedong and in contemporary speeches by General Secretary Xi Jinping. This theme underscores the intrinsic link between these philosophical traditions and the dynamic interaction between abstract concepts and their practical application. It emphasizes the integration of knowledge and action as a fundamental principle driving societal change and influencing moral education.

The study of the sociology of knowledge sheds light on how knowledge is formed within a society and how it interacts with the broader community. This field focuses on the impact of social interactions and shared meanings on individuals' understanding, which in turn contributes to broader societal influences. When considering the context of CPC ideology, these perspectives help to better understand how personal interpretations, shared understandings, and the CPC's ideology collectively influence the construction of knowledge and social reality. It becomes evident that socialization plays a significant role in shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors within the framework of the CPC's ideology. Wang Yangming's theory, deeply rooted in China's philosophical heritage, establishes essential connections between knowledge, action, and ethics. This theoretical framework provides a solid foundation for analyzing China's social norms, values, and educational practices within the context of CPC ideology and moral education.



## Chapter 3

# Shaping Moral Education: Ideological Foundations to Organizational Reality

Moral development is critical in shaping individuals into responsible citizens, promoting ethical behavior, empathy, and civic engagement among students in the education system. Given the changing and evolving circumstances, a comprehensive examination of moral education is crucial in China. Such an exploration is particularly relevant when considering the alignment with an evolving ideological framework and its effects on the values and personal development of students. This study seeks to enhance the understanding of how moral education promotes the development of mindful and empathetic individuals, thereby creating a significant impact on the future direction of Chinese society. Through an examination of the strategies and components central to moral education in Beijing, this study aims to shed light on potential influences on the alignment of students' constructed worldviews with the prevailing ideological paradigms.

A thorough examination of the developmental pathway of citizenship and its transmission to morality in the educational setting, especially in the distinct context of China, serves as a fundamental initiative to comprehend the complexities of the educational terrain and the evolving dynamics of moral education in the country. This investigation into the development of citizenship and its interaction with moral education produces valuable observations concerning the foundational aspects of moral education and its alignment with ideological structures. The study of curriculum reform policy updates is equally important as it sheds light on the educational structure of China, particularly in Beijing, and its implications for moral education. Examining curriculum reform and policy implementation is crucial to understanding the path China has taken and the evolution of moral education in recent decades. The potential shift from indoctrination to student-centered instruction proposed in these implementations can provide insights into the development of quality education in China. Furthermore, it illustrates how educational policies can influence teachers' flexibility in aligning students' constructed realities with prevailing ideologies.

The study of teaching materials and teacher training serves as a practical foundation for effective moral education and provides valuable insights into the challenges educators face. These components are central to deepening the understanding of the alignment between moral education and the ideological framework. Moreover, they illuminate how teachers, while adhering to the guidelines of authority, enhance their abilities to guide students toward becoming responsible and "ideal" citizens. It emphasizes exploring these aspects thoroughly to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the integration of moral education in the Chinese context.

### 3.1 The Shaping of Citizens: China's Framework for Moral Education

The development of citizenship concepts in China, guided by the Communist Party of China, provides a distinct viewpoint to understand the intricate interplay of social and political factors in shaping citizenship and its significant educational implications. Preceding the CPC's rise to power and the founding of the People's Republic of China, the citizenship notion in China operated within a specific historical context. This context establishes the basis for comprehending the close correlation between citizenship and moral education. In China's extensive historical background, citizenship encompassed not just political involvement but also had strong roots in ethical values and concepts within the cultural paradigm. Moral education in China is not just about instilling values in individuals, but rather a means to shape citizens who align with the CPC ideology. The CPC's ideology has played a key role in transforming traditional concepts of citizenship by infusing them with socialist principles. Citizenship and moral education are now important tools in cultivating allegiance to the CPC and its objectives for China's future, which shape the values of the younger generation and reinforces the party's control.

#### 3.1.1 Historical perspectives on citizenship

Citizenship is a complex concept with no universal definition that applies globally. Its origins and interpretations vary from nation to nation and may be subject to individual or political perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The idea of citizenship in China can be traced back to the late Qing dynasty of the 19th century, despite original skepticism regarding its applicability to Eastern societies such as China (Fogel and Zarrow, 1997) and its relevance to China's political and legal life. Although the concept of citizenship is present in China, it diverges from the Western emphasis on individual rights. Chinese citizenship is rooted in an authoritarian system of governance and a communal understanding of rights according to Keane (2001). It is worth noting that

In contrast with the Western democratic tradition that emphasizes sovereignty, participation in politics, and civil rights, citizenship in China is seen as a benefit granted by the State to persons born in the People's Republic. Rights emanating from citizenship are thus framed as economic, social, and cultural benefits (Keane, 2001, p. 02).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Burchell gives a detailed description of the connotation of citizenship in his article *The Attributes of Citizens: Virtue, Manners, and the Activity of Citizenship* from 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Western citizenship, which originated from the Greek *polis* and later the Roman Empire provides insights into a citizen's role within a state (Shafir, 1998, p. 03). Greek citizenship emphasized freedom but only granted to a particular group, leading to diversified forms of membership due to the empire's diversity (Shafir, 1998, p. 04). Aristotle's ideal citizen is socially and politically engaged, embodying *polis* virtues. However, he limited this model to the elite and believed aesthetic education could instill virtue in others. In *Politics*, he defines citizens as those who both govern and obey, uniting to make and honor collective decisions (Heater, 1999; Shafir, 1998). Over time, citizenship evolved with changing social conditions, resulting in different interpretations. In the Roman Empire, it shifted from emphasizing freedom to a legal status providing protection and property

In the late 19th century, philosopher Liang Qichao coined the term *guomin* in China by translating “citizen” as a combination of *guo* (state or nation) and *min* (people or individual). The translation aimed to modernize China and connect Chinese individuals with their country by drawing inspiration from Western citizenship ideals.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, disparities arose between the Western and Chinese notions. In the West, citizens possess both rights and duties, which creates a reciprocal relationship with the state. China’s concept of citizenship was influenced by the authority of the Qing dynasty, leading to an imbalance with the power of the state outweighing citizens’ rights. In the aftermath of the Qing dynasty’s fall in 1912, a focus on individualism arose, seeking to contribute to individual development and China’s nation-building (Guo, 2014). The concept of Chinese citizenship resurfaced during the drafting of the Chinese Constitution of the Republic of China in 1912. It was within this historical setting that the Republican Constitution and its subsequent amendments introduced the concept of citizenship as a modern classification.<sup>4</sup> This development was highlighted by the use of the term *renmin* to refer to a citizen, indicating a significant move towards modernizing China’s political and legal system. This shift fell short of establishing a stable concept of citizenship due to political upheavals in China’s history. With the rise of Marxism and the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921, the focus shifted to collective, class, and party concepts, replacing the emphasis on the individual, citizen, and citizenship.

According to Li and Zhong (2002), it is important to establish two clear boundaries when defining citizenship. The first boundary separates citizens (referred to as *gongmin* (公民)) from private citizens (translated from *simin* (私民)) and subjects (translated from *chenmin* (臣民)). Private citizens are considered “natural men”, *ziranren* (自然人), who put their own interests first and have no responsibilities to society. On the other hand, subjects (also known as *zimin* (子民)), given to male slaves, have no sense of self and are solely responsible for obeying the ruler without possessing any personal rights. The second boundary concerns the distinction between *gongmin* (公民) and national citizen (translated from *guomin* (国民)) and people (translated from *renmin* (人民)). National citizen refers to “all persons who hold the nationality of the People’s Republic of China” (Li and Wu, 1999, p. 160). It emphasizes

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rights. The Greek perspective stressed citizenship as a communal concept, emphasizing membership in a political community and active participation in shaping a citizen’s identity (Shafir, 1998). Citizenship involves contributing to the community’s well-being and supporting the political structure. From a liberal standpoint, it primarily signifies a membership status with restricted political engagement. Citizens are entitled to protection and have legal responsibilities to fulfill, underscoring the state’s authority over individual rights (Heater, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese intellectuals were confronted with transitioning from an empire state to a modern nation-state. They had to choose between two forms of nationalism: one focused solely on a Han-dominated China, and another more accepting of non-Han regions. Some advocated for a single ethnic nation while others recognized the importance of accommodating diversity. Inspired by Western notions of citizenship, some advocated for equal rights for all within China’s borders, redirecting the focus to a territorial identity. Even Sun Yat-sen, who was initially inclusive of only the Han population, later championed a more diverse “greater Chinese nation” (大中国民族). The Nationalists, on the other hand, preferred assimilation towards non-Han populations. However, the idea of a multi-ethnic China gained acceptance, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse Chinese nation (Baranovitch, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Chinese constitutions serve as documents for ideological guidance and political statements that reflect governmental policies. A review of the development of Chinese constitutions provides valuable insights into the changing concept of citizenship over time. For further reading, I recommend Yu (2002)’s *Citizenship, Ideology, and the PRC Constitution* as a valuable resource.

the geographical aspect of citizenship. Conversely, the notion of *people* encompasses various nations and historical eras. It arises when individuals endorse or represent different groups in various ways, even if they belong to the same group at a specific time. The concept of *people* highlights social tendencies and class characteristics, bearing a closer connection to the concept of *gongmin*, albeit with distinct connotations. The Chinese Constitution defines *renmin* as “the people are the masters of the state and that all powers of the state belong to the people” (Li and Wu, 1999, p. 159). Another translation for citizen is *shimin* (市民), which “has a more common meaning in the Chinese lexicon, referring to citizens of a particular municipality or district, and is regularly used in civic campaigns” (Keane, 2001).<sup>5</sup>

Between 1949 and 1979, Chinese political discourse centered around the concepts of *guomin* (national citizen) and *renmin* (people) during Mao Zedong’s leadership. With China’s shift to a market-based economy, *renmin* ceased to have a distinct political significance, and the term *citizen* regained importance in official dialogues (Li and Tan, 2017). The transition towards a more moral oriented interpretation of the term *citizen* in the 1980s represents a departure from the politically charged term *nationals*. This transformation is exemplified by the shift from the use of *guomin*, which was prevalent before 1949, to *gongmin* after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (which is in use since 1953 to this day and refers to all PRC nationals). While *guomin* is linked to the state, *gongmin* pertains to *all* people, signifying an alteration in the understanding of citizenship. However, in the mid-1970s, citizenship was predominantly associated with allegiance and support for the Communist Party of China. Furthermore, the term *renmin* has become an all-encompassing term, overshadowing other categories and negating implied rights and statuses. This ideological shift was evident in the public events of political movements such as the Cultural Revolution. It impacted political rights and prioritized universal virtues associated with workers and peasants. China’s transition to a market-oriented economy in the late 1970s necessitated specific citizenship attributes, such as a global perspective, openness, meritocracy, and democratic awareness (Zhong and Lee, 2008).<sup>6</sup> This shift has led to changes in citizenship education, which has prompted scholars to investigate the tension between collectivism and individualism since the 1980s. However, despite these adjustments, the comprehension of citizenship in China is still unclear and it is uncertain whether Chinese individuals are fully aware of and intentionally participate in citizenship practices (Hawkins et al., 2001; Chen and Reid, 2002; Wan, 2004).

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the term “citizen” held little importance, primarily in formal, legal, and propaganda contexts. Citizenship was viewed

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<sup>5</sup>The translation of citizen has been inconsistent over time, influenced by China’s political situation and its corresponding rights and responsibilities. Political developments, ideologies, and power relations play an important role in determining the choice of translation for citizen (Li and Zhong, 2002). Ci Hai defines the Chinese citizen, usually translated with *gongmin* (公民), in the *Shanghai Dictionary Publishing House* in 1979 as “citizen usually refers to a person who has the nationality of a country and enjoys rights and obligations in accordance with the constitution and laws of that country” (Li and Zhong, 2002). According to Zarrow (1997), *gongmin* can be translated as *public people* and there is not only *one* Chinese word for citizen, there are several, depending on *how* the term is used and *where* it is used.

<sup>6</sup>Law (2006) discusses the positive and negative effects of opening up to the world, such as capitalistic concepts, values and experiences from Western countries. Which on the one hand are highly promoted (competition and efficiency) and on the other hand are condemned (such as individualism).

as conflicting with socialist values, as some scholars regarded it as a Western idea that stressed individual liberties, while Chinese society prioritized state authority and held differing opinions on citizenship (Keane, 2001; Banks, 2004).<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the People's Republic of China, the household registration system, *hukou zhidu* (户口制度), was implemented (1958) with the primary goal of tying Chinese citizens to their hometowns and encouraging dependence on rural collectives or urban work units for their living and employment. The system's main rationale was to bolster subsistence and employment dependency on specifically designated geographical and organizational entities. During the Maoist era, there were no individual identity cards, and instead, households were given a family registration booklet, *hukou ben* (户口本). This furthered the idea that individuals were part of a collective, such as the family or work unit, instead of autonomous entities. In rural China, this information was recorded at the village office, which prevented rural residents from having their own identities and restricted their mobility rights (Yan, 2009).<sup>8</sup>

The social structure of China has transformed as individuals gained more opportunities for physical and social mobility. This shift allows individuals to escape the limitations imposed by social groups and pursue self-development in new contexts. Various factors contribute to this transformation, including the demand for mobile labor in the workforce and improved urban opportunities. Yan (2009) referred to this as “jumping into the sea” (p. 277) that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, whereby individuals left state-secured positions for opportunities in the private sector. On the other hand, the party-state has actively pushed for increased mobility. Acknowledging mobility as a crucial factor for progress, the party-state implemented several policy and institutional changes, such as relaxing the strict household registration system<sup>9</sup> and initiating layoffs from state-owned enterprises. An example of substantial change occurred in the 1980s with the introduction of personal identification cards, *jumin shenfen zheng* (居民身份证). This adjustment signified a shift in the approach of identifying and representing individuals in formal documentation. In 1985, the National People's Congress enacted a law mandating that all Chinese citizens must obtain individual identity cards. As a result, these cards became available to both urban and rural Chinese residents. This progress is a significant advancement in releasing individuals from the restrictions imposed by their households, communities, professions, and ultimately the government. It allowed people to redefine themselves based on their own achievements and aspirations, signifying a notable shift in social structure toward greater individualism and mobility (Yan, 2009).<sup>10</sup> Addition-

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<sup>7</sup>In 1953, Zhou Enlai explained the differentiation between *renmin* and *guomin*. He pointed out that *guomin* lack the privileges of *renmin* but must fulfill the responsibilities of citizens. Additionally, Mao Zedong, in his work *On Contradiction*, further emphasized the division between *the people* and their enemies, effectively erasing the concept of citizen and citizenship. The concurrent use of *the people* and *the enemies* alongside *people* and *citizens* has created ambiguity around the concept of citizenship and impeded the development of citizen consciousness in China. It was perceived that being a member of *the people* holds a higher status than being a citizen since citizens encompass all PRC nationals, regardless of their moral character.

<sup>8</sup>Additionally, this system has established an unequal distribution of citizenship rights by categorizing citizens based on political rights or regional status, leading to an increase in societal inequalities among various population segments.

<sup>9</sup>According to Yu (2002), the elimination of the household registration system in 2001 did not result in equal treatment of citizenship between urban and rural areas. During that period, distinctions in the perception of citizenship persisted, with urban areas typically enjoying a more favorable position compared to rural areas.

<sup>10</sup>Yu (2002) further notes that the 1982 constitution placed *the people* before *the state*, potentially leading to a shift

ally, during the 1980s, intellectuals sought to broaden their intellectual scope and creativity by constructing alternative discourse systems while avoiding direct opposition to the government. They implemented Western theories and research paradigms to examine modern society and culture, resulting in the emergence of the “new Enlightenment movement”.<sup>11</sup> The proliferation of Western ideas recorded in translated books and articles followed the introduction of Western concepts like freedom, democracy, and the market economy as symbols of modernity. Chinese intellectuals and college students started incorporating Western thinkers and their ideas into their vocabularies as a means of engaging in intellectual discourse while sidestepping direct confrontations with established Marxist discourse (Yan, 2002).

Prior to the 1980s, citizenship education in China lacked a systematic approach. Political education focused on Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of China. In the 1960s, secondary school students were offered textbooks such as *Politics, Education in Moral Quality* or *To Be Successors of the Revolution* (Law, 2006). In 1978, the Chinese government reinstated the *Behavior Code for Primary and Secondary Students*, which emphasizes the importance of moral education in cultivating students’ ideals, morals, culture, and discipline. In the 1980s, guidelines were issued for Ideology and Character, *sixiang pinde ke* (思想品德课), for primary schools, and Ideology and Politics, *sixiang zhengzhi ke* (思想政治课), for secondary schools, marking the beginning of a more systematic citizenship education curriculum. This education aims to foster students’ devotion to the socialist motherland and the socialist enterprise, their thirst for knowledge, critical thinking, and creativity (Arthur et al., 2008, p. 147). Independent timetabled courses of ideological moral education were introduced in 1981 and 1992. In 1988 and 1991, there were significant developments in citizenship education in China. In 1988, the introduction of the subject of *civics* marked a shift in emphasis from solely political education to encompassing students’ behavior. During the same year, the *Outline of Moral Education in Secondary School* was introduced and was subsequently fully implemented in 1991. This outline underscored moral education as an independent component, without the prefix *ideology*, and took on a central role within the citizenship curriculum (Arthur et al., 2008). Moral education in China has the objective of nurturing “good” citizens by instilling values and norms

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in attitudes and the relationship between citizens and the state. He further notes that some scholars have even argued that this change implies an increased importance placed on *the people*, whereas the reverse order suggests the opposite.

<sup>11</sup>The Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries aimed to reform beliefs, introducing the concept of citizen and citizenship, focusing on social and political rights. The 1789 French Revolution solidified this by defining personal status and national affiliation, leading to resource provision. Education, citizenship, and the nation-state have a strong relationship, as seen in the work of scholars such as Heater (1990) and Miller (2000). Educating students as active citizens with rights and responsibilities started in the early 18th century and continues today. After the French Revolution, the idea emerged that legitimate states are built on shared beliefs, leading to a differentiation between citizens and temporary residents within their borders (Vink and Bauböck, 2013). This era witnessed the rise of the nation-state and the growing significance of nationality in shaping identity and international relations. In the late 18th century, European citizens largely identified more with local and religious groups than with a national identity, according to Brubaker (1992)’s study. National citizenship replaced urban citizenship only after the 1789 French Revolution. However, urban citizenship made a comeback in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through trade unions and political parties advocating for citizens’ rights (Prak, 2018). Following the French Revolution, Europe faced a challenge with opposing political ideologies: the Enlightenment’s universalism and the emergence of nationalistic self-aware nations (Harris, 2002, p. 184). The result was a wide range of citizenship models in 19th-century Europe, which created intricacies in citizenship regulations among states.

that align with the state's principles. It encompasses a diverse range of moral values, with a strong emphasis on collectivism, patriotism, and socialism, all deeply rooted in the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, Communist Party policies, and the teachings of political leaders. The ultimate aim is to enhance students' awareness of their political choices (Halstead and Zhu, 2012, p. 138).

The evolution of individual identity in China marks a notable shift from collectivism to individualism, evident in changes in public discourse and social categorization. In historical China, individuals were primarily defined in relation to their family and kinship connections, emphasizing a temporal link between ancestors and future generations. However, following the revolution, the party-state liberated individuals from these kinship and community affiliations and incorporated them into the socialist collective, where each person was part of a politically regulated and economically managed entity. Despite this, individuals during this era often lacked a distinct sense of self-identity in the public sphere, frequently referring to themselves as "we" or "our work unit" instead of "I" or "my family" (Yan, 2009, p. 280). During the 1990s, the emergence of the "I-generation", a new cohort born during the reform era of the 1970s, demonstrated a distinct sense of individualism by using the first-person singular. This departure from the collective language of earlier generations marked a significant shift. In the public discourse of the 1980s, there was a notable suppression of individual identity, exemplified by the labeling of pioneers in the private economy as "geti hu", a term that combined the words household and identity. However, in the 1990s, the terminology evolved, and "private entrepreneur" became the more widely accepted label, displacing previous designations. Individual entrepreneurs continued to face restrictions on political engagement imposed by the party-state, which resulted in penalties for attempts to circumvent these limitations. According to Yan (2009), the process of individualization in China primarily manifests in the pursuit of enhanced political freedom, improved living standards, and an elevated social standing. While personal identity holds importance, its significance is often linked to the opportunities it provides in life. In the Chinese context, mobility is a driving force behind individualization, reshaping the relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions, and asserting individual rights. The introduction of individualism in Chinese society during the late 20th century has, at times, been associated with tendencies toward egocentrism and incivility. Undesirable outcomes stemming from individualization, such as heightened competition and diminished social trust, are often the result of an insufficient understanding of individualism. Despite the focus on individualization, the family continues to play a pivotal role in shaping self-identity in China, preventing complete isolation of the individual. Remarkably, the Chinese government influences the process of individualization through subtle methods rather than strict control. Yan refers to this approach as "railroading with self-interest" (p. 289), where individuals are incentivized with economic and political rewards to align with the preferences of the party-state while staying within prescribed boundaries. This strategy seeks to achieve desired collective outcomes while accommodating individual aspirations, requiring a delicate balance.

In the early 1990s, the Communist Party of China experienced substantial shifts in both ide-

ology and economic policy, all while maintaining a monopoly on political power. Key events during this period, such as Deng Xiaoping's visit to southern China and the emergence of the theory of the socialist market economy, along with Jiang Zemin's introduction of the theory of the Three Represents<sup>12</sup>, marked a notable change in the CPC's official discourse. These shifts indicated a growing acknowledgment of market economics and capitalism within the CPC. Throughout the 1990s, the CPC's presence in the private sector expanded significantly, leading to a decrease in its control over various social and economic spheres. These changes had widespread implications, providing millions of Chinese citizens with new opportunities for different lifestyles and greater mobility. By the year 2000, the term "reform" within the CPC encompassed policy adjustments that were the result of negotiations and power struggles among influential party members with both economic and political clout (Yan, 2009). In his report to the 16th CPC National Congress in 2002, Jiang Zemin emphasized the significance of advancing socialist democracy, establishing the rule of law, and constructing a political civilization. This vision prioritized the welfare of individuals, as well as their dignity, rights, and responsibilities, while striving for an all-encompassing prosperous society (Jiang, 2002). In addition, Deng Xiaoping proposed that

All the people of China should grow up to be good citizens with self-discipline and a sense of responsibility, with knowledge and skills, with good mental and physical health, and motivated by the noble ideals of socialism (Deng, 2002, p. 402).<sup>13</sup>

The systematic development of citizenship education in China during the late 20th century was a direct response to societal transformations and was largely orchestrated by the Communist Party of China. An influential turning point occurred during the 16th CPC National Congress in 2002 when the CPC underscored the need to build a socialist political civilization. In this envisioned society, individuals would internalize fundamental values and integrate them into their daily lives. Achieving this ambitious goal would require equipping citizens with the necessary skills, which, in turn, necessitated the incorporation of citizenship education into the national education system, as highlighted by Wan (2003). According to Li and Zhong (2002), citizenship education in China is underpinned by three core principles. These principles highlight the cultivation of independent personalities among citizens, the unity of rights and duties, and a steadfast commitment to upholding the rule of law. The overarching aim of citizenship education is to foster democratic qualities among citizens, enhancing their motivation and consciousness within civil society.<sup>14</sup> Teachers should give precedence to

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<sup>12</sup>The "Three Represents" was proposed by Jiang Zemin in 2000 and describes the new relationship between the Party and the people. It requires the Communist Party of China to represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. The "Three Represents" were written into the Party Constitution on March 14, 2004.

<sup>13</sup>own translation

<sup>14</sup>Chen (2013) conducted a study on the discrepancy in the meaning of citizenship between the state and society. He collected data in the form of documents from various newspapers as well as official documents containing the connotation of citizenship (*gongmin*) in a period from 2007 to 2010. By analyzing the meaning of citizenship in context, he concluded that "the society has the tendency to uphold citizens' rights, while the state is



fostering an appreciation for diversity and democratic comprehension among students. This entails emphasizing the interplay between the moral, political, and legal rights and responsibilities of citizens. A robust democracy is built upon a normative framework grounded in universal rights, and citizenship education centers on these rights and duties within a legal framework.

According to Wan (2003), it is essential to ensure that the curriculum and content of citizenship education align with society's expectations for its citizens. The primary goals include deepening students' understanding of their role within the nation, fostering political participation, promoting legal literacy, instilling democratic values, encouraging active involvement in public affairs, and nurturing a sense of public ethics, national identity, and a global perspective. These elements are seen as critical for students to develop a connection with their country and grasp their future responsibilities as Chinese citizens. By integrating citizenship education into the national education system and emphasizing the cultivation of responsible citizens, the Communist Party of China aims to harmonize the existing ideological, political, and social curricula, all while setting specific educational objectives at different educational levels. In 2001, the CPC Central Committee released the *Implementation Outline for the Construction of Civic Morality* which enumerated fundamental moral norms including patriotism, lawfulness, rationality, sincerity, unity, kindness, diligence, self-reliance, and dedication to work (CPC Central Committee, 2001). The outline was updated in 2019 to ensure its alignment with contemporary contexts. The primary objective for constructing civic morality is stated as follows:

To safeguard and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, we need the all-round development of material and spiritual civilization and the overall improvement of people's material and cultural living standards. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and strengthening the whole of society is a strategic task for building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and for building a modern and powerful socialist country in an all-round way, an urgent necessity for adapting to changes in the major contradictions in society and meeting the people's aspirations for a better life, and an inevitable requirement for promoting all-round social progress and all-round human development (CPC Central Committee, 2019b).<sup>15</sup>

The outline underscores the importance of addressing moral deficiencies to improve citizens' moral standards. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, there's been a focus on developing civic morality in alignment with the socialist market economy objectives. The new era outline extends this to include social morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and personal morality. These encompass behaviors like courtesy, altruism, and responsible use of resources, promoting good citizenship. Education is key to nurturing ideals, integrating personal aspirations with national progress, cultivating socialist core values, and upholding

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inclined to highlight citizenship in terms of responsibilities and participation. In other words, discrepancy of meaning of citizenship exists between the state and society" (p. 268).

<sup>15</sup>own translation

Chinese traditions and the spirit of patriotism. The national spirit centers on patriotism, while the spirit of the times emphasizes reform and innovation.

Citizenship and moral education share a common field of study, but their interpretations vary among different countries and over time.<sup>16</sup> The primary differences between these two concepts lie in moral education's emphasis on compliance with and responsibility to the state, the promotion of the ruling party's values, and the focus on the relationship between the individual and the public. In contrast, citizenship education places a higher priority on the interplay between rights and duties within civil society, underscores rationality in everyday life, and acknowledges the significance of respecting individuals' and families' private lives (Li and Zhong, 2002). According to Li (2011), moral education is "part of *ideological work* in school. Ideological work (formally called *ideological-political work*) is supposed to provide spiritual support for socialism and communism, attempting not only to determine people's political standing and behaviour, but also to construct their worldview, life philosophy and value orientations" (author's emphasis) (p. 378-88).

According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), there are three common visions of a "good" citizen in a democracy: the personally responsible citizen, the citizen who actively participates in civic affairs and social life<sup>17</sup>, and the justice-oriented citizen who critically evaluates and seeks changes in social, political, and economic structures to address root problems. In addition, Young (1998) discusses the "differentiated" concept of citizenship, which embraces individual and group differences. This approach advocates the participation of diverse groups in public institutions without compromising their distinct identities or facing disadvantages. The idea of "differentiated" citizenship promotes inclusion and full participation for all. Some scholars argue that citizenship can be succinctly defined in two components: membership in a polity and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion (Kivisto and Faist, 2008; Heater, 2004). It encompasses practices (cultural, symbolic, and economic) and rights and duties (civil, political, and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity (Isin and Wood, 1999). Originally linked to city-states, citizenship is now more commonly associated with nation-states (McCowan, 2009, p. 05) and is intricately connected with legal and political status (Arthur et al., 2008). It grants individuals both rights and responsibilities that can differ across different periods and regions, although some are considered universal. These rights incorporate the right to vote, but individuals who are not members may find themselves excluded. Citizenship carries connotations of duty and the idea of equality on a global scale. According to Jackson (2003), citizenship rights are usually tied to nationality and are automatically granted to those born in a country. The four forms of citizenship are intertwined, participation could

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<sup>16</sup>For more in-depth reading, Zhu and Feng (2008) conducted a comparative study on the evolution of civic education in China and Western nations. They highlighted the distinctions and similarities in the correlation between citizens and the state and society, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the connections between civic education and moral education.

<sup>17</sup>As outlined by Yu (2002), individuals in traditional China had a profound sense of belonging. However, this sense of belonging was primarily expressed through passive association rather than active participation in community or dynasty matters, which were actively overseen by officials and the gentry class. He describes how a sense of belonging to a nation, culture, or people can give rise to feelings of patriotism and nationalism, even in the absence of formal citizenship. Merely identifying as Chinese is sufficient for individuals to experience a sense of patriotism and nationalism.

be understood as people who participate constructively in political life (McCowan, 2009, p. 05), who participate in public life (Jackson, 2003), or who face the responsibilities of participation in the form of compulsory taxes or military service (Stokke, 2017, p. 196). In *The SAGE Handbook of Education for Citizenship* (2008), citizenship is closely associated with practical engagement (Arthur et al., 2008). Political scientists see the *ideal* connotation of citizenship as a shift from a political status to a legal status. It confers equal rights and duties on all full members of a community within the society of a nation-state. The *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (2005) describes the concept of citizenship as follows

Modern political thought has bequeathed two conceptions of citizenship, one leading to a conception of citizenship as participation in civil society and the other a view of citizenship as legal status based on rights and generally defined with respect to the state as opposed to civil society [...] A full definition of citizenship, then, includes the four dimensions of rights, duties, participation, and identity. The first two of these refer to the formal dimensions of citizenship, while the dimensions of participation and identity refer to substantive dimensions (Ritzer, 2005, p. 93-94).

*The Dictionary of Sociology* (2001) defines citizenship as

both the legal right to count oneself a member of a particular state or commonwealth, and ideas concerning the relationship between an individual and the state. Generally, notions of citizenship involve defining the rights and the responsibilities of both the state and its citizens (Lawson and Garrod, 2001, p. 30).

Further, the Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989) defines a citizen as a "native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection" (p. 270). And goes on to define citizenship as the "state of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen" (p. 270). Dynneson (1992) defines the *good* citizen as a "label commonly used to describe people who consistently do the right thing according to a formal or informal list of values and behaviours". The definition of citizenship is not universally standardized, leading to potential confusion among educators and divergent interpretations (Lee and Fouts, 2005). While dictionary definitions may vary, citizens play a fundamental role within a nation-state. They constitute a person's primary identity, and nations aim for citizens to establish a sense of belonging, loyalty, and compliance with national laws while upholding moral values aligned with the nation's interests. This harmonization between an individual's identity and the norms and behaviors of the nation-state is what defines citizenship. It allows for personal development and appropriate conduct, illustrating the intricate relationship between citizens, the nation-state, and the political system (Wan, 2003). However, the study and teaching of citizenship prove to be complex due to the unique characteristics that each nation-state imparts to the concept of citizenship, thereby lacking universal standards.

In China, the concept of *suzhi* (素质), which translates to "quality", holds significant importance in shaping responsible citizenship. It emphasizes the development of valuable qualities

such as responsibility, integrity, and moral virtue. The promotion of social harmony, respect for diversity, and positive contributions to society are all integral aspects of *suzhi*. This concept aims to elevate the cultural level, known as *wenhua shuiping* (文化水平), of the nation (Keane, 2001). Schools in China play a crucial role in instilling *suzhi* in students, not limited to academic knowledge but also extending to social and moral education. *Suzhi* aligns with the idea that citizens have an active role to play in their country's development, both in the workforce and in support of the nation's progress. It encompasses the establishment of ethical principles, adherence to the law, and engagement in community activities, all of which are fundamental responsibilities of citizenship in China. *Suzhi* education necessitates the fostering of all-around development, which in the present day takes the form of the *five education*: moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. Each of these approaches is designed to develop personal strengths and address areas for improvement (CPC Central Committee, 2019a).<sup>18</sup> China adopts a distinctive approach to promote desirable behavior and social norms. Public scrutiny and social pressure to conform to expected ethical standards serve as social mechanisms for nurturing *suzhi*. This approach can be seen as somewhat top-down, where both governmental and societal influences significantly shape individual behavior. It raises the question of whether having a high level of moral character (or moral qualities) serves as a valid indicator of one's standing. In some cases, individuals with high *suzhi* may indeed receive more respect and social privileges, and their moral character may influence their achievements. However, this also suggests that the relationship between moral character and social status in China may not be straightforward. Complex factors, including the influence of political power and wealth on an individual's perceived *suzhi*, may come into play.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1.2 Fostering citizenship through educational communication

In China, there is no specific subject called Citizenship Education, *gongmin jiaoyu* (公民教育). Citizenship education is often referred to as *deyu* (德育), which is commonly translated as moral education. The translation comes from the word *de* (德), which means morality, and *yu* (育), which means education. However, this translation only partially captures the essence of *deyu*. It encompasses not only moral education, but also political and ideological education, including courses in law, health, work-related studies, and other activities for the

<sup>18</sup>Furthermore, Norbert Elias' theory of the "civilizing process" offers a sociological perspective on the development of human behavior and the influence of societal norms on civilization. The theory suggests that as societies progress, they experience a gradual transformation characterized by heightened social restrictions on individual conduct. These formal and informal restraints induce individuals to exert more self-control. This involves suppressing impulsive behavior and conforming to societal norms. A crucial aspect is cultivating a sense of collective identity, which fosters a belongingness to a larger social group and promotes adherence to established standards for maintaining social unity. This historical process unfolds over centuries, influenced by broader societal changes, and sometimes undergoes periods of decivilization when social constraints weaken. Details can be found in Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, vol. 1 and 2 (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997).

<sup>19</sup>In the Western context, the "civilizing process" is often portrayed as a bottom-up phenomenon motivated by individual ambitions for a higher quality of life. It suggests that as individuals and communities aspire to improve their quality of life in terms of social and economic well-being, they develop self-discipline, adhere to societal norms, and contribute to the overall enhancement of behavior and etiquette. This process is perceived as a collective effort that gradually leads to the cultivation of a more refined and cultured society.

general education of students (Li et al., 2004, p. 449). It is argued that the content is similar to citizenship courses in other countries and includes aspects of morality, life, society, ideology, and physical education (Wan, 2004), which are interrelated and can be used interchangeably (Lee, 1996; Lee and Ho, 2008).<sup>20</sup> The concept of citizenship education is subject to varying interpretations, with some viewing it as a distinct subject in the curriculum, while others integrate it into various subjects or regard it as a component of social development and political socialization. In the context of China, the closest terms to citizenship education are political, ideological, and moral education. Fundamentally, citizenship education is designed to equip young individuals with the qualities and knowledge necessary to become responsible members of their communities. Its primary objective revolves around the exploration of “what is a good citizen” and “what do good citizens do” (Li and Tan, 2017). Traditional Chinese education historically placed limited emphasis on individualism and instead favored a standardized, uniform approach, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. This approach tended to overlook the diversity existing among different regions, ethnic minorities, and religious beliefs within China, and instead promoted a singular set of values. During this period, individual expression and uniqueness were often suppressed in favor of collective conformity and the establishment of a homogenous societal structure, which inadvertently restrained the nurturing of individual creativity (Li, 1990; Yue, 2004).

The transformation in moral education within China over recent decades reflects a transition towards incorporating a mix of traditional Confucian values and the assimilation of democratic and individualistic principles. This shift underscores the challenge of harmonizing the personal perspectives and beliefs of individuals with the broader ideological framework in the country. The modifications in the curriculum, the introduction of politically oriented subject matter, the necessity for specialized educators, and the use of nationally approved textbooks serve as illustrations of the intricate dynamics encountered by educators and students as they navigate the changing landscape of moral education within the Chinese educational system. Presently, there is a degree of flexibility in the acceptance of diverse textbooks, as long as they adhere to the fundamental guidelines established by the Ministry of Education (Halstead and Zhu, 2012). Before the period of opening up and reform, moral education in China was primarily centered around instilling a comprehensive understanding of political ideologies and ethical principles. However, it often overlooked the individual needs and unique perspectives of students. This approach was characterized by a closed-minded and manipulative nature, with the intention of nurturing individuals who conformed to authority and demonstrated obedience (Qi and Tang, 2004). The ongoing reform of moral education in China is seemingly centered on students, giving weight to their interests and preferences. This reformation aims to inspire students to strike a balance between freedom and responsibility, fostering their ability to confront moral dilemmas rather than evade them. This shift in the approach to moral education reflects the changing dynamics within the Chinese education system and its

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<sup>20</sup>In their article published in 2008, Lee and Ho (2008) described this interchangeability as: “The etymological transferability of these terms reveals the nature of moral education in China, being regarded essentially as a means of political socialization, in transmitting ideological and political values not only to the students, but also to the populace at large.” (p. 413)

influence on the ethical development of students. Furthermore, scholars contend that

First, rather than talking about politics, citizenship education in the East talks about morality. “Civics” always goes with “morals” in the East; thus civic and moral education is a term more common than civics education or citizenship education in Asian countries. Second, many Asian countries would tend to focus on the development of individuality (as far as the self is concerned) and relations (as far as the society is concerned) in citizenship education (Lee, 2009, p. 12).<sup>21</sup>

Efficient communication holds a pivotal position in the nurturing of engaged and responsible citizens, particularly within the domain of citizenship education in China. Through the application of effective teaching techniques and communication strategies, educators can adeptly impart the fundamental civic values and proficiencies essential for substantial engagement in their communities and democratic societies. This underscores the significance of pedagogical methods in facilitating the harmonization of individuals’ personally constructed moral perceptions with the existing ideological structures. Scholars emphasize the necessity of transitioning towards interactive and student-focused methodologies in citizenship education, thereby promoting moral consciousness (Bellous, 2008). The content may be called civics, social studies, or moral education, and may be integrated into various subjects such as history or geography (Arthur et al., 2008). According to Banks (2004), schools should emphasize experiential learning of values rather than merely lecturing about them. Citizenship education strives to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives necessary to form their identities and engage in a variety of communities. It emphasizes the importance of comprehending not just one’s own nation-state but also diverse cultural settings. The objective of citizenship education is to aid students in cultivating robust cultural and global identities while nurturing an appreciation of the interconnectedness of nations. It promotes a thoughtful sense of belonging to the global community and fosters positive attitudes towards individuals from various countries (Banks, 2004; Davis, 1994). According to Arthur et al. (2008), effective citizens base their decisions on knowledge and evidence, which requires an understanding of society and skills such as evaluating information.

It is argued that teachers should act as guides, creating open classrooms that empower students to question societal, cultural, and political structures (Arthur et al., 2008, p.07). Costello (1995), as early as the 1990s, emphasizes the importance of teaching critical thinking for developing moral reasoning in young children<sup>22</sup>, while Damon and Colby (1996) suggest that moral education should consider moral habits, commitments, and the influence of other institutions on students’ expectations. According to Ross (2002), three curricular approaches exist for teaching citizenship: content-driven, which views knowledge as a distinct body of data to be acquired; process-driven, which views education as a process; and objective-driven, where knowledge becomes a commodity. All three approaches are believed to contribute to

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<sup>21</sup>Emphasis added by author.

<sup>22</sup>Li and Wang (2015) see it as an important aspect of current university education to instill some kind of critical thinking in future teachers. They see a lack of awareness of critical thinking in current students, and they need to be taught in the direction of critically facing certain facts rather than just taking them for granted. For them, critical thinking in Chinese education is an important aspect for the full preparation of future teachers.

citizenship education, although teachers generally adopt one and discard the rest (Scott and Lawson, 2002). The school curriculum varies from country to country and includes multiple ways of incorporating citizenship education. According to Kennedy and Laurie (2007), the citizenship curriculum reflects the societal values, knowledge, and skills that each society deems important. Unitary systems such as China may have a uniform citizenship education, while countries with more decentralized decision-making may have different approaches within different regions. The citizenship curriculum seeks to provide students with knowledge, skills, and values that support their national identity and enable responsible decision-making. This includes imparting an understanding of citizenship rights and responsibilities for their future (Arthur et al., 2008, p. 484). In addition, *The SAGE Handbook of Education for Citizenship* says

[...] There is little agreement about what is essential civic knowledge and skills, the best time to teach it and what should be the expected outcomes at different points in time. Different frameworks have been used in different contexts to try and provide a common approach within countries and sometimes across countries (Arthur et al., 2008, p. 487).

Varied perspectives on citizenship education across different countries pose challenges in defining its content and methods, and understanding and contextualizing it within diverse education systems.<sup>23</sup> In their research on the practice of citizenship education, Crick et al. (2004) identified four key areas for effective learning. The first is the importance of quality dialogue and discourse to help students identify shared values and construct concepts of justice and equality. The second is empowering students' voices and giving them opportunities to articulate their life experiences and identities. The third key area focuses on the school as an institution that provides the structure and strategy for imparting theoretical and practical knowledge. Lastly, they emphasize the need to support teachers and school staff in transforming the curriculum content. As noted by Banks (2004), there exists a disparity between theoretical concepts and practical application within citizenship education. Frequently, these ideals lack the necessary institutional structures and practical implementations. This underscores a fundamental challenge that educators and institutions might encounter when attempting to align students' constructed moral realities with the prevailing ideological framework, particularly in the context of moral education integration in China. The new era of citizenship education aims at a global perspective that "demands moral commitment and empathy beyond the individual and his or her own interests" (Dill, 2012, p. 541).<sup>24</sup>

School education complements family upbringing by providing students with essential knowledge, practical skills, and instilling a set of values and beliefs. Educators play a crucial role in nurturing students' holistic development encompassing moral, intellectual, physical,

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<sup>23</sup>In addition, Althof and Berkowitz (2006) provide an overview of the differences between citizenship education and character (and moral) education, as well as their similarities. They define character education as education that focuses on teaching moral concepts, manners, and civility. Citizenship education, on the other hand, focuses on politics, government, and the interrelationships of social life. In order to integrate these two concepts and to achieve the goal of fostering the development of citizens who are not only pro-social but also participate in liberal democratic society, they should allow for the same foundation of goals and methods.

<sup>24</sup>For further studies focused on global citizenship education, I suggest additional reading material such as Goren and Yemini (2017a) and Goren and Yemini (2017b).

and aesthetic dimensions. Xi (2002) emphasizes that within the realm of citizenship education, national unity education becomes integral to guiding students in forming their political perspectives as part of their socialization process. Xi identifies two fundamental aspects of social control that shape the transmission of the correct life outlook. First, educational institutions, particularly schools, act as channels through which external authorities impose control over educational material. This results in a standardized approach to ideological and political education. Second, students are guided to internalize intrinsic values that, in turn, govern their political behavior through the cumulative influence of education. This educational strategy relies on three main components. First, it involves the correct use of textbooks, which systematically and progressively steer students towards developing the correct life outlook. Second, teachers, through their teaching and personal beliefs, become influential figures in shaping students' perspectives. They are encouraged to be mindful of their roles in safeguarding national unity through their words and actions. And third, various extracurricular activities within the school environment are instrumental in guiding students towards adopting the correct outlook on life. According to Yue (2003), students tend to internalize ethical norms and values more efficiently when they perceive that their actions align with the broader expectations of society. Actively engaging in social activities provides students with opportunities to delve into the underlying value systems and the significance of their existence. The promotion of citizenship education is a multifaceted endeavor with distinct dimensions that can vary significantly within and between different countries. The methods, materials, and strategies employed to impart citizenship-related knowledge and values exhibit substantial diversity. These variations are notably influenced by a multitude of cultural, political, and social factors.

### **3.1.3 Development of an education towards morality**

The ongoing adjustments in China's education system, driven by various institutions and supported by educational reform efforts, highlight the importance of moral education in shaping "ideal" citizens. The integration of moral and ethical teachings is a key aspect of developing responsible and virtuous individuals. Scholarly research that examines the impact of moral education on teachers, teaching methods, and curriculum reform is critical to understand the alignment between moral education and the prevailing ideological framework. It provides insight into the challenges teachers face in implementing concepts that may seem far removed from real-life experiences (Fu and Clarke, 2019; Lu and Gao, 2004b; Li and Tan, 2017; Li et al., 2019).<sup>25</sup>

In China, education has undergone a transformation from the traditional focus on instilling morality through imitation and modeling to a contemporary emphasis on the values of hard work and altruism. Within this context, political and moral education holds a pivotal role, encompassing both the formal curriculum and extending into broader societal influences. Historically, Chinese education prioritized collective loyalty and socialist morality over individ-

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<sup>25</sup>There are also articles, such as Lawrence (2000), that examine the similarities and differences between British and Chinese citizenship education, and suggest ways in which British citizenship education could benefit from the Chinese model.



uality. These fundamental principles continued to hold sway well into the 1980s. The fusion of politics with moral principles significantly shapes the attitudes and conduct of students within the classroom. A notable component of this educational approach is the utilization of small-group discussions to assess behavioral patterns and their practical applications. The overarching objective is to cultivate a collective political orientation at the macro level, while simultaneously promoting acceptable attitudes and behaviors at the individual level (Wilson, 1974).

According to the Ministry of Education, the objectives of moral education are as follows: In primary education, the emphasis is on instilling good behavior habits, love for the motherland and socialism, and establishing fundamental concepts such as ethics, legal consciousness, and hygiene. In secondary education, concepts like socialism with Chinese characteristics are taught, nurturing students' national identity and citizenship. Foundational skills lead to the development of personal qualities, including self-esteem and self-confidence. Students' understanding of the traits required for success in society is enhanced by exploring China's traditional history. At the university level, students often study the major thinkers of China and gain a comprehensive understanding of the development that led to the modern-day China, including the Communist Party of China. Students have the opportunity to develop themselves comprehensively and reflect on their personal growth, guided by the ideals of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2005).<sup>26</sup> The political orientation in education becomes increasingly noticeable as students advance in their studies. Primary education's focus is on guiding students within society. Secondary education highlights China's political history for citizenship education purposes. University education delves into the revolutionary history of China and its ideals. There is a clear shift from basic moral education towards improving students' ideological and moral level, ultimately leading to a focus on comprehending Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the Three Represents.

Moral education in China is primarily delivered through two distinct approaches. The first approach is subject-based moral education, which the distinction between primary and secondary schools. These variations manifest in the core elements and the specific values emphasized at each level. The second approach encompasses extracurricular activities, which serve as supplementary channels for moral education. These activities comprise morning meetings, class meetings, and various party-related events, among others. During the Monday morning meeting, the national flag is raised and exemplary students are selected to set an example for others to follow, and patriotism is promoted through speeches by the principal and students. In a weekly class meeting the class teacher and students discuss the week's events. Another activity is related to the Communist Party and involves organizations such as the *Young Pioneers*, *shaonian xianfengdui* (少年先锋队), which aim to encourage good behavior among children aged eight to fourteen. Students between the ages of fourteen and twenty-eight can join *The Communist Youth League of China*, *Zhongguo Gongchanzhuyi Qingnian tuan* (中国

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<sup>26</sup>This is a concise summary of the general goals of moral education in Chinese education. More detailed information can be found in various publications by the Ministry of Education. The 2005 publication serves as a point of reference, while various other documents published by the Ministry of Education offer additional support, details, or adaptations of these goals.

共产主义青年团), which is responsible for educating and supporting the Young Pioneers. These organizations serve as additional educational resources outside of school officials and also provide opportunities to apply and become a member of the Communist Party of China (Zhu and Liu, 2004).

According to Zhan and Ning (2004), education is directed towards fostering holistic development in individuals. This comprehensive growth encompasses the transmission of knowledge, moral education, aesthetic education, work-related skills, and engagement in social practices. However, during the process of socialization, teachers may not assign equal importance to all these aspects, leading to variations in emphasis, with one aspect potentially receiving more attention than others. As suggested by Liu and Zhu (2001), the concept of moral education should undergo a transformation from a mechanistic approach to a life-theoretical one. This shift entails moving away from standardized educational practices and instead embracing diversity as a means to enhance individual quality. After China's opening-up policy, moral education aimed to empower individuals to take charge of their own lives and contribute to society. It shifted from a *no people* approach to a *people-oriented* focus, emphasizing the integration of theoretical and practical activities into students' everyday experiences (Shu, 2021). As noted by Cheung and Pan (2006), the concept of "regulated individualism" is employed to strike a balance between personal autonomy and socialist collectivism. This approach encompasses several dimensions, including maintaining a socialist orientation within national education policy, the legitimization of moral education reforms, the expansion of the moral education domain, the diversification of teaching methods, and the conditional adjustment of the state-defined individual-collective relationship. The shift toward a market economy has posed challenges to the traditional model of moral education in Chinese schools, prompting necessary adaptations to align with global economic and cultural trends and the process of modernization. According to Li and Zhong (2002), questions such as "how to promote the development of moral education through reform", "how to establish a moral education system that meets the requirements of the new era", or "how to provide basic quality support for China's modernization" arose. Chinese schools have acknowledged the significance of moral education in addressing societal needs. They found that traditional moral education classes were insufficient in adapting to the evolving social landscape and fell short in fostering the comprehensive development of individuals. Consequently, there was a transition towards subject-oriented moral education, which prioritizes the moral growth and development of students.

Ban (2002) identifies a shift in moral education towards humanization, characterized by four key changes: from materialization to humanization, from indoctrination to dialogue, from restriction to liberation, and from separation to integration. This form of education values dialogue over indoctrination, liberation over restriction, integration over separation, and prioritizes human needs over material gain. Humanized moral education prioritizes respecting individuals' rights, caring for their needs, and fostering sound morals. It emphasizes meaningful exchanges, cultural heritage, and holistic student development. It aims to promote mutual respect, empathetic understanding, and the holistic development of students.

The transition from indoctrination to dialogue encourages mutual influence between teachers and students with a focus on guiding moral development while respecting each other. It entails teachers supporting students' individual growth without imposing standardized models, promoting freedom over restriction. Moral education should focus on *helping* students to grow, instead of *shaping* them into a human being without personality. This shift allows students to explore advanced moral concepts, leading to an open moral education that affords a broader perspective in facing life and society. Lastly, the shift from segregation to integration highlights the importance of incorporating moral education into students' holistic education and social experiences, resulting in a complete effect.

The historical evolution of moral education in China has showcased a prioritization of ideal needs over the practical needs of students. While underscoring the significance of ideal needs in shaping an individual's role in society, it is essential to acknowledge that these ideals may not consistently align with the contemporary societal demands. This dichotomy raises significant questions concerning the structure of moral education and its compatibility with an evolving ideological framework. Specifically, when moral education leans too heavily towards ideal needs at the expense of immediate practical considerations, it could potentially compromise the healthy development of both individuals and society.<sup>27</sup> In the realm of moral education, the incorporation of ideal needs within the context of individual students' practical requirements is crucial. However, ideal needs may not always harmonize with the direction of realistic needs. Simultaneously, it is vital to recognize that realizing ideal needs is often contingent upon the satisfaction of realistic needs (Liu and Zhu, 2001; Zhang and Du, 2023). Teachers have the opportunity to utilize role models as exemplars for students to follow, providing valuable guidance. However, care must be taken to prevent students from merely imitating these models without understanding their true nature as living individuals. Scholars like Liu and Zhu (2001) and Reed (1995) contend that teachers continue to serve as moral authorities, imparting knowledge as absolute truth. These classes prioritize universal moral principles, employing historical figures as illustrative examples while occasionally overshadowing students' individual experiences and emotions. Although teachers do promote student expression, the emphasis frequently leans toward aligning with *official words* and *stereotypes* of morality. In instances where students express genuine ideas that diverge from the official perspectives, teachers may reject them, often providing what they perceive as *reasonable excuses*.<sup>28</sup> This can have a negative impact on the quality of the development of individual

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<sup>27</sup>Lu and Gao (2004a) elaborated the top-down set of values and rules, such as these ideal needs. They state that this kind of approach "was established to control children and require them to meet the moral needs of the country and society" (p. 499).

<sup>28</sup>Kibble (1998) gives an interesting insight into the moral dilemma that teachers of moral education must face. He analyzes these moral dilemmas using three examples: Should moral education deal with the rights of those who belong to terrorist organizations? Should it address injustices in a foreign country when that country threatens to withdraw commercial contracts if its government is criticized? Should moral educators teach students that some religions (or at least some versions of them) have moral teachings and practices that are questionable by humanitarian standards? With these questions, he raises the awareness that moral judgments are not easy to make and cannot be "easy" and "simple", just as morality itself is not "easy" and "simple". Nespor (1987) conducted a study on the role of beliefs in teaching practice in order to elaborate teachers' ways of thinking and understanding. His paper developed a conceptualization of beliefs grounded in cognitive psychology and science and suggests several key function of beliefs in teachers' thinking. Pajares (1992) also takes teachers' beliefs into account and "argues that teachers' beliefs can and should become an

students and also on the development of society.<sup>29</sup> Giving students the opportunity to express their ideas and perspectives is crucial. When individuals gain a better understanding of themselves, they can more effectively understand others and the world around them, leading to a more positive and conducive learning environment (Yang, 2022). Li et al. (2004) speak of “interactive pedagogy”, where the teacher encourages students to think critically and does not necessarily expect a correct answer.

Moral education classes in China aim to foster self-awareness and understanding of individual roles in society among students. In order to promote self-education, moral activity classes have been introduced in schools, which concentrate on students’ active experiences (Xu and Wang, 2015). These courses supplement the inclusive moral education program and are emphasized in educational reforms outlined by the Ministry of Education, including the 2001 *Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Revision (Trial)* and the 2005 *Opinion on the Overall Planning of the Moral Education System of Universities, Secondary and Primary Schools*. The Ministry of Education defines the goals of moral education in Chinese schools as follows

In formulating national curriculum standards, it is necessary to strengthen the significance, effectiveness and initiative of moral education work in accordance with the characteristics of each curriculum and its specific content; to educate students in patriotism, collectivism and socialism; to strengthen education in the traditions of the Chinese nation, revolutionary traditions and national defense; and to guide students in forming a correct world outlook, outlook on life and values (Ministry of Education, 2001c).<sup>30</sup>

and further

Moral education is mainly to educate students about politics, ideology, morality, legal system and mental health. Young students’ patriotic feelings, civilized behavior and habits, good moral character, awareness of law-abiding, scientific world view, outlook on life, values, ideals and beliefs of socialism with Chinese characteristics are a process that is gradually formed and developed through education (Ministry of Education, 2005).<sup>31</sup>

Moral education should have its foundations in real-life experiences and the everyday realities of students. Its aim is to kindle students’ enthusiasm and drive for self-improvement, self-education, and self-service. Moral education activities create opportunities for students to encounter real-world moral dilemmas, demanding them to apply their moral knowledge in practical contexts. Through these activities, students can reflect on their behavior and adapt their moral awareness to new situations they encounter. Both external and internal factors

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important focus of educational inquiry.”

<sup>29</sup>Schuitema et al. (2011) conducted a study in the USA on the quality of student dialogue and its impact on students’ ability to justify their positions on moral issues. Their findings show the correlation between student dialogue in general and students’ individual ability to reason about moral values.

<sup>30</sup>own translation

<sup>31</sup>own translation

play a role in students' education. External factors influence students, while internal factors involve self-education. A balanced approach to moral education is essential for the internalization of morality and the development of individual moral perspectives (Xu and Wang, 2015). Teachers play an important role in designing moral activity courses that align with students' interests and needs, seamlessly integrating them into moral education curricula. The purpose of such courses is to motivate and challenge students while fostering their self-learning capabilities. To encourage students as active creators of norms, educators must create realistic, interactive scenarios that reflect students' everyday experiences. These scenarios should be pragmatic, relatable, and natural (Liu and Zhu, 2001).

The fundamental challenge of moral education revolves around the question of how to become a person. It serves as a guide for students to navigate social norms, make conscious choices, and live morally. Moral education employs historical examples and personal experiences to aid students in forging their individual life paths. However, it cannot fully replace the process of personal life construction. Instead, it should facilitate the reconciliation of students' subjective aspirations with the realities they encounter in life. This journey may lead to questions such as "Is this kind of life meaningful?", "What kind of meaning or significance does this life have?", or "What can such a life mean to me?" Moral education enriches students' comprehension of life's meaning and its practical aspects. As proposed by Lu (2010), life construction encompasses both external manifestations like one's actual way of life and internal aspects such as personality and traits. This process is continuous and subject to constraints imposed by personal factors like willpower, capabilities, and relationships. The capacity for change is limited to the scope of one's actions, where thinking and behavior mutually shape life. Moral education equips students to confront both known and unforeseen challenges, fostering the development of critical thinking, adaptability, and various life skills. In this context, teachers influence students' norms, values, beliefs, thought processes, behavior, political inclinations, and ethical outlooks.

As discussed by Xi (2002), comprehensive moral education relies on three key elements: teachers, teaching materials, and various school activities. Teachers occupy a central role in shaping the socialization and education of students. Their political tendencies, whether conscious or unconscious, can profoundly impact the political development of their students. When teachers introduce their political perspectives and beliefs during classroom interactions, they directly influence the political socialization of their students. As role models, the behavior and language employed by teachers carry significant weight in students' lives. Consequently, teachers should exercise caution in imparting knowledge, utilizing appropriate examples, and selecting language that aligns with the goals of moral education. Teaching materials serve as invaluable resources for both students and teachers, guiding and directing the course of moral education. These materials are typically designed to be gradual and systematic, progressively moving from concrete to abstract concepts to enhance comprehension and practical application. They are adapted to suit students' levels, employing language and images suitable for each stage of their moral development. Campus activities, such as involvement in student unions and class committees, wield substantial influence over the

political socialization of students. These activities foster mutual understanding, encourage national unity, and cultivate a positive environment for political engagement. As outlined by Xi (2002), they contribute significantly to the overall political development of students.

Chinese education is undergoing changes in line with the directives set by the 19th CPC National Congress and National Education Conference, with the 2019 document *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening the Reform of Education and Teaching and Comprehensively Improving the Quality of Compulsory Education* being a part of these changes. Compulsory education in China, under the influence of General Secretary Xi Jinping's ideology, aims to cultivate virtuous and capable citizens who can contribute to the nation's rejuvenation. Teaching methods are evolving, moving towards more interactive, inquiry-based, research-oriented, and cooperative learning. In this educational transformation, technology, including the internet and digital resources, plays a pivotal role. China places great importance on continuous teacher development and recognizes the vital role of families in the educational process. The nation views education as a collective societal effort, endorsed by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, which highlights that education goes beyond the boundaries of the classroom and is integral to the broader societal framework.

## **3.2 Contemporary China: Educational reforms and moral development**

The ongoing process of education reform in China bears significant implications for the nation's future, particularly in the context of its rapid development. The reform aims to address the evolving social dynamics marked by modernization and socio-economic transformation. In particular, the moral development of the younger generation is arising as a key dimension of this transformation. Policy implementation in this context has an impact beyond government authorities and the structural aspects of the education system. This also presents challenges to educators responsible for its implementation and students who are recipients. The educational reforms operate on a national scale, allowing for local adaptations as long as they align with the overarching framework. Over the past decade, there has been a significant revision of the curriculum standards for moral education, culminating in a comprehensive revision in 2022. These revisions pose new challenges, particularly for teachers who are at the forefront of translating these requirements into classroom practice.

### **3.2.1 The impact of policy implementations on the curriculum reform**

Since the beginning of the reform and opening-up era in the late 1970s, the education system in China has made considerable progress, reaching the objective of providing nine-year compulsory education for all and enhancing the overall quality of education (Ministry of Education, 2001a). However, as of 2001, disparities in the development of basic education persisted among regions, indicating uneven attention to this critical aspect. To address these disparities, the Ministry of Education introduced the *State Council Decision on the Reform*

*and Development of Basic Education*, which aimed to strengthen nationwide compulsory education. These decisions were in line with the Party's education policy, promoting the reform and healthy growth of basic education while adhering to existing laws and supporting China's educational achievements. The guideline aimed to provide steps for better management, funding, and sustainable education development in both rural and urban areas, with a focus on reducing disparities and ensuring equal access to nine years of compulsory education. Given China's large rural population and socioeconomic diversity, educational development remains a key avenue for achieving the nation's educational goals. Emphasis is also placed on improving the teacher training system to strengthen the training of primary and secondary school teachers (Ministry of Education, 2001a). The *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China*, first implemented in 1986 and revised in 2018, underscores that

Compulsory education must implement the State's education policy, provide quality education, improve the quality of education, enable schoolchildren and young people to develop their morals, intelligence and physical strength in a comprehensive way, and lay the foundation for training socialist builders and successors with ideals, morals, education and discipline.<sup>32</sup>

and further says that

Schools should put moral education in the first place, incorporate moral education into education and teaching, carry out social practice activities appropriate to students' ages, build an ideological and moral education system in which schools, families and society cooperate with each other, and promote the cultivation of students' good ideological character and behavioral habits (Chinese Government, 2018b).<sup>33</sup>

In 2001, the Ministry of Education implemented curriculum reforms to replace the outdated curriculum with the contemporary and adaptable *Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Trial)*, which meets modern demands and diverse contexts (Ministry of Education, 2001b,c). Experimental areas were selected to develop specific curriculum plans that reflect their unique circumstances, ensuring that Chinese education meets contemporary needs and supports the holistic development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Students should learn about patriotism, collectivism, and their love for socialism while also respecting Chinese traditions. As China develops, students will be educated to embody ideals, morals, culture, and discipline. Currently, efforts are being made to bridge the gap by emphasizing practical applications, comprehending students' life experiences, fostering social engagement, embracing local differences, and promoting students' individual growth. According to the *Experimental Plan for Compulsory Education Curriculum* from 2001:

The curriculum should reflect the basic nature of compulsory education, follow the law of students' physical and mental development, adapt to the requirements

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<sup>32</sup> own translation

<sup>33</sup> own translation

of social progress, economic development and scientific and technological development, and lay the foundation for students' sustainable and all-round development (Ministry of Education, 2001d).<sup>34</sup>

The reform of the basic education curriculum draws attention on the cultivation of morals, ideals and a correct outlook on life. Moral education is integrated into every subject and should be naturally included into the curriculum.<sup>35</sup> Chinese education also includes subjects that aim to cultivate students' morality, with special emphasis on how to become a morally mature person. In 2001, moral education in the nine-year compulsory education was divided into three subjects: Character and Life, *pinde yu shenghuo* (品德与生活), (grades one and two), Morality and Society, *pinde yu shehui* (品德与社会), (grades three to six), and Ideology and Character<sup>36</sup>, *sixiang pinde* (思想品德), (grades seven to nine). Science is added from the third grade, and history and society are introduced from the seventh grade. The curriculum aimed for a well-rounded course distribution, allowing for local adjustments. It emphasized the integration of subject knowledge, social life, and student experience, promoting creativity and distinctiveness in school management. Each subject is encouraged to incorporate ideological and moral education as per its unique characteristics. Schools are also encouraged to independently organize activities such as morning meetings and group events (Ministry of Education, 2001d).

China aims for an all-round education that promotes the healthy development of individuals. The CPC Central Committee and the State Council continuously address concerns to guarantee the realization of this objective. The 2005 *Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the Overall Planning of the Moral Education System of Primary and Secondary Schools* categorized education into primary, secondary, and higher levels and highlighted progressive learning objectives. The schools were recommended to integrate these objectives into their daily activities, incorporating standardized approaches that account for the physical, mental, and ability characteristics of their students. This approach replaced ambiguous and redundant moral education objectives, establishing definite goals for each academic level that align with the Party's education policy (Ministry of Education, 2005). Standardized moral education has been implemented throughout China and must be applied consistently. It should prioritize people, align with societal development, and emphasize ideals, beliefs, patriotism, civic morality, basic values, and real-life relevance. Teachers play a crucial role in promoting these positive moral concepts and guiding students to develop the correct worldview and values.

The Ministry of Education develops a moral education curriculum for all levels of education, integrating it into various courses to align with China's development needs. Continual improvements in education result from addressing evolving moral education requirements at each National Congress of the Communist Party, providing better opportunities for growth. After the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, new tasks were imple-

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<sup>34</sup>own translation

<sup>35</sup>Zhu (2006) asserts that moral and value education can be found in multiple subjects due to the curriculum reform.

<sup>36</sup>In the following, the subjects of moral education will be capitalized to underscore their significance in Chinese education.



mented to cultivate people through virtue. In 2017, the Ministry of Education issued the *Notice on the Issuance of the "Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools"*, which aimed to strengthen education in all ordinary primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2017d). The guidelines should be integrated into existing principal and teacher training, and served as an essential basis for monitoring and evaluating moral education in primary and secondary schools. The Party and the State shall strive to build a moral education system with "correct direction, perfect content, connection of school segments, rich carriers, healthy development" and "vigorously promote the professionalization, standardization and effectiveness of moral education work" and further "strive to form a moral education work pattern of all-round education" (Ministry of Education, 2017d).<sup>37</sup> The guiding ideology of moral education in primary and secondary schools should be in line with the new strategy of governance and adhere to the principle of educating *people*. The core is to cultivate socialism with Chinese characteristics, inculcate good moral character, and promote the formation of students' positive behavioral habits. The 2017 circular emphasized the combination of school, family and social education, and adhered to the combination of education with productive work and social practice. The primary goal at each stage is to educate and guide students to love the Communist Party of China, the motherland, and the people. However, moral education ought to encompass the governance thoughts and guidelines of the Party Central Committee, highlighting an examination of General Secretary Xi Jinping's speeches. It should integrate Chinese history, culture, and national ethos with modern-day policy concerns to attain a more profound comprehension.

Moral education focuses on ideals, socialist core values, traditional Chinese culture, ecological civilization, and mental health, all guided by the Ministry of Education's directives. According to the 2017 notice, teachers are instructed to connect with their students' daily lives and utilize local resources for teaching purposes. Campus environment should foster a safe and comfortable atmosphere while reflecting the national spirit through the placement of the national flag and socialist core value symbols in classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2017d). Schools and classrooms should make creative use of posters, walls and floors to display portraits of outstanding people, heroic models and students' own work. The active participation of teachers and students in creating a comfortable and inspiring environment that reflects the national spirit and Chinese history is highly encouraged. The Ministry of Education suggests various outdoor activities, such as visits to museums, galleries, and memorial sites, to closely link moral education with students' real lives. This shift from the classroom to experiential learning helps students better understand Chinese history and its achievements and can strengthen students' commitment to their motherland and the national spirit. Schools should formulate and improve their education management system to focus on moral education, prevent bullying and violence, regulate responsibilities, and better understand individual students. Moral education should be cooperative, involve families, local departments and organizations to share resources and promote students' healthy development. Family education mechanisms and open school days, visits and meetings should be established and improved

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<sup>37</sup>own translation

(Ministry of Education, 2017d).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education further introduced the unified name and direction of *Morality and the Rule of Law* for the subject of moral education in Chinese schools through the *Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on Matters Related to Morality and the Rule of Law, Language, History and Primary School Science Teaching Books in Compulsory Education in 2017* (Ministry of Education, 2017e). Soon after, the Ministry of Education released the *Introduction to Compulsory Education Morality and the Rule of Law*. It describes the content and objectives of the recently developed compulsory education textbook on Morality and the Rule of Law. The introduction covers multiple topics such as the teaching materials' principles, textbook structure, and implementation guidelines. It is stated that the unified textbooks should

Be guided by Marxism, fully absorb the achievements of moral curriculum reform and the experience of the rule of law education over the past more than ten years, and focus on cultivating qualified socialist citizens with ideals, morals, culture and discipline, and run through the education of socialist core values (Ministry of Education, 2017b).<sup>38</sup>

In 2019, General Secretary Xi Jinping's symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory resulted in updates to publications by the State Council and Ministry of Education. General Secretary Xi Jinping highlighted the importance of applying socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics, implementing the Party's education policy nationwide, and prioritizing moral education. He emphasized adherence to the guiding principle of Marxism, the implementation of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and the commitment to education in the service of the people. According to him, young people represent the future and optimism of the nation, and are entrusted with the responsibility of national rejuvenation. Dedicated teachers significantly contribute to students' moral development (Chinese Government, 2019b). In 2019, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the *Opinions on Reforming Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools*, aimed at implementing General Secretary Xi Jinping's socialist thought with Chinese characteristics and the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress. These opinions focus on improving the cultivation and education of students, leading to an innovative reform of ideological and political theory courses. The 2020 Implementation Plan emphasized the importance of these courses in cultivating character and individuals, and stressed improving teaching methods, materials, and teacher training to meet standards. The plan also advocated greater cooperation among schools, families and society to promote ideological and political education. Society is encouraged to prioritize and strengthen education in line with China's development goals, promote socialism with Chinese characteristics, and contribute to the nation's modernization and revitalization. The General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council proposed six basic principles for deepening and improving ideological and political courses. The first is to maintain the Party's overall leadership in building ideological and

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<sup>38</sup>own translation

political courses. The second is to integrate General Secretary Xi Jinping's new-era socialism with Chinese characteristics and socialist core values into teaching materials and classrooms. The third is to implement the reform and innovation requirements of ideological and political courses. The fourth is to promote the leading role of ideological and political courses in the curriculum system, and promote synergy with other subjects. The fifth is to continuously cultivate high-quality professional teachers and support their development. And the sixth is to focus on problem orientation and goal orientation, and improve students' knowledge, emotions, and actions (Chinese Government, 2019a).

Universities should strengthen students' sense of responsibility and Party obedience, and educate them as qualified socialist builders and successors. High schools should improve students' political education, guide them to support the Party's leadership and embrace their identity as socialist builders and successors. Junior high schools should focus on laying the ideological foundation and strengthening students' views on the Party, the motherland and the people. Primary schools should cultivate moral sentiments and teach students to love the Party, the motherland and the people, and to aspire to become socialist builders and successors. A stable compulsory curriculum of ideological and political courses should be maintained, while elective courses should be offered in accordance with the characteristics of each stage of schooling. Universities should give priority to course modules on General Secretary Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics, Party and national history, and the history of reform and opening up. High schools offer a compulsory course *Ideology and Politics* with optional courses focusing on the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's recent speeches. Junior high schools and primary schools offer a compulsory course *Morality and the Rule of Law*, with elective courses available in combination with school-based and interest classes. To improve teacher training, a team of ideological and political teachers with strong political consciousness, deep understanding and correct character should be cultivated. Training plans, study sessions and seminars to support and recognize outstanding teachers should be improved. Identifying and cultivating talents, selecting department heads, and improving the overall structure of the teaching system are of great importance. It is recommended that special meetings be held annually to oversee the construction of ideological and political courses (Chinese Government, 2019a).

In 2020, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Education distributed the *Implementation Plan for Ideological and Political Theory Course Reform in Schools*. This plan is based on the opinions discussed in 2019. The embodiment of General Secretary Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era requires integration, innovation, appropriateness, and overall planning. All subjects should integrate ideological and political courses, and teaching materials and methods should adhere to the laws of ideological and political work and education. The implementation of the plan should be gradual, and teachers should actively and persistently carry out various tasks. The curriculum objective system of ideological and political education is described as follows

Understand, learn and grasp Xi Jinping's socialist thought with Chinese charac-

teristics in the new era, and put forward clear requirements in terms of political identity, family and national sentiments, moral cultivation, awareness of the rule of law, cultural achievements, and so on, and guide students to strengthen the “four self-confidence”<sup>39</sup> and be socialist builders and successors with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics and labor (Ministry of Education, 2020a).<sup>40</sup>

Special training is necessary for teachers to meet the challenges of teaching methods and materials. Full-time teachers for ideological and political courses must be available in primary and junior high schools, and colleges and universities should establish dedicated teaching and research departments. Educators should collaborate and discuss the best practices for implementing ideological and political course material. The Ministry of Education has established a Steering Committee to integrate ideological and political courses into universities, secondary, and primary schools, aiming to reinforce their contributions to the formation of morality and the cultivation of individuals, as well as to promote the *three advances*.<sup>41</sup> The Steering Committee is a “decision-making, coordinating and deliberating body for strengthening and improving the construction of ideological and political education in schools under the leadership of the Party Group of the Ministry of Education” and further, “its main function is to provide political leadership and work guidance for the integration of ideological education” (Ministry of Education, 2021c).<sup>42</sup> The Steering Committee’s primary responsibilities concern major issues related to the integration and management of ideological and political courses, materials, and teachers across all levels of education. The Steering Committee undertakes the tasks of consultation, research, evaluation, training and guidance. Furthermore, they hold annual meetings to review work reports and discuss important development issues. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed.

The 2022 *Opinions on Strengthening Ideological and Political Courses* issued by the Ministry of Education presents a modern perspective on these topics. In recent years, primary and secondary schools across the country have made significant progress in implementing innovative ideological and political education reforms. These efforts have led to improvements in education quality, student outlooks, and the overall role of education. However, there are ongoing challenges that require attention and improvement. Some communities and schools may not fully grasp the significance of these courses, and there is a need to enhance the quality of teaching materials, elevate teachers’ competence, and improve classroom teaching effectiveness. Consistent with the 20th CPC National Congress in 2022, there have been proposals to strengthen ideological and political courses in primary and secondary schools.

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<sup>39</sup>The “four self-confidence” are: Self-confidence in the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, self-confidence in theory, self-confidence in the system, and self-confidence in culture, which were proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the “Celebration of the 95th Anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China”.

<sup>40</sup>own translation

<sup>41</sup>General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced the three advances, which are the advance of teaching materials, the advance of the classroom, and the advance of students’ minds, in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. They give full play to the fundamental leading role of Xi Jinping’s socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era for university students’ ideological and political theory courses.

<sup>42</sup>own translation

Schools should deepen the Party's ideological and political education at these levels, and pay attention to

Give overall guidance to the construction of political courses, comprehensively implement the Party's education policy, carry out the fundamental task of cultivating people, actively cultivate and practice the socialist core values, promote the integration of ideological and political education in primary and secondary schools, and give full play to the effect of ideological and political courses.<sup>43</sup>

they should further

Closely connect with the reality of primary and secondary schools, deepen the reform and innovation of ideological and political education in primary and secondary schools, effectively strengthen the building of teachers of ideological and political education, coordinate and make good use of various educational resources, and vigorously improve the quality of ideological and political education (Ministry of Education, 2022a).<sup>44</sup>

Schools must guide students to follow the Party and train them as future leaders for national rejuvenation. The development of ideological and political courses is essential for a high-quality education system that emphasizes their political guidance and value-leading role. Efforts must be made to improve teaching management, resources and the professionalism of teachers. Strict implementation of the revised 2022 compulsory education curriculum standards for Morality and the Rule of Law is essential, as is creating conditions for optional courses and improving their content to promote General Secretary Xi Jinping's socialist thought with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Customized teaching approaches, contemporary technology, well-rounded curricula, and sufficient opportunities for social engagement enrich the learning experience. Investing in full-time educators and their professional growth supports these enhancements. Educational institutions and local communities can introduce innovative moral education initiatives through themed activities and foster a positive and cohesive campus environment that recognizes the overall leadership of the Party (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

### **3.2.2 Education in Beijing**

In recent years, Beijing has implemented strategic positioning, innovative governance reforms, and people-centered policies. It is also governed as a municipality with 16 urban, sub-urban and rural districts. This unique combination of factors makes Beijing an ideal location to study the intricacies of moral education and its alignment with the prevailing ideological framework, providing valuable insights into this critical aspect of China's educational system.

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<sup>43</sup> own translation

<sup>44</sup> own translation

Beijing is at the forefront of educational modernization efforts<sup>45</sup>, in line with General Secretary Xi Jinping's goal of building a strong nation through education for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The *Capital Education Modernization 2035* states that "by 2035, higher education should be modernized, meet the needs of the capital's people for fairer and higher quality education in the new era, and provide important support for the initial construction of a world-class harmonious and livable city", and further, this goal should be achieved by implementing the task of "optimizing the supply of resources and providing more equitable and adequate education services" (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2019).<sup>46</sup>

### **Political and educational administration in Beijing**

China's political administration is guided by the Constitution, which stresses the decentralization of power to local regions.<sup>47</sup> This grants local governments and Communist Party organizations greater authority over personnel management and economic units, representing a significant aspect of China's political structure (Guo, 2007). The Constitution serves as the basic law, and all other laws in the country are based on it. It contains articles directly related to education and others indirectly related to education. The *Education Law of the People's Republic of China*, adopted in 1995 and amended in 2021, is the basic law on education, superior to administrative and regional regulations but subordinate to the Constitution. China's administrative structure has three levels: the top level is the State Council, followed by provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government (*sheng/zizhiqu*). The second level includes autonomous prefectures, counties, and autonomous counties (*diqu*). The municipality government is divided into the county level government, suburb government, and urban district government. The third level consists of townships, ethnic townships, and small towns (*xian*). Each level is under the authority of the State Council, which oversees various departments and commissions responsible for major issues such as education and labor. The state has the power to create special administrative regions and change administrative divisions as needed. Beijing is a provincial-level municipality (*zhixiashi*) directly under the central government. It is divided into 16 districts, each of which is administered by a local CPC Committee Secretary. Beijing is further divided into townships and villages, which serve as organizational units for local government. The Beijing Municipal Committee issues administrative orders, manages the economy, and supervises local government through a standing committee of the Municipal People's Congress (Xu and Mei, 2018; Chinese Government, 2005; Chan, 2002).

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<sup>45</sup>As literature shows, there is no universal definition of modernization of education, and various methods have been employed to explain the process. Gu (1997) contends that modernizing education involves transforming traditional education into a modernized format. Cheng and Chen (2023) further suggest that the period of comprehensive promotion for the modernization of education began in 2012, coinciding with the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Yin (2020) discusses the strategic imperative of maintaining quality and balance in compulsory education aimed at fulfilling the public's desire for "quality schooling" while addressing the variations in the standard and quality of education across different regions, both urban and rural.

<sup>46</sup>own translation

<sup>47</sup>Basic information about Beijing and its political and cultural administration departments is available on the website of *The People's Government of Beijing Municipality*, providing the latest updates: <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/>.

China's education laws can be divided into basic and non-basic laws. Basic laws, enacted by the National People's Congress, regulate the basic relationships in education. Non-basic laws, administrative regulations and regional regulations are derived from the Basic Education Law and address specific educational requirements. Special education laws, such as the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education* or the *Law of the People's Republic of China for Teachers*, address specific goals and are formulated by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. The State Council formulates education administrative regulations based on the Constitution and basic education laws. Regional education regulations approved by the State Council apply only within their respective administrative areas, meet regional needs and promote comprehensive development. Provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and some cities with provincial governments may make regional regulations, provided they are in accordance with the Constitution and local laws (Xu and Mei, 2018). Regional regulations are essential to address local challenges and conditions, and complement national laws. In Beijing, primary and secondary education follows the national curriculum overseen by the Ministry of Education in accordance with the Mainland Education Law.<sup>48</sup> The Beijing Municipal Commission of Education is responsible for local education matters and operates under the guidance of the *Education Committee of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China*. It was established in 1979 as part of China's comprehensive reforms during the era of Deng Xiaoping. These commissions, including the one located in Beijing, aim to decentralize educational administration, granting local authorities more control and adaptability to meet local needs. This initiative was driven by the desire for efficient, adaptable policies aligned with economic modernization goals to enhance education quality and support economic and social progress in China (The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, 2023). The work of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission is described as follows:

The Municipal Education Commission implements the guidelines, policies, decisions and arrangements of the CPC Central Committee on the undertaking of education and relevant work requirements of the Municipal Party Committee, and adheres to and strengthens the unified leadership of the Party on the undertaking of education in the course of performing its duties (The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, 2023).

The Beijing Municipal Commission of Education is responsible for implementing national education laws, formulating local policies, and supervising their implementation. It plans, coordinates and directs education in the city, ensures the balanced and equal development of

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<sup>48</sup>Xu and Law (2015) conducted a study on the relationship between school leadership and citizenship education in Shanghai. Their empirical study examines the dynamics and complexities of the role played by school Party secretaries, who they argue are de facto equivalent to school principals, in leading and overseeing citizenship education. In their study, they explore questions such as how Party secretaries respond to their responsibilities (in terms of managing citizenship education), how they share responsibilities (with school principals), and what opportunities they have to manage citizenship education. Their main findings are the complex division of power and labor between Party secretaries and school principals, the mediation by Party secretaries (to balance state control with their professional autonomy), and the cooperation between Party secretaries and school principals in managing citizenship education.

compulsory education, sets educational standards and formulates guidelines for school management. It supervises various aspects of education, including ideological, political, moral, physical, health, art, handicraft and national defense education. It also supervises the educational work of county governments, supervises compulsory education, inspects the quality of teaching, and coordinates the construction of teachers' ethics and morals. The Beijing Municipal Commission of Education consists of various internal institutions specializing in legal affairs, different levels of education, research, teacher management, evaluation, support and cooperation. These institutions, especially those focusing on preschool and primary school affairs, play an important role in guiding moral education in the early stages of education (The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, 2023).

### **The impact of policy implementation on the development of education in Beijing**

Beijing began its educational modernization journey in 1994, and in 1996 set the goal of "laying the foundation for the nation's first realization of educational modernization" (Chai and Zhong, 2021). Since 2001, Beijing has been actively engaged in basic education curriculum reform, achieving significant improvements in classroom teaching and promoting high-quality education through school-teacher cooperation. During the first citywide education conference of the 21st century held in 2004, Beijing introduced the concept of "capital education" (Chai and Zhong, 2021). In 2005, Beijing pioneered education reform with a focus on modernization. This led to all first grade primary and middle schools participating in the new curriculum experiment (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2006). In 2006, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission published the *2006-2010 Compulsory Education Plan*. The plan aimed to set goals, tasks, and measures for the first cycle of the nine-year compulsory education experiment, strengthen leadership, address emerging issues, improve the quality of education, and achieve balanced development in Beijing. In 2006, Beijing initiated efforts to introduce quality education and reform the basic education curriculum, taking inspiration from Deng Xiaoping's theory and the important thought of the Three Represents. These initiatives involved the adoption of innovative management and teaching approaches to enhance primary and secondary education in response to the need for improved educational quality. Between 2006 and 2010, local regulations placed emphasis on various initiatives such as experimental projects, moral education training, curriculum reform, teacher support, and resource sharing. This collaborative approach involved municipal, district, and county governments working together to address challenges and prioritize reforms, particularly in areas with unique difficulties. Key to these efforts were municipal leadership, the strategic prioritization of policies, and research-informed approaches. By 2010, Beijing had completed the first nine-year cycle of its compulsory basic education curriculum reform, aligning its principles with national regulations. These endeavors aimed to position the city at the forefront of modernizing basic education and nurturing high-quality citizens (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2006).

In 2006, the Beijing Municipal Moral Education Bureau launched activities to improve students' ideals, beliefs and skills. Districts and counties established school-based moral edu-



cation groups, introduced innovative mechanisms, and adopted a “three-dimensional goal” approach to improve students’ learning (The People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, 2006; Chai and Zhong, 2021). Following the 18th National Congress, Beijing has actively promoted socialist core values in schools. This has been achieved through the integration of various departments into a unified system that places a strong emphasis on moral education. In 2008, the *Social Classroom Project* was launched to support students’ all-round development through extracurricular activities. With a three-phase construction plan, Beijing aimed to build a resource information and activity management system with over one thousand resources, involving top-to-bottom coordination at various levels within the city, districts and schools (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2008). The Social Classroom Project has opened nearly 500 resource units for students, with 65% from social resources and 35% from the education system (The People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, 2008). These units cover various aspects in Beijing’s districts and counties. The social classroom focuses on students’ livelihood and needs, and promotes the sharing of educational resources and equality. In 2010, exhibition and exchange activities were held in eight districts and counties of Beijing.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the year, the three-year construction project<sup>50</sup> of the social classroom for primary and secondary students was completed, and nearly 1,300 social resource units became classrooms for millions of students to experience national conditions and develop skills outside the campus (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2017b). For example, in 2017, the Daxing District Education Commission organized the “Museum Spring” activity with the theme of “Inheriting Chinese Culture and Being a Confident Chinese”. They introduced the construction, use and management of the social classroom resource. The activity was co-sponsored by the Municipal Education Commission and the Municipal Cultural Relics Administration, and implemented the spirit of the *Opinions on the Cultivation and Practice of Socialist Core Values in Beijing Primary and Secondary Schools* (Beijing Education Yearbook, 2023). In 2009, Beijing celebrated the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China by launching the first patriotic education class. Schools at all levels were encouraged to organize educational activities to commemorate the anniversary, with districts and counties deploying moral education cadres to conduct patriotic education and training in schools. Themes such as “Development of the Motherland” and “Great National Unity” were used to educate students on these issues, with special speeches and national anthem performances highlighting the country’s progress and ethnic harmony (Beijing Education Yearbook, 2023).

Starting in 2014, the revision of the national curriculum has resulted in comprehensive enhancements in students’ holistic development (Ma, 2023). Beijing has implemented strategies, such as the 2017 *Working Paper on Further Improving the Reform and Development of*

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<sup>49</sup>The districts and counties are Shijingshan, Fangshan, Daxing, Yanqing, Haidian, Shunyi, Chaoyang and Tongzhou (Beijing Education Yearbook, 2023).

<sup>50</sup>The three main tasks can be summarized as resource integration, curriculum development, and information management. The first task includes the development and integration of resource units and the formation of a resource map with its own characteristics. The second task is achieved by forming a social classroom curriculum covering 27 subjects in primary and secondary schools. The third task includes information technology such as building online websites and establishing student cards (Beijing Education Yearbook, 2023).

*Integrated Urban and Rural Compulsory Education*, to integrate education in urban and rural areas<sup>51</sup>, aiming to improve the quality of compulsory education. The government is executing initiatives like urban teacher rotation to enhance the quality of compulsory education and diminish disparities between schools (Yin, 2020). However, resource allocation still seems unequal, leading to significant differences between urban and rural education. Beijing requires full-time teachers to have a bachelor's degree or higher. The *Capital Education Modernization 2035* plan aims for over 99% of teachers to have a bachelor's degree or higher by 2035. The plan also emphasizes that “by 2035, the annual proportion of teachers on exchange and rotation will be no less than 15% of the total number of teachers eligible for exchange; among them, no less than 20% of the total number of teachers on exchange and rotation will be core teachers” (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2019).<sup>52</sup> Beijing uses a top-down administrative coordination approach, with policy documents promoting curriculum reform and clarifying responsibilities. At the same time, it is taking a bottom-up approach, empowering schools to develop school-based curricula, select innovative teaching materials, and improve their own characteristics (Chai and Zhong, 2021).

In 2014, Beijing issued the *Opinions on Teaching Improvement of some Subjects of Basic Education*, emphasizing the need for continuous teacher development and recognizing those who embrace curriculum reform and innovative teaching methods. The city has effectively used educational resources and technology to improve the quality of education, with a focus on supporting primary and secondary education, maintaining curriculum standards, and reducing academic pressure on students by avoiding “rushed teaching” and “overburdening students” (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2014). Revised teaching materials and evaluation models, adapted by each district to local conditions, promote an open teaching model in schools. This approach encourages personalized learning, active engagement, and diverse resources for students (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2014).<sup>53</sup> In 2017, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education launched a comprehensive promotion of socialist core values, focusing on strengthening the moral education system and promoting traditional Chinese culture. Beijing introduced curricula that incorporate special values such as the Chinese Dream and traditional culture, and underscored cooperation among schools, families, and society. School Party organizations take a leading role in moral education, with the goal of offering students firsthand experience of socialist core values (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2017a). In the same year, the “Beijing Primary and Secondary School Moral Education Work Area School Trip” was launched, in which educational leaders, teaching rep-

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<sup>51</sup> Contrary to the national understanding of urban and rural areas, rural areas in Beijing mostly refer to the distant suburbs and counties outside the six urban districts (Xicheng, Dongcheng, Chaoyang, Haidian, Shijingshan, Fengtai).

<sup>52</sup> own translation

<sup>53</sup> Mai et al. (2020) conducted a study on the development of moral education during the 13th Five-Year Plan period in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Beijing formulated the *Education Reform and Development Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period (2016-2020)* to guide education reform, emphasizing comprehensive quality education and improving students' literacy. The study proposes strengthening the practice of socialist core values among primary and middle school students and improving ideological and political education in universities. To promote students' all-round development, Beijing is focusing on major projects such as socialist core value guidance and improving school sports, as well as building schools with excellent traditional Chinese cultural characteristics.

representatives, and school cadres visited schools to discuss the teaching of socialist values and moral education. Subsequently, in 2017, the Municipal Education Commission released the *Three-Year Action Plan for Beijing Primary and Secondary School Cultivation Education*, which focuses on students' ideals, habits, and all-round development, integrating core values and traditional virtues for their healthy growth. In addition, initiatives such as the *Action Plan for the Reform of Ideological and Political Theory Courses* and the *Guidelines for the Construction of the Integrated Moral Education System* underscore the commitment to strengthening moral education and cultivating well-rounded socialist individuals (Ministry of Education, 2019b).

In 2021, the *Guiding Outline for the Integrated Moral Education System* was revised by the Beijing Education Work Committee and the Beijing Municipal Education Commission to strengthen the integration of moral education at all levels of education. As Rong et al. (2022) highlight, this system, guided by socialist core values, is integral to moral education, talent development, and national rejuvenation. The guideline enhances educational objectives, content, methodologies, and assessment, with a focus on resource integration to enhance educational quality and explore Beijing's unique attributes. Overall leadership is reinforced through coordination by the Education Work Committee and specific initiatives led by district education departments, exerting a substantial influence on education in Beijing (People's Network, 2021a).

### **Impact of the new curriculum standards in 2022**

In 2022, the Ministry of Education revised and published the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan and Standards*. The Beijing Education Commission provided a policy interpretation for the execution of the updated compulsory education curriculum in Beijing, underscoring its focus on goal orientation, problem orientation, and innovation orientation. Beijing is positioned as the "four centers"<sup>54</sup>, and therefore needs to simultaneously adhere to the development of "five education", develop quality education, and promote the continuous deepening of the internet and basic education reform. To successfully put into action the updated compulsory education curriculum standards, Beijing prioritizes comprehensive planning, district-level management, and school-specific execution. Strict monitoring and oversight are in place to ensure the students' healthy development and adherence to the demands of the new era. The implementation measures took place in the fall school years of 2022 and 2023 (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2022a). In 2022, Beijing introduced the "three linkages" concept to improve ideological and political courses. These include the "urban linkage" for coordinated course construction, the "knowledge-action linkage" that emphasizes theory and practice, and the "time-space linkage" for online collective lesson preparation that benefits teachers throughout the community. (Ministry of Education, 2022c). In 2023, Beijing implemented the *Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Strengthening Ideological and Political Courses in Primary and Secondary Schools*, which focuses on key courses, teaching reform, and organization. It prioritizes the Party's leadership and innovative theory in education,

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<sup>54</sup>In 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping inspected Beijing and proposed the four centers, namely the national political center, the cultural center, the international exchange center, and the technological innovation center.

adheres to national curriculum standards, and emphasizes diverse educational resources and teachers' qualifications for an effective educational atmosphere (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2023).

### **General statistics of Beijing's education development**

The *Beijing Statistical Yearbook*<sup>55</sup> offers an annual analysis of Beijing's economic and social growth, encompassing topics like population, employment, living conditions, and education, among others. While some data dates back to 1978, the majority of the information is accessible from 1990 onwards. The provided statistics cover four decades, spanning from 1991 to 2020.<sup>56</sup> For a more comprehensive view of educational progress in each district, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission provides up-to-date data from 2015 to the present, focusing on the 16 districts in Beijing. Beijing's school enrollment rate has been close to 100% since 2012, and the total number of students has significantly increased in the past decade (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This research took place in one of the districts with higher educational resources and one district that is more suburban. While the data may lack of any detailed informations about school settings, resource allocation and level of quality, they do offer insights into the density of schools in various districts. Furthermore, when analyzing academic achievements in different districts, it becomes apparent that a consistently high level of effort is invested across all districts, irrespective of whether they are predominantly located in urban or suburban areas.

Table 1 provides data on the number of schools in Beijing from 1991 to 2020. The number of schools is defined as the "total number of various schools (unit)" and can be further divided into different education sectors. The focus is on compulsory education, but higher education schools are also included. Secondary education includes various types of schools, such as vocational and specialized schools, with regular secondary schools consisting of regular junior and senior high schools. The number of schools in Beijing has decreased significantly over time, possibly due to restructuring and mergers of smaller institutions. However, the number of colleges has increased, reflecting the focus on developing high-quality educational institutions.<sup>57</sup> The total number of schools in Beijing has more than halved since 1991. In 2020, secondary schools decreased to almost half of the 1991 amount, while regular secondary schools increased slightly. Similarly, the number of primary schools in 2020 fell to nearly one-third of the 1991 level.

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<sup>55</sup>Henze (1992) provides insight into how to view education statistics in China, as they often suffer from a lack of clear definitions or variables included in the data.

<sup>56</sup>This statistical review examines the evolution of education in Beijing Municipality in recent decades, with particular emphasis on primary and secondary compulsory education. The data for kindergartens, vocational schools, as well as other forms of education, are not included in this overview, despite their importance and alignment with the preceding overview of compulsory education in China.

<sup>57</sup>In comparison, other provinces like Shanghai and Yunnan are also experiencing a reduction in the total number of schools while there is a simultaneous increase in higher education institutions in these regions. This trend suggests a collective effort across various provinces in China to enhance the overall quality of education (Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2020; Yunnan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Tab. 1: Number of schools in Beijing in 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2020

year	total schools	higher education schools	secondary schools	regular secondary schools	primary schools
1991	8.496	67	1.168	282	3.482
2000	5.458	59	1.159	303	2.169
2010	3.330	89	779	289	1.104
2020	3.799	92	766	321	934

Source: Own representation based on the data from the Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2021, provided by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics.

Table 2 shows the number of enrolled students in Beijing from 1991 to 2020. Despite a decrease in the number of schools, the number of enrolled students nearly doubled during this period. This can be attributed to the ongoing progress in Chinese education and the reform of the basic education curriculum, which has been notably prioritized in Beijing since 2001. Compulsory education in China is a significant accomplishment, with a distinct focus on guaranteeing that every child has the chance to finish their nine-year compulsory education. The number of regular undergraduate and college students in China has seen a consistent rise. A growing number of students are opting for higher education following their completion of the nine-year compulsory education. This trend is driven not only by the desire for stable employment but also by the intensifying competition within the country. Between 1991 and 2010, the number of regular undergraduates and college students increased significantly, while the number of secondary school students remained relatively stable, peaking in 2000. However, the number of primary school students decreased until 2010, but then started to increase again until 2020.

Tab. 2: Number of enrolled students in Beijing in 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2020

year	enrolled students	regular undergraduates and college students	secondary schools	primary schools
1991	2.142.085	136.940	565.357	1.013.268
2000	2.299.433	282.585	972.930	743.109
2010	3.299.555	577.828	727.741	653.255
2020	4.038.504	590.335	563.743	995.045

Source: Own representation based on the data from the Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2021, provided by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

Table 3 shows the number of full-time teachers and the average number of students per teacher in Beijing. The rise in the quantity of teachers and the reduction in the number of students per teacher indicate the progress in Beijing's educational sector and its commitment to enhancing teaching quality through a decreased student-teacher ratio and increased teacher recruitment. The count of full-time teachers in Beijing exhibited consistent growth from 1991 to 2020, with a notably higher rate of increase between 2010 and 2020. This increase is likely

a result of initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher quality and encouraging more individuals to pursue a career in teaching. The criteria for becoming a teacher, including the possession of a bachelor’s degree, have become more rigorous, but this has also led to improved working conditions for teachers. These improvements are reflected in the student-teacher ratio. In 1991, there were an average of 10.5 general secondary school students per full-time teacher, which increased to 14.1 students in 2000, possibly due to the implementation of nine-year compulsory education nationwide.<sup>58</sup> The average number of primary students per full-time teacher decreased from 1991 to 2000, but has increased since then. The decrease in the number of primary schools and the increase in student enrollment could explain this situation, as it has led to schools needing to accommodate more students with a limited number of teachers.

Tab. 3: Number of full-time teachers in Beijing in 1991, 2000, 2010 and 2020

year	full-time teachers	general middle school	primary school
1991	168.485	10,5	18,0
2000	167.040	14,1	12,8
2010	206.602	10,2	13,2
2020	256.594	8,3	14,0

Source: Own representation based on the data from the Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2021, provided by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

**Statistics divided by districts**

The Beijing Municipality comprises 16 administrative subdivisions at the county level, distributed across urban, suburban, and rural districts. The downtown area of the capital contains a wealth of educational resources, including well-known primary and secondary schools situated in districts like Dongcheng, Xicheng, and Haidian. Parents express a strong desire to enroll their children in schools that can provide these valuable resources, regardless of the financial considerations. The allocation of government support is influenced by policies and capacity, with a focus on schools that have received early investments and have a longer history. Consequently, certain schools boast superior campus facilities, teaching resources, and well-qualified educators, while others may have more modest facilities and staff (Yin, 2020). Each district is advised to practice the national curriculum in conjunction with the actual situation. As Ma (2023) states, “the national curriculum lays the foundation, the local curriculum presents the culture, and the school-based curriculum builds the characteristics” and further a “one-level management and two-level development” mechanism is formed for the local and school-based curriculum (p. 72). For example, Dongcheng District established a school district system and developed regional curricula; Xicheng District formed a growth chain of courses and characteristic curriculum culture; Haidian District focused on the “great teaching and research” paradigm and promoted the “deep learning project” (Ma, 2023). Chaoyang CBD

<sup>58</sup>We can find the same figures for students taught by full-time teachers in Shanghai. In 1991, a full-time teacher had an average of 11 regular secondary school students, which increased to 17 students in 2000 and then decreased to 13 students in 2010 (Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, 2020).

schools emphasize quality, art, collectivization and internationalization, while Mengtougou District schools focus on an ecological landscape curriculum system (Chai and Zhong, 2021).

In recent years, each district in Beijing has worked to enhance education through initiatives such as upgrading school facilities, expanding campus spaces, fostering partnerships with universities, and enhancing the quality of schools, staff, and students. The 2020 *Beijing Education Yearbook* highlights around 45 achievements in primary schools and approximately 65 achievements in middle schools across different districts and institutions. For example, a forum in Huairou District promoted co-education between primary schools and home education. It emphasized innovation in home education at three levels: parents, classroom teachers, and schools. Parents shared insights on behavior and relationships, while teachers discussed effective parent-teacher communication. Daxing District initiated a project to improve the quality of primary education, focusing on the “Three Good” initiative: good teachers, principals and schools. More than 4,000 teachers received pedagogical training through the Good Teachers subproject, with the goal of establishing model local schools. In 2020, Fangshan District held a primary education forum. Principals explored six areas: education mode, teacher training mode, teaching mode, learning mode, home and school cooperation education mode, and management mode. They shared their thoughts on school reform in the current context. Haidian District held a forum to showcase high-quality achievements in high school education reform. Dongcheng District invested in informatization and integrated the “five education” to cultivate morality and humanity. A school in Dongcheng District signed a contract with a university to integrate rule of law and ideological education in primary and secondary schools (Beijing Education Yearbook, 2023). These examples from 2020 represent numerous achievements in all districts of Beijing.

Tables 4 and 5 provide an overview of the number of primary schools and junior and senior middle schools in Beijing in 2021 for each district. Table 4 provides an overview of the number of primary schools, classes, and staff in each of Beijing’s 16 districts in 2021. In the districts of Haidian, Dongcheng, and Xicheng, a significant number of both primary and secondary schools are located. These districts are known for their numerous educational institutions and substantial teaching staff. Among Beijing’s 16 districts, Haidian, along with Changping and Daxing, is notable for having a significant number of schools and classrooms. Haidian, in particular, boasts the highest number of teaching staff and personnel, with a considerable percentage being full-time educators. This concentration of educational resources demonstrates Haidian’s unwavering commitment to providing comprehensive support to students and schools. In contrast, rural districts in Beijing, such as Mentougou, Yanqing, and Miyun, have fewer schools, faculty members, and full-time teachers. These rural areas face unique challenges and resource limitations when compared to more urban areas like Haidian. Districts like Changping and Tongzhou, while having many schools, have a relatively lower number of classes. The levels of staff, including teaching personnel and full-time instructors, in these districts are considered average within the broader context of Beijing’s educational landscape. In Fengtai district, the second fieldsite area, there is a notable presence of schools, although they have fewer classes compared to urban districts. However, Fengtai

has a significant number of full-time teachers, which is essential for ensuring the provision of high-quality education within these classrooms. Recognizing these variations in educational resources and strategic focuses among the diverse districts of Beijing deepens our understanding of the unique educational context in the specific fieldsites of Haidian and Fengtai. This provides insights into how resources are distributed among the various schools, ultimately impacting the educational environment, teaching methods, and outcomes.

Tab. 4: Number of schools, classes and school-personnel in primary schools in 2021 divided by the districts in Beijing

district	schools	classes	faculty and staff	full-time teachers
Dongcheng	47	1.816	5.700	5.302
Xicheng	58	2.868	7.152	6.660
Chaoyang	74	5.217	7.111	6.638
Fengtai	70	1.982	4.723	4.415
Shijingshan	25	771	1.358	1.208
Haidian	89	4.977	10.000	9.139
Mentougou	21	428	1.227	1.010
Fangshan	53	1.767	3.870	3.514
Tongzhou	81	2.044	4.881	4.577
Shunyi	51	1.584	3.934	3.323
Changping	91	1.988	4.075	3.677
Daxing	80	2.170	3.965	3.551
Huairou	18	532	1.588	1.309
Pinggu	29	678	2.207	1.863
Miyun	26	682	2.033	1.673
Yangqing	24	474	1.445	1.154
together	837	29.977	65.269	59.013

Source: Own representation based on the data of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission for the academic year 2021-2022

Table 5 provides a similar outlook as the table above, but for junior and senior middle schools. Haidian, along with Chaoyang district, has the highest concentration of educational facilities, featuring a substantial faculty and staff, as well as a significant number of full-time teachers. Notably, Haidian surpasses other districts in terms of full-time teachers, underscoring its commitment to maintaining a robust educational workforce crucial for delivering quality education to junior and senior middle school students. Conversely, regions like Mentougou, Huairou, and Pinggu have fewer junior and senior middle schools, reflecting distinct educational priorities and demands in those areas. In Fengtai district, a balanced distribution of schools and full-time staff is observed, indicating a fair allocation of educational resources. This suggests that Fengtai not only has a favorable concentration of educational institutions but also provides commendable support to its educational initiatives through adequate teach-



ing staff provision.

Tab. 5: Number of schools, classes and school-personnel in junior and senior middle schools in 2021 divided by the districts in Beijing

district	schools	junior classes	senior classes	faculty and stuff	full-time teachers
Dongcheng	39	789	518	6.718	5.851
Xicheng	42	1.031	676	8.351	6.739
Chaoyang	96	1.772	532	15.605	13.303
Fengtai	46	666	305	5.765	4.929
Shijingshan	22	288	139	2.967	2.342
Haidian	87	2.181	1.362	18.023	13.695
Mentougou	17	166	86	1.327	1.019
Fangshan	50	596	253	4.535	3.746
Tongzhou	46	639	266	5.327	4.270
Shunyi	34	530	260	5.534	4.007
Changping	58	614	197	6.762	5.050
Daxing	49	649	271	6.286	5.088
Huairou	19	268	111	2.399	1.791
Pinggu	19	222	123	2.666	1.700
Miyun	24	315	164	2.497	1.996
Yangqing	19	199	107	1.921	1.277
together	667	10.925	5.370	96.583	76.803

Source: Own representation based on the data of the Beijing Municipal Education Commission for the academic year 2021-2022

Beijing's various initiatives and forums aimed at enhancing comprehensive learning environments align with the objectives of educational advancement and empowerment. Statistical data illustrating improvements in teaching quality, learning methodologies, and collaboration between parents and teachers at the grassroots level provide tangible evidence of the favorable results of these efforts. While obstacles persist, Beijing's holistic strategy stands as a significant illustration of educational progress, contributing to a broader comprehension of educational developments within the Chinese educational context.

### 3.2.3 Development of the curriculum standards

Analyzing the compulsory education curriculum standards, specifically the transition from three distinct subjects to a unified subject named *Morality and the Rule of Law* in 2022, is crucial for understanding the content of moral education courses. These examinations provide valuable insights into the relationship between moral education and the prevailing ideological framework. By presenting an analysis of the three separate topics and their convergence, the objective is to reveal notable modifications in terms of content and structure that contribute to the direction of moral education in contemporary times. Nonetheless, it is important to

acknowledge that moral education is merely one aspect of shaping students' ethics, principles, and behavior. The wider educational and socializing practices, both in and out of the school environment, significantly influence their development.

### **Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards 2011**

China launched the reform of the basic education curriculum in 2001 with the aim of aligning it with Chinese characteristics and modern ideals to establish a foundation for high-quality education. Approximately a decade later, it was acknowledged that some curriculum standards required modifications and adjustments to comply with the *Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)*. These updated curriculum standards were put into practice in Autumn 2012, emphasizing study and training undertakings, teaching reformation, evaluation system reformation, curriculum resource development, and organizational leadership (Ministry of Education, 2011d).

#### **(1) Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Character and Life**

In grades one and two, primary school students have limited subjects, one of them is Character and Life, *pinde yu shenghuo* (品德与生活).<sup>59</sup> Primary school plays a significant role in nurturing children's moral character, behavioral habits, life attitudes, and cognitive development. The *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Character and Life* states that "good moral character is the foundation of a sound personality and the core of civic quality" (Ministry of Education, 2011a).<sup>60</sup> This course embraces four key characteristics: it focuses on children's real-life experiences, promoting a practical and engaging learning approach; it incorporates mobility and thematic activities, encouraging lively exploration and connections across disciplines; it merges subject education with self-education, enabling students to take an active role in their learning journey; and the course is flexible, adapting its objectives according to the changing requirements of students. At its core, this approach centers on children's lives and values, emphasizing moral education integrated into everyday experiences. It introduces three main themes: children and self, children and society, and children and nature. These themes encompass topics like healthy living, happiness, responsibility, and environmental awareness, fostering a well-rounded education that prepares students for life's challenges.

During the initial stages of education, it is important to cultivate moral character and positive behaviors in children. This initial stage provides an opportunity to introduce values like patriotism, respect for others, a strong commitment to hard work, an appreciation for science, and an understanding of social principles like socialism. In grades one and two, children receive a well-rounded education in four key areas: emotions and attitude (such as love, respect, and imagination), behaviors and habits (including hygiene and good citizenship), knowledge and skills (such as basic life skills and social interactions), and process and methodology (in-

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<sup>59</sup>For additional reading on moral autonomy, Lee and Misco (2016) did an empirical analysis of the content of the curriculum standards for grades one and two and compared the theoretical outline with the practicality of achieving moral autonomy as stated in the curriculum standards.

<sup>60</sup>own translation

cluding learning experiences and problem-solving). Teachers should thoughtfully adapt their approach based on the course's nature and the unique characteristics of primary school students. They play the roles of educators, supporters, and guides, establishing an environment conducive to children's life exploration. It is essential for teachers to comprehend the individual needs and development stages of each child, as well as the family and community backgrounds they originate from. Encouraging active participation among students assists them in shaping their early life perspectives. Teachers should also motivate students to engage in activities related to the course's themes. Textbooks are valuable resources for teachers, helping them to adapt to the characteristics of the curriculum and to guide classroom objectives, rather than being rigid teaching methods (Ministry of Education, 2011a).

## (2) Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Morality and Society

From grades three to six, students study Morality and Society, *pinde yu shehui* (品德与社会). The curriculum suggests adaptable activities for each class content, allowing teachers to fully implement the educational goals. The *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Morality and Society* highlights the importance of familiarizing students with social life to develop their moral awareness, judgment, and behavior. Rooted in socialist core values, the course aims to meet students' physical and mental needs through active learning and understanding of social dynamics. It seeks to enhance moral judgment and prepare students for active participation in society. The course has three key characteristics: it is comprehensive, reflecting social life; practical, focusing on real-life problem solving; and open, adaptable to social changes and students' development needs. The course focuses on cultivating students' moral character based on their daily lives. It extends beyond the classroom to involve schools, families, and communities. The goal is to make moral education more effective by adapting it to students' development and local conditions. Teachers use real-life examples to foster problem-solving skills and moral growth. The curriculum emphasizes the role of the social environment, activities, and relationships in nurturing responsible citizens with love, responsibility, and positive behavioral habits.

Students are taught in three areas: emotions, attitudes and values (including cherishing life, respecting others, and loving the homeland), skills and methods (such as good habits, expressing feelings, and problem solving), and knowledge (including moral norms, historical and geographical knowledge, and world events). This comprehensive approach aims to produce well-rounded students equipped with a strong moral compass and a diverse set of skills. The curriculum is organized around six main themes, each with specific subtopics that are tailored to achieve educational objectives. Unlike grades one and two, it now includes suggested activities, offering flexibility for regional and student-specific adaptation. These activities are designed to engage students actively, encouraging them to experience, explore, share, and discuss. Teachers have the flexibility to choose or create various activities in line with specific objectives and content. The curriculum also distinguishes between middle and high levels and adjusts content accordingly, ensuring that it aligns with students' developmental stages. The six main themes are: my healthy growth, my family life, our school life,

our community life, our country, and our common world. Each theme's sub-topics provide age-appropriate knowledge and skills, blending factual and practical information to achieve educational goals. Teachers are encouraged to follow these guidelines to shape students' behaviors, foster enriching experiences, and instill moral character across a range of life situations (Ministry of Education, 2011b).

### (3) Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Ideology and Character

From grades seven to nine, students study Ideology and Character, *sixiang pinde* (思想品德). The Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of morality as a symbol of the progress of human civilization in the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Ideology and Character*. With China's development in a new historical phase, junior middle school students need guidance to form a strong moral character. The curriculum is student-centered, aimed at fostering their ideological and moral development to establish a solid foundation for healthy growth. This approach recognizes the vital role of schools in shaping responsible and moral citizens, contributing to China's ongoing development. The course is characterized by four main aspects: ideological content (socialist core values, love for the motherland, people, labor, science and socialism), humanity content (national spirit, culture and social responsibility), practical content (correct concepts and good moral character) and comprehensive content (emotions, knowledge and skills). The course is designed to lay a solid foundation for students, aspiring to shape them into idealistic, moral, educated, and disciplined socialist citizens. It seeks to enhance their moral integrity, legal awareness, and sense of social responsibility. To achieve these goals, students are guided in three key areas: emotions, attitudes and values, knowledge, and skills. Students are encouraged to develop a deep appreciation for life and a strong identification with Chinese culture. They are expected to inherit revolutionary traditions and carry forward the national spirit. Respect for their parents, a commitment to respecting others, and care for the environment are paramount. Furthermore, the first area aims to foster self-confidence, an understanding of the rule of law, love for the motherland and socialism, as well as a solid grasp of China's national conditions and history. In the second area, students are encouraged to develop observation, communication, and reflection skills. They are urged to actively participate in social life, contribute to environmental protection, and adhere to laws and regulations. This skill-based approach aims to equip students with the tools they need to be effective, responsible citizens. In the third area, students are expected to understand the intricate interplay between human survival and the environment, the significance of maintaining their own health, and the dynamics of their relationships with others and society at large. Additionally, they are required to possess knowledge about China's national conditions and history.

The curriculum is structured around three main themes, each further supported by subtopics designed to guide teachers. It offers flexibility, allowing activities to be adapted to the unique needs of schools and students. These three main themes provide a progressive journey, moving from individual development to understanding one's place in a collective, and ultimately, within society as a whole. The main themes are: I am growing up, my relationship with others

and the collective, and my relationship with the state and society. The first theme focuses on self-discovery and personal growth, including psychological adjustment, emotional regulation, and self-control development. Students participate in activities to overcome challenges, nurture positive character traits, and develop self-respect, self-worth, and responsibility. Activities include group discussions on emotional control and life's purpose, real-world child protection examples, and keeping a "youth diary" for self-reflection. The second theme highlights interpersonal relationships, covering communication etiquette, interpersonal skills, and cooperation. Students learn to respect, care for, and understand others and their community. They explore civic engagement principles, rights, and responsibilities. Activities include sharing communication problem-solving experiences, teacher interviews for insights, and discussions on equality and integrity. Real cases related to individual rights and child protection are also studied. The third theme promotes societal awareness, urging students to adapt to societal changes, understand the national context, and appreciate legality. It covers patriotism, responsible Internet use, China's achievements, loyalty to the Communist Party, and the vision of a well-rounded, prosperous society. Students learn about national pride, social responsibility, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. Activities include discussions on Internet usage, the rule of law, environmental issues, and events related to safeguarding the country. The curriculum aligns with the Party's education policy, guided by socialist values, and encourages independent learning, aiming to shape informed, responsible citizens (Ministry of Education, 2011c).

## **Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Morality and the Rule of Law**

**2022**

In the autumn of 2022, the Ministry of Education introduced a revised curriculum designed to promote the holistic development of students, aligning with the principles outlined in the Party's ideology and education policies. This updated curriculum for compulsory education comprises sixteen standards that place a strong emphasis on the guiding thinking, revision principles, and notable changes aimed at deepening curriculum reform. While the standards established in 2011 already had a positive impact on educational quality, the focus has now shifted from merely *having a school* to ensuring students *study well*.<sup>61</sup> It is still necessary to clarify "what kind of people to cultivate, how to cultivate people, and for whom to cultivate people"<sup>62</sup> and how to optimize the blueprint for school education. Adapting to the change of technology and societal changes, the continuous enhancement of the compulsory education system remains a priority. The new curriculum aligns with General Secretary Xi Jinping's vision of socialism with Chinese characteristics, emphasizing moral education, the pursuit of high-quality learning, and a student-centered approach. Schools are expected to encompass moral, intellectual, physical, labor, and aesthetic education, with the overarching goal of nur-

<sup>61</sup>The curriculum standards call this *you xue shang* (有学上) and *shang hao xue* (上好学) (Ministry of Education, 2022a), which literally translates to having a school and studying well.

<sup>62</sup>This approach was previously discussed in this chapter during General Secretary Xi Jinping's speech at the symposium for teachers of ideological and political theory courses. As a result, it has been integrated into the newly revised curriculum standards to meet the needs of education development in the current era.

turing capable contributors to socialist society. The curriculum revision draws inspiration from both successful Chinese practices and global educational concepts, while respecting the individuality of students.

The main changes in the revised curriculum standards (2022) compared to the previous standards (2011) can be summarized in three aspects: First, the training goals are improved by focusing on ideals, skills, and responsibilities. This means not only imparting knowledge but also fostering a sense of purpose and ethical values, alongside practical skills and a commitment to social responsibility. Second, the curriculum is optimized by implementing the *double reduction policy*<sup>63</sup> and integrating subjects while keeping the total hours unchanged. This optimization aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning experience, minimizing redundant elements and promoting a more integrated and interconnected education. And third, implementation requirements have been refined by adding basic class preparation and teaching material requirements, and strengthening monitoring and supervision. This increased clarity aims to provide educators with the necessary tools to deliver a high-quality education (Ministry of Education, 2022a).<sup>64</sup> The 2022 curriculum standards provide refined content, improved academic quality, increased teacher support, and improved alignment between different school levels. In addition, there are a few visible differences between the curriculum standards of 2011 and those of 2022: (1) Merging three moral education subjects into one unified subject strengthens the connection between grades. (2) The 2022 standards replace the 2011 emotions, attitudes, knowledge, and skill goals with five core competencies that provide a consistent focus across grades. (3) The 2011 standards have major themes and related subtopics that are well aligned with textbooks and provide clear guidance. In contrast, the 2022 standards present a topic complex of content and instruction that appears less aligned with textbooks and lacks coherent guidance. (4) The 2011 standards have three levels aligned with the three curriculum standards. The 2022 standards introduce four levels: grades one to two, three to four, five to six, and seven to nine<sup>65</sup>, and further emphasize guidelines for assessment, teacher training, and instructional research to improve teacher quality (Ministry of Education, 2022b).

The 2022 curriculum standards aim to improve citizens' moral and legal understanding for social progress. They prioritize the development of students' political consciousness, moral values, and legal knowledge in alignment with the requirements of society. These standards are guided by principles from Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping's Theory, and the Three Represents. Additionally, they underscore students' life experiences and communication skills, with particular attention to nurturing the concept of the "growing self" (Ministry of Education, 2022b). The course follows a consistent structure, covering

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<sup>63</sup>The double reduction policy is an educational policy that aims to reduce the academic burden that students experience. It should improve the mental health of students, but also reduce the amount of time students spend in tutoring (Ministry of Education, 2021a).

<sup>64</sup>Shi and Wang (2021) identify four key aspects of the changes in the new curriculum standards: interconnected content, a focus on politics and contemporary issues, integrated design, and practical teaching guidance.

<sup>65</sup>The curriculum is structured according to the 6:3 educational principle (six years of primary school and three years of junior high school), with minor adjustments when using the 5:4 principle (five years of primary school and four years of junior high school); the division changes into grades one to two, grades three to five, grades six to seven, and grades seven to nine.

interpersonal and social dynamics from primary school through nine years of compulsory education. It uses thematic learning that resonates with students' daily experiences, merging the subject's logic with the logic of real life. The emphasis is on fundamental skills and helping students grasp moral and legal principles by incorporating content directly relevant to real-life situations.<sup>66</sup> Teachers play a central role in shaping students' values and subject understanding, and the assessment methods encompass self-evaluation, teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, parent feedback, and community input (Ministry of Education, 2022b). The curriculum standards outline five core competencies that students should achieve after nine years of compulsory education. These core competencies include political identity, moral cultivation, concept of the rule of law, sound personality, and sense of responsibility. The argument is as follows:

Political identity is the ideological requirement for socialist builders and successors; moral cultivation is the basis for establishing oneself as an adult; the concept of the rule of law is the guide for conduct; a sound personality is the basis for physical and mental development; and a sense of responsibility is an essential requirement for newcomers in the era of national rejuvenation (Ministry of Education, 2022b).<sup>67</sup>

The initial core competency, political identity, reflects the political direction and value orientation that a student ought to acquire through education. Moral cultivation aims to internalize moral norms and demonstrate them through actions. The concept of the rule of law entails comprehension of the Chinese Constitution and the rights and responsibilities of citizens, along with the determination to adhere to them. Sound personality entails traits like self-awareness, positive mentality, a healthy perspective on life, self-esteem, sociability, genuineness, and adaptability to social settings. Lastly, the sense of responsibility encompasses taking ownership, caring for oneself and others, demonstrating a responsible attitude, and taking a disciplined part in society and activities (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 5-8).

In their first and second years of school, students learn about China's national identity, basic moral conduct, and social behavior. The curriculum is multifaceted, encompassing exploration of their culture, nationality, and political institutions. Key topics include healthy living, respect for parents, understanding school procedures, environmental conservation, and basic safety measures. During this phase, students not only acquire practical life skills but also develop the ability to appreciate life, express their emotions, and seek assistance when needed. These activities empower them to become more self-reliant and engaged in school life. Furthermore, students are introduced to the concept of the Chinese nation as a united family, and they cultivate values, ethics, and legal principles relevant to this notion. The curriculum is structured into five categories: entrance education, moral education, life safety and health education, rule of law education, excellent traditional Chinese culture, and revolutionary traditional education. By the time students reach the second grade, the overarching goal

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<sup>66</sup>Chapter five will delve into a detailed analysis of the textbook in order to better comprehend the concepts outlined in the curriculum. The analysis will examine the textbook's practicality and relevance through the use of illustrative examples.

<sup>67</sup>own translation

for them is to understand the national context, work collaboratively for the common good, and foster a sense of patriotism. Consequently, they become more independent, emotionally mature, and act responsibly. Classroom activities include discussions on communication skills, journal writing, movies to depict consequences, role-playing for empathy, and outdoor activities (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 17-22).

In the third and fourth grades, students find themselves in a transitional period. It is a phase where they adapt to school life while also gaining independence. During this critical period, the curriculum aims to instill in them a deep understanding of what it means to be responsible Chinese citizens. They are encouraged to take pride in their cultural and national identity, practice socialist core values, and recognize the significance of the Communist Party of China. Moreover, students are taught essential life skills, such as communication etiquette and an appreciation for the support they receive from society. They also develop a sense of responsibility and concern for public health and community facilities. This educational stage guides students towards a comprehension of established protocols and social standards, teaching them to conform to these norms. As students mature, they enhance their emotional regulation skills, patience, and empathy towards others. They actively participate in household chores and begin to shoulder family responsibilities. The course comprises five themes that align with the content taught in primary school's initial stage. However, it replaces entrance education with national condition education. By the end of this stage, students are expected to not only understand but also apply moral norms and laws in their daily lives. Additionally, they should acquire a deeper understanding of China's accomplishments, appreciate its culture, and demonstrate socialist values. Further, students are encouraged to bolster their sense of national identity, embrace the Communist Party of China, and embrace socialism with Chinese characteristics. Teaching methods include activities like observing parents' hard work, role-playing etiquette, cooperative activities, and group discussions (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 22-27).

In the fifth and sixth grades, students reach the culmination of their primary education. By this point, they possess a broader perspective on life and exhibit improved moral reasoning. The curriculum is designed to further deepen their understanding of national circumstances, their role in safeguarding national interests, and the importance of showing respect for their motherland. At this stage, it is crucial for students to strengthen their sense of identity with the Chinese nation, delve into the history of the Communist Party of China, appreciate traditional culture, and integrate socialist core values into their daily lives and social interactions. Moreover, students are encouraged to develop respect for public institutions and adhere to the principles of public order. They should grasp the concepts of the rule of law, citizenship rights, and their accompanying responsibilities. This includes holding themselves accountable for their actions and decisions. As students progress, they enhance their self-regulation and resilience, and actively participate in community service and volunteer activities to foster teamwork and a sense of responsibility. The curriculum is structured around five core themes, similar to the third and fourth-grade stages. By the end of this stage, students are expected to possess a fundamental comprehension of China's history, national spirit, and the pivotal role



of the Communist Party of China. This knowledge is intended to be applied practically, enriching their daily lives and interactions within society. Fostering moral development among young people enhances their sense of connection to both China and the nation, and fuels their commitment to contributing to the nation's revival in this new era. To achieve these objectives, a range of activities is recommended. These include collecting role models, participating in group sports competitions, engaging in sustained communication with parents, and facilitating follow-up discussions with classmates (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 27-33).

Grades seven through nine mark a significant transition as students enter middle school. This phase is pivotal in their character development, the establishment of their worldview, and the formation of their values. It is a period characterized by increased critical thinking, the development of judgment, and the fluctuations of mood typical of adolescence. In middle school, this course takes on a distinct focus, with a strong emphasis on social perspectives. The curriculum reflects a shift, with political theory gaining prominence, replacing the previous focus on morality with an increased emphasis on revolutionary traditional education. By the end of this stage of compulsory education, students are expected to possess a profound understanding of and admiration for socialism with Chinese characteristics and the leadership of the Communist Party of China. They should strongly identify themselves with the Chinese national community, the motherland, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. Students are equipped with a sound knowledge of the significant institutions and the fundamental political and economic systems of China. Moreover, they develop a well-rounded life perspective, moral values, and codes of behavior that enable them to actively participate in social life while showing respect for others and adhering to the rule of law. They develop a positive perspective towards life and willingly accept challenges with a firm sense of duty. Ultimately, they are well-positioned to make significant contributions to society. To achieve this, recommended teaching methods involve exploring the historical development, introducing the spirit of reform and opening-up, and examining the philosophy and family values that are fundamental to China's culture (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 34-42).

The 2022 Curriculum Standards introduce academic qualities to evaluate and enhance teaching materials, ensuring alignment with students' diverse academic levels. These criteria center around core competencies and course materials. Teachers, under policy guidance, are encouraged to actively pursue professional growth. The curriculum standards emphasize improvements in teaching methods, evaluation techniques, and teacher training programs to enhance the quality of education. Teachers play a pivotal role in students' development, and appropriate policies and values should guide their actions. Teachers are encouraged to combine practical and theoretical innovations in their classrooms, promoting independent, constructive thinking. Curriculum designs should offer diverse teaching approaches to match local contexts and student needs, bridging the gap between knowledge and practical application for a richer educational experience. The evaluation process should concentrate on assessing ideals, patriotism, responsibility, morality, and legal comprehension while promoting socialist core values, traditions, individuality, and unique personal growth.

### 3.3 Development of teaching materials and teacher training in China

The ongoing reforms and societal shifts in China have resulted in dynamic changes to teaching materials<sup>68</sup> and teacher training programs.<sup>69</sup> This change is crucial for effectively integrating moral education into the curriculum. It highlights the challenges educators face in aligning teaching materials with training requirements while maintaining educational excellence. These challenges underscore the complex interplay between moral education, citizenship, and ideological constructions in the Chinese educational setting. Consequently, they provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that aligning moral education with students' personal perspectives amidst the broader ideological framework presents significant obstacles.

#### 3.3.1 Advancements in the development of educational materials

In 2001, the Ministry of Education issued the *Experimental Plan for Compulsory Education Curriculum* together with the *Catalog of Standard Experimental Textbooks* to respond to changing societal demands and ensure the efficient implementation of the compulsory education curriculum. This catalog contains authorized experimental textbooks and thus requires careful guidance and supervision by local education authorities because of its restricted, policy-oriented selection (Ministry of Education, 2001e). Annually, the Ministry of Education issues a revised edition of the textbook catalog for primary and secondary schools. The *National Textbook Catalog for Primary and Secondary Schools* serves as a critical resource for educators nationwide and aids in creating a standardized learning experience for all students. This list includes various subjects and undergoes regular review and revision in alignment with guidelines from the Ministry of Education. Any noncompliant books are removed, and new additions are made to ensure consistency and effective management. Additionally, provinces and regions are encouraged to create their own catalogs in accordance with the national list, promoting diversity and allowing for the addition of supplementary educational materials (Ministry of Education, 2002).

#### Textbook management measures

In 2011, China initiated a curriculum reform for primary education, which comprised revisions and approvals of textbooks, ongoing adjustments, and adherence to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. Three years later, the *Interim Measures for the Management of the Selection and Management of Primary and Secondary School Textbooks* were introduced to

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<sup>68</sup>As pointed out by Baranovitch (2010), textbooks in the PRC undergo careful planning involving influential editors associated with publishing houses that serve as conduits for CPC propaganda.

<sup>69</sup>As Guo (2001) mentions, teaching activities are important to consciously promote the socialization of students and to promote the teacher-student relationship. Teaching research should take teaching activities as the starting point to avoid the connotation of "teaching theory". By revealing the richness of teaching activities, the conscious promotion of students' socialization will be achieved.

standardize the selection process, improve teaching quality, and address local educational requirements. The approval of materials is overseen by the Department of Education of the State Council. Provincial education departments establish expert committees responsible for managing regional textbook selection to ensure adaptability, diversity, fairness, and organization. Approved resources are published for the entire academic year. This committee-based approach to textbook management has evolved over the past decade to ensure equitable access to high-quality educational resources and alignment with curriculum standards to support students' development (Ministry of Education, 2014).

In 2016, China combined the previous used textbooks into one course of *Morality and the Rule of Law*. This move was in line with the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee. To guarantee consistent use of the textbook, strict regulations were put in place with provincial education departments tasked with enforcing adherence (Ministry of Education, 2016a). This unified course in moral education and the 2019 catalog of teaching materials have made it mandatory for primary and secondary schools nationwide to adopt the *Morality and Rule of Law*, language, and history textbooks from 2019 onwards. The Ministry of Education has highlighted the significance of these textbooks in promoting socialist values and cultivating individual character. The primary school textbooks aim to establish a connection with students' lives and interests. They focus on socialist core values, Chinese culture, and morality, as well as encourage a blend of learning and critical thinking. Secondary school textbooks follow a similar approach, aligning with primary school content. They also consider students' development, real-life experiences, and practical scenarios for better understanding (Ministry of Education, 2016b).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education published the *Introduction to Compulsory Education Morality and the Rule of Law Teaching Materials*, which provide guidance for the newly unified *Morality and the Rule of Law* textbooks. The textbooks integrate ten years of achievements from moral education reforms and are guided by Marxist principles. The textbooks aim to cultivate socialist citizens with values, ideals, and discipline, focusing on individuals, families, schools, society, the country, and the world (Ministry of Education, 2017b). The unified version of the *Morality and Rule of Law* course was launched in 2019 after undergoing review and approval in 2018. Each grade has a single version. In 2021, three additional reader books titled *Xi Jinping's Socialist Thought with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era* were included in the primary and secondary school teaching materials catalog. These books draw attention on the importance of Xi Jinping's speeches and the characteristics of the new era, intended for third, fifth, and eighth-grade students (Ministry of Education, 2021b). In 2019, the Ministry of Education replaced the 2014 regulations with the *Measures for the Management of Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools*. These revised regulations align educational materials with the views of the Party Central Committee and State Council, placing great emphasis on Party leadership and the power of the state. The measures adhere to the national curriculum program and the Party's education policy, which highlights the guiding role of Marxism and promotes socialist core values across all subjects. The advancement of morality and humanity ranks as a significant objective in education. Policy regulation and established

guidance on textbook planning is predominantly managed by a responsible committee at the national, local, and school level, where the regional curriculum should conform to the nationwide curriculum. The reforms introduced in 2019 anticipate changes in the curriculum for 2022. Article 10 states that

Guided by Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of the Three Represents, the scientific outlook on development and Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, organically integrate the excellent traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary traditions, awareness of the rule of law, national security, ethnic unity and ecological civilization education, strive to build conceptual categories, theoretical paradigms and discourse systems with Chinese characteristics and integrate China and foreign countries, guard against the influence of erroneous political views and ideological trends, and guide students to form a correct world view, outlook on life and values, strive to become the socialist builder and successor of the all-round development of morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetic and labor (Ministry of Education, 2019a).<sup>70</sup>

The 2019 measures prioritize students' overall development, core competencies, and the relationship between thinking, learning, and the real world. Textbooks incorporate knowledge, skills, emotions, and values. The State Administration Department supervises textbook production, while other materials need approval from qualified units and the Party, with chief editors providing oversight. Regular revisions are crucial. Expert panels review national and regional curriculum materials, while provincial education departments oversee regional textbook selection (Ministry of Education, 2019a). In 2019, the National Textbook Committee released the *National Plan for the Construction of Textbooks for Universities, Secondary Schools and Primary Schools for 2019-2022* aimed at enhancing Party leadership, improving textbook production standards, and elevating teaching material quality by 2022. This plan aligns with socialist development in China to support education. This plan is the first of its kind since the founding of new China, and serves as a blueprint for constructing textbooks in the new era. It outlines five essential tasks, with a focus on improving systems, implementing General Secretary Xi Jinping's socialism with Chinese characteristics, and improving teaching materials for basic education, vocational education, and higher education, with a focus on enhancing the purpose of education. To accomplish these objectives, curriculum textbooks will be systematically designed, incorporating ideological and political teaching materials, and other materials will be revised as needed. The primary goal is to standardize structure, ensuring a fair presentation of subjects throughout production.

The national plan emphasizes the significance of enhancing traditional culture, revolutionary traditions, socialist core values, and national security awareness in education. These concepts are already present in teaching materials, but a need for improved structure exists. The Ministry of Education aims to institutionalize and systematize theme education integration

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<sup>70</sup>own translation

into all curricula for comprehensive education and departmental unification. The plan places priority on supplying quality teaching materials for all levels, with an emphasis on improved production. It incorporates evaluation mechanisms and standards for ensuring textbook quality, with a focus on primary and secondary school materials. Success hinges on high-quality teacher training in addition to the formation of capable textbook production teams (Ministry of Education, 2020c). These measures and the national infrastructure plan are crucial in improving the quality of education in China, aligning with General Secretary Xi Jinping's vision of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Nonetheless, challenges still exist, primarily the need for well-defined responsibilities, comprehensive planning, and incorporation of innovative concepts into educational materials, with a focus on value-based and knowledge-based education (Ministry of Education, 2020b). These measures address shortcomings and recognize China's educational advancements in the modern era.

### **Textbook management measures in Beijing**

In China, educational materials for primary and secondary schools are chosen from a national catalog. However, Beijing Municipality has implemented its own experimental catalog for educational reform, which is carefully aligned with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. To promote nationwide consistency, in 2004, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission issued guidelines to standardize textbook selection for schools. This initiative reduces academic and financial burdens for both students and parents while guaranteeing consistent curricula and teaching quality across districts, counties, and schools. To avoid unapproved materials, schools should only choose teaching materials approved by the Municipal Education Commission. Selection of textbooks rests with district and county education commission directors as well as school principals (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2004).

The *Beijing Academy of Education and Sciences Curriculum and Textbook Research Center* is responsible for overseeing textbook selection in districts and counties on behalf of the Municipal Education Commission. Following a review process, local teaching materials may be added to the catalog. To support the professional development of teachers, schools are advised to offer a variety of teaching materials in their libraries. To ensure an equitable and democratic process for selecting textbooks, the Municipal Education Commission proposes the formation of textbook selection committees in each district and county that involve different stakeholders and follow standardized procedures. These committees offer professional evaluations of teaching materials (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2004). The selection process for textbooks comprises of four stages: subject groups compare textbooks, the selection committee discusses and votes on opinions, selections undergo review and coordination across districts, and the Municipal Education Commission publishes the approved results. These steps adhere to the 2014 national policies and prioritize socialist core values, appropriateness, diversity, fairness, and standardization. These procedures are detailed in the 2017 proposed *Implementation Rules for the Selection and Management of Primary and Secondary School Textbooks in Beijing (Provisional)*, which consistently mirrors General Secretary

Xi Jinping's views on socialism with Chinese characteristics. These guidelines are applicable to textbooks for compulsory education, ordinary high schools, and supplementary teaching materials such as brochures and audio-visual materials (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2017c).

In 2022, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission published the *Guidelines for the Development of Local Curriculum Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools in Beijing*. These guidelines, consisting of four chapters, outline general requirements, development direction, management system, and guarantee conditions, providing a roadmap for strengthening textbook management and selection in Beijing. The development direction focuses on localizing the national curriculum, promoting regional culture with Beijing characteristics, and enhancing literacy, science, and technology. The management system for selecting textbooks will be continuously improved, emphasizing organizational leadership, inspection, supervision, and confidence. The goal is to meet the needs of intellectual talents, nurture core competencies, introduce high-quality local teaching materials, and align with China's educational direction (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2022b).

### **3.3.2 Advancements in the development of teacher training**

Decentralization in education over the recent decades has increased school and teacher autonomy. This has enabled teachers to participate in curriculum development and innovate strategies, giving them the power to shape moral education within a specified ideological frame. The transformation in teacher roles extends beyond knowledge transmission to the development of well-rounded individuals capable of making informed decisions, underscoring the potential limitation of didactic guidelines in fully reflecting students' real-life experiences. With greater flexibility, teachers seem to be able to adapt moral education to bridge the gap between curriculum guidelines and students' realities. Curriculum reforms require continuous professional development and must avoid constraining teachers' flexibility with rigid normative directives. By offering teachers the necessary support and training, China can navigate these complexities and create a dynamic educational landscape that aligns moral education with the prevailing ideological framework and ensures that students are well-prepared for the future.

#### **General goals of teacher training**

Since the 2001 curriculum reform, various activities have sought to enhance teachers' expertise. Governments and schools have organized workshops, seminars, and other events to decentralize education. However, these measures have faced criticism for being imbalanced and insufficiently innovative, resulting in irregularities and raising questions about their effectiveness (Xu, 2022). Both the state and the Central Committee of the Party attach great importance to education and the role of teachers. According to Tang (2023), teachers are described as the "four guides" - guiding students to develop character, acquire knowledge, think innovatively, and devote themselves to the motherland. In addition, teachers are referred to as the "three disseminators" - disseminating knowledge, ideas, and truth, and as

the “three shapers” - shaping souls, lives, and new individuals. As proposed by Peng and Tang (2022), teacher training is an investment that enhances teaching and research abilities, promotes professional satisfaction, and fosters academic growth and plays a crucial role in forming a strong community of educators. The shift brought about by the opening-up policy redirected teacher education from a focus on subject knowledge to pedagogical knowledge and from theory-based approaches to a more practical orientation (Ye et al., 2019). The principle of “training before implementation and no implementation without training” received emphasis. In 2004, the Ministry of Education mandated that all teachers must complete a minimum of 60 hours of training before introducing the new curriculum in their classrooms. Continuous training became a fundamental requirement for teaching, aiming to establish a mechanism for ensuring quality. However, during the initial stages of curriculum reform, various challenges were encountered. These included abstract course content, trainers with limited relevant teaching experience, and teachers’ hesitance to embrace new ideas. Addressing these challenges demanded ongoing efforts from all parties involved to enhance the quality of education (Ye et al., 2019; Zhao, 2012). A four-step model for government-led teacher training activities was noted by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002): in-service training, shifts in knowledge and beliefs, adjustments in classroom practice, and ultimately, changes in student learning outcomes.

The teaching research system in China follows a closed-loop model, which supports communication and practical interactions between central administration and schools. This model involves activities like school visits and teacher observations, promoting curriculum reform and establishing a collaborative learning community that contributes to mutual development in educational reform. Guo and Feng (2021) conducted an empirical study on the influence of teacher training components on effectiveness, recognizing five dimensions: training objectives, mode, duration, support, and design. The study indicates that to improve effectiveness, it is essential to include practical content that considers professional growth, societal significance, and teachers’ requirements. This content should focus on addressing real-world issues, fulfilling societal demands, and deepening understanding in areas like morality and theory. Prioritizing integration and comprehensiveness encourages self-efficacy, self-reflection, and active inquiry through peer assessment activities. Peng and Tang (2022) identify two primary categories of research on teacher education models. The “top-down” approach focuses on creating ideal models based on educational theories to enhance practical training. It is anticipated that future teacher training models will emphasize practicality, building upon the traditional “three centers” (textbooks, educational theory, institution). On the other hand, the “bottom-up” approach prioritizes addressing teachers’ requirements, deriving general principles from practical cases, and enriching relevant theories. Teacher training in China encounters practical challenges that impact its effectiveness in enhancing teaching quality. For example, Xu (2022) highlights issues such as teachers’ lack of motivation, as training is often perceived as obligatory and mandated by government policies. Furthermore, there is a deficiency in institutional norms and effective communication between training organizations and agencies, leading to confusion in responsibilities and the wastage of resources. Despite teachers

expressing practical needs, training primarily focuses on theoretical aspects while neglecting their real requirements. Outdated timing and teaching methods further exacerbate these challenges, and there is a need to elevate the professional competence of trainers to enhance the quality of teacher training.

### **Teacher training management measures**

In 2010, the Ministry of Education implemented the *National Training Plan for Primary and Secondary School Teachers* to create a methodical and specialized teacher training system, consisting of five levels: national, provincial, municipal, county (district), and school-training (Peng and Tang, 2022). In accordance with the 17th CPC National Congress, the objective of the plan is to enhance the quality of teaching teams and provide support to rural teachers. It focuses on improving teacher quality, promoting balanced compulsory education development, and supporting basic education reform to raise educational standards. The Department of Education emphasizes that teacher training is primarily a local responsibility, with the national plan serving as a guide. The plan aims to foster “backbone teachers” while enhancing training resources and innovating teaching methods. It also provides national-level teacher training with local government involvement. The plan contains two primary components: demonstrating projects for primary and secondary school teachers and rural key teacher training in central and western China. Between 2010 and 2012, the program aimed to train 30,000 key teachers. Additionally, it aimed to provide distance learning training to 900,000 teachers, including 600,000 compulsory school teachers and 300,000 new high school subject teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In 2011, the Ministry of Education released two significant documents: *Opinions on Vigorously Strengthening the Training of Primary and Secondary School Teachers* and *Opinions on Vigorously Promoting the Reform of the Teacher Education Curriculum*. The former document aimed to establish a cohort of competent educators, while the latter focused on improving the quality of teacher training and enhancing curriculum reform. The Ministry of Education underscored the development of proficient and ethical teachers by conducting systematic and personalized training for each school. The objective was to provide a minimum of 360 hours of training to over 10 million teachers across the country within a five-year period, beginning in 2011. The plan entailed the provision of national-level instruction to one million primary teachers, the dispatch of 10,000 outstanding backbone teachers for overseas training and research, and assisting two million teachers in improving their academic credentials. To achieve this, several measures were implemented, such as academic exchanges, 120 hours of pre-service training for new teachers, and 360 hours of in-service training every five years. These actions intended to support teachers in adjusting to innovative education methods, updating their knowledge and skills, and improving their practical abilities (Ministry of Education, 2011e). Teacher training should draw attention on morality, duty, and teaching proficiencies, with a focus on professional ideals, ethics, and codes of behavior. Classroom teachers receive 30 hours of specialized training every five years as part of a five-year cycle for standardization and institutionalization. In 2011, the state implemented standardized



*Teacher Education Curriculum Standards* to bridge educational disparities. These standards establish criteria for teacher preparation programs across all levels, with a focus on practical knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and aligning with the evolving educational reform and development needs (Ye et al., 2019). To enhance teacher education, a well-rounded curriculum incorporating innovative concepts has been developed. This curriculum comprises 18 weeks of supervised practice and has undergone content revisions to incorporate core socialist values. It also seeks to improve resources, methodologies, training programs, collaborative teams, assessment methods, and leadership in education (Ministry of Education, 2011f).

In 2013, the Ministry of Education issued the *Guiding Opinions on Teacher Training Reform* to enhance training autonomy, teacher engagement, and individualized support. However, scholars criticized the questionnaires and interviews for their inadequate ability to capture teachers' hidden needs (e.g. Peng and Tang, 2022). The guidelines give importance to quality education, curriculum reform, and the professional development of individual teachers. The objective is to align the content with real-life situations, incorporate real cases, and place emphasis on practical training while fostering moral values. The state has implemented standards, resource-sharing platforms, and interactive methods to enhance teacher training. Provincial education departments provide options in terms of content, schedules, and training institutions while enhancing online lifelong learning opportunities. Standardizing training management at different levels is considered essential, and this process is overseen through a national information system designed for managing teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2013). In 2018, the Ministry introduced the *Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Construction of the Teaching Contingent in the New Era*, highlighting technology-integrated training and leadership development with a people-centered approach and multidirectional exchanges (Xu, 2022). The Ministry of Education has set a goal to substantially improve teacher quality, professionalism, and innovation by 2035. This objective involves the training of millions of top-quality teachers, hundreds of thousands of outstanding teachers, and tens of thousands of teacher-educators. This aligns with the commitment made at the 19th CPC National Congress to develop a high-quality, innovative teacher team that fosters well-rounded individuals and contributes to the country's strength through modernized education (Tang, 2023; Chinese Government, 2018a). It is stated that

Teachers, who have the critical mission of disseminating knowledge, ideas, and truth, and the significant task of shaping individuals, lives, and communities, are the foremost source of educational growth and an important cornerstone of the nation's prosperity, rejuvenation, and well-being.<sup>71</sup>

And further, that

The majority of teachers keep their mission in mind and remain focused on their original intention of providing love and devotion through teaching and educa-

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<sup>71</sup>own translation

tion. They also strive for reform and innovation to serve society and make important contributions (Chinese Government, 2018a).<sup>72</sup>

Meeting education standards necessitates enhancing teacher training, particularly in the fields of ideology, politics, and ethics, as emphasized by the Chinese Government (2018a). The Ministry of Education, alongside five additional departments, launched the *Action Plan for the Revitalization of Teacher Education (2018-2022)* in 2018 with a view to enhancing teacher education, catalyzing field reforms, and fostering exceptional and inventive teachers who satisfy both public and Party demands. It utilizes guidelines such as the “Four Standards of Good Teachers”<sup>73</sup>, “Four Guides”<sup>74</sup>, “Four Unifications”<sup>75</sup>, and “Four Services”<sup>76</sup> to guide teachers’ development, enhance teacher education curricula, and promote moral character in teaching. The plan focuses on improving teacher education standards, ensuring equitable resource distribution, introducing innovative models, and promoting equal access to education. It embodies holistic educational principles applicable to all levels of teacher training and prioritizes lifelong learning while enhancing teachers’ understanding of morality, legal matters, and traditional culture. The plan also specifies measures to enhance teacher preparation and elevate teacher quality in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2018).

In 2019, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission organized a training program for primary and secondary school educators focused on Morality and the Rule of Law. The program had dual objectives: nurturing moral development and enhancing pedagogical skills. It involved more than 250 participants who took part in lectures, examinations, and discussions to share ideas and tackle relevant issues. The Basic Education Department of the Municipal Education Commission stressed the importance of incorporating morality into all compulsory education subjects. This initiative is designed to enrich the teaching curriculum and enhance leadership in moral and legal education (The People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, 2019). During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, a key focus is on teacher training to promote high-quality development and provide support for rural areas, as outlined in the *National Training Plan for Primary and Secondary School and Kindergarten Teachers (2021-2025)*. This plan, jointly published by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance in 2021, prioritizes the cultivation of exceptional talents for reforms in basic education. It underscores the importance of fundamental skills, including morality and ideology, guided by the educational principles of General Secretary Xi Jinping, and aims to enhance teachers’ technological

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<sup>72</sup>own translation

<sup>73</sup>It stands for the Chinese 四有好老师, which means 1. to be a good teacher, we must have ideals and beliefs; 2. to be a good teacher, you must have moral feelings; 3. to be a good teacher, you must have solid knowledge; 4. to be a good teacher, you must have a heart of love (Ministry of Education, 2017c).

<sup>74</sup>It stands for the Chinese 四个引路人, which means 1. be a guide for students to temper their character; 2. be a guide for students to learn knowledge; 3. be a guide for students to think innovatively; 4. be a guide for students to contribute to the motherland (People’s Network, 2021b).

<sup>75</sup>It stands for the Chinese 四个相统一, which means 1. adhere to the unity of teaching and education; 2. adhere to the unity of words and deeds; 3. adhere to the unity of research and pay attention to society; 4. adhere to the unity of academic freedom and standards (People’s Network, 2018).

<sup>76</sup>It stands for the Chinese 四个服务, and reflects the new requirements for ideological and political work in colleges and universities: 1. serving the people; 2. serving reform, opening up, and socialist modernization; 3. serving the leadership of the Communist Party of China; 4. serving the consolidation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics (People’s Network, 2017).

proficiency.

In 2022, the *Plan for Strengthening Teachers in Basic Education in the New Era* was introduced to create a skilled and innovative teacher workforce encompassing primary, secondary, kindergarten, and special education. This plan includes the establishment of national teacher training centers, reforms in building teacher teams, and graduate-level education for aspiring educational leaders. A key focus is on enhancing support for teacher education in rural areas and nurturing exceptional educators in less-developed regions, particularly in central and western areas. Over the years, there has been notable progress in improving the quality of students' education and addressing educator shortages in underdeveloped regions. Teacher training has become more professional and standardized, and there have been enhancements in teacher team management and services. Looking ahead to 2035, the goal is to establish a flexible and contemporary education system, accompanied by an advanced teacher training and professional development program. The objective is to promote an educational environment characterized by openness and collaboration (Ministry of Education, 2022d). The Ministry of Education sees the situation of teacher education in 2022 as follows:

The number and quality of teachers basically meet the needs of basic education development. The regional distribution of teachers, the distribution of school levels, the level of education, the structure of the academy and the structure of age are generally reasonable. Considerable improvements have been made in teacher preparation, supporting a notable increase in both overall quality of teaching and respect for teachers (Ministry of Education, 2022d).<sup>77</sup>

Sustaining and enhancing teacher training is crucial because teachers play a direct role in implementing new policies, ultimately ensuring the success of policies in meeting contemporary needs. The examination of teacher training supports efficient teaching and improvement mechanisms, aiding in the establishment of objectives, curriculum development, and execution. The future of education requires teachers who are politically informed, supportive, and competent while aligning with state objectives. Expectations encompass individualized, accessible, and varied teacher education. Policy trends stress the institutionalization of education, provision of personalized services, and training tailored to current demands (Tang, 2023). When addressing the challenges of aligning moral education with the prevailing ideological framework, the significance of teacher training becomes evident. Adequate training can provide teachers with the political literacy, support, and skills necessary to align with state objectives. This alignment is crucial for the integration of moral education as it ensures that teachers can effectively navigate the ideological framework while delivering the curriculum. Moreover, customized and needs-based training can help teachers adapt their teaching methods to meet the unique perspectives and requirements of their students, a vital component in aligning moral education with individuals' constructed realities. Competent teacher training may also help bridge the gap between individual perspectives and the prevailing ideological framework, thereby contributing to the successful implementation of moral education.

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<sup>77</sup>own translation

### 3.4 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings of moral education in China were examined within its historical context. Also explored were the key policies that have shaped the methods and content of moral education in the country. The aim was to provide insights into the process of aligning moral education with the broader educational system. From this comprehensive perspective, the state's goal to reconcile ideological principles with practical classroom application was outlined. Through examining teacher training, materials, and various teaching approaches, the practical challenges confronted by educators in China's rapidly changing educational landscape were illuminated. Ultimately, it has become apparent that governmental strategies that impart teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge is crucial. This will enable them to effectively navigate the complexities of integrating CPC ideology into their teaching practices while also maintaining control over didactic practices and teacher adaptability. As a result, this will ultimately contribute to the promotion of moral education in China.

The development of citizenship and individual identity in China is intricately tied to its historical and philosophical heritage. This evolution, dating back to the late 19th century, was initially influenced by non-PRC citizenship ideals during the Qing dynasty. During this phase, state power took precedence over citizens' rights. The fall of the Qing dynasty marked a shift towards individualism with the introduction of citizenship in the Chinese Republic's constitution. Chinese citizenship has been dynamic, influenced by political changes. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 shifted the focus away from citizenship to socialist values, reinforced by the household registration system. From 1949 to 1979, political discourse centered on *guomin* (national citizen) and *renmin* (people) during Mao Zedong's leadership. Market-oriented reforms in the late 1970s revived the term *citizen*.

Despite an emphasis on individualism, subtly guided by the government, family continues to shape self-identity, preventing complete isolation. The government regulates individualism through incentives and boundaries. In response to 1990s socioeconomic shifts, China adopted a systematic citizenship education strategy integrated into the national educational framework. Central to responsible citizenship is the principle of *suzhi* (quality), promoting accountability, ethics, and cultural improvement. Schools play a crucial role in fostering *suzhi* in students. Citizenship education emphasizes collective harmony, social responsibility, and national identity, underscoring the role of moral education. Balancing national identity and global citizenship, addressing contentious topics in the curriculum, and ensuring inclusivity are crucial elements in shaping moral education in China. Understanding the path of citizenship and citizenship education in China and the challenges educators face in aligning moral education with the ideological framework provides valuable insights into their effective integration into the education landscape.

The integration of moral education into China's educational system is primarily influenced by government policies and initiatives. These policies stress the significance of moral education in contemporary Chinese education and aim to integrate it into the national curriculum. Moral education seeks to instill positive behavioral habits, patriotism, and socialist values

among students from primary to university levels, placing emphasis on their national identity, citizenship, and political ideology. Two approaches are employed towards education: subject-based instruction in schools and extracurricular activities such as flag-raising, class meetings, and affiliation with Communist Party organizations like the Young Pioneers. The education system gradually acquaints students with Marxism, socialism with Chinese characteristics, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the Three Represents. The focus on ethical reasoning, social responsibility, and students' moral character demonstrates a move towards a system that prioritizes morality. The complex interplay of political administration and educational governance in Beijing, the capital of China, illustrates the impact of government policies and practices. The Beijing Municipal Education Commission and organizations similar to it have a vital function in setting and improving education benchmarks, stimulating ingenuity, and remedying inequalities within the educational system. In addition, a meticulous analysis of China's moral education curriculum demonstrates noteworthy progress in instilling education built on values and prioritizing moral and social growth while integrating revolutionary traditional culture with contemporary history through various means. This comprehensive strategy goes beyond academic accomplishments and fosters overall student development.

Improving teacher education and classroom practices in China is a critical objective in meeting the progressive requirements of the education system. Chinese teachers are pivotal in fostering active citizenship, employing inclusive classrooms and encouraging substantive discourse on the subject. Teachers acquire a significant ability to foster a positive school culture that promotes active engagement, critical thinking, and moral development through their training, mostly guided by CPC ideology. A crucial part of this development involves incorporating more diverse and comprehensive teaching materials that coincide with the needs of modern Chinese education, moving away from traditional texts. These instructional materials must adhere to curriculum standards and pedagogical principles. They undergo a rigorous review and feedback process involving various stakeholders to ensure their accuracy and relevance. Teacher training is a crucial component that has undergone substantial development in recent years in China, encompassing pre-service education, in-service professional development, and ongoing in-service training occurring at different levels of teacher education. Continuous professional development for educators is crucial in improving the quality of education in China. It enables educators to stay up-to-date with the latest instructional methods and research findings. The integration of assessment and feedback mechanisms into teacher training programs also promotes the professional development of educators, preparing them to meet the evolving requirements of the education system and changes in teaching methodologies.

## Chapter 4

# Interwining Perspectives: Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Education

Moral education holds great importance for the objectives set by the Communist Party of China. While it is well-intentioned, moral education often falls short of effectively addressing the diverse challenges that students encounter. The prescribed curriculum requirements, although designed to benefit students, can inadvertently restrict teachers from incorporating their students' real-life experiences. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved, it is crucial to examine the foundational structures of knowledge acquisition in Chinese society and the strategies employed to influence them. Over time, moral education in China has evolved from citizenship education, with citizenship heavily influenced by the political ideals of the Communist Party of China. As a result, moral education now encompasses ideological, nationalist, legal, and ethical components that align with CPC values. These elements form the basis of moral education, influencing how students perceive themselves as citizens and their roles in society.

The components of moral education in China are closely tied to prevailing guiding norms, which significantly influence individual behavior and their tendency to adhere to them. The interaction between these norms and moral education is particularly noticeable within the teaching profession. Navigating these guiding norms is pivotal in shaping professional identities and fulfilling educational responsibilities. Understanding the concealed structures of these guiding norms is essential for a comprehensive grasp of moral education in China. Moral education in China reflects the political ideology of the Communist Party of China. It combines historical and contemporary values with China's rich cultural heritage. The Communist Party of China wields considerable influence over moral education, governing curricula, guidelines, and objectives. The fusion of historical and modern values, combined with the integration of classical Chinese ideals, imparts a unique character to moral education that resonates with the Communist Party of China's vision and China's cultural values.

Education functions as a pivotal institution for socialization, and consequently, teachers encounter a range of challenges when they undertake the role of imparting moral education. Ideal types wield considerable influence in shaping the moral education process. These ideal types serve as guiding principles for the cultivation of moral character. Educators play a fundamental role in the realm of education, serving as frontline agents in the moral development of students. Their responsibilities extend beyond the mere embodiment of these ideals within the classroom. Educators face the challenging task of reconciling the prescribed values with their personal beliefs. This initiative strives to establish an educational setting that accommodates the diverse needs of students while encouraging ethical perception and moral values.

## 4.1 The role of sociological perspectives in shaping moral education

The ideas of sociological perspectives form the basis of how Chinese society is shaped and its framework of action. The significance of Chinese ideology extends beyond the realms of constitutional and Party leadership, reaching into the domain of education.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the foundational ideology and norms that govern Chinese society is indispensable in comprehending the challenges that educators face in the realm of moral education and their position within the educational structure. Expectations, ideals, and restrictions are influential components in determining the moral growth of students in the Chinese educational system. These elements have a substantial impact on ethical reasoning and behavior.

### 4.1.1 The role of ideologies in shaping moral values and norms

Ideology, according to Mannheim, includes systems of ideas, values, and beliefs that influence individual perception and behavior. These belief systems are rooted in specific social positions and serve to legitimize and maintain power structures (Mannheim, 1985). Ideologies are dynamic and evolve with changing social conditions, challenging the idea of universal truth. Ideology in the Chinese context aims to induce shifts in thinking rather than immediate action. Its party constitution has been progressively expanded to encompass a spectrum of ideological principles. Marxism-Leninism (主意) serves as the main source of ideological guidance in China, shaping multiple aspects of policy, including education. Mao Zedong Thought follows closely, integrating theoretical grounds with practical implementation. Supplemented by Xi Jinping Thought (previously classified as “theoretical contributions”) and Deng Xiaoping Thought (as opposed to mere ideological concepts and ideas). Subsequent concepts are integrated as supplements and enhancements, such as the Theory of the Three Represents and Hu Jintao’s concept of “scientific development”<sup>2</sup> (Noesselt, 2016). This complex mixture of ideological principles reflects the systemic legitimacy of the Communist Party of China, which is based on an eclectic combination of different ideological currents rather than a monolithic or monistic ideology, while the prevailing ideology aims to create a monopoly of thought.

In his study, Schurmann (1966) examines the significant impact of Communist Party ideology on individual behavior, particularly in the context of pursuing organizational objectives. He observes that while the theoretical and abstract ideas outlined in party regulations and ideological texts may not yield immediate practical results, their influence becomes evident when they manifest in observable actions. Certain ideas can act as catalysts, affecting other concepts they come into contact with. The ideology of the CPC serves a dual purpose: it motivates individuals and aligns them with the organization’s mission, while also offering guidance for the advancement of that mission. In the context of moral education in schools, CPC ideology fosters an atmosphere that supports the adoption of virtues favored by the party’s

<sup>1</sup>According to Fiala (2007), ideology in education refers to the beliefs, customs, culture, and values that guide education in areas of curriculum, such as politics and morals, or knowledge and truth.

<sup>2</sup>The scientific outlook on development (*kexue fazhan guan* (科学发展观)) emphasizes growth, places people at the center, and aims for comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable progress through a holistic approach.

leadership. As a result, it establishes a logical structure for translating these principles into responsible citizenship and ethical conduct. Schurmann's analysis suggests that an exemplary member of a Communist group in China wholeheartedly dedicates themselves to the cause and possesses the necessary knowledge to act in accordance. The fundamental CPC ideology values and principles not only inspire dedication and action but also foster a sense of unity within the group. One notable strategy employed by the CPC to influence individuals' ideology is thought reform. This process is designed to encourage "correct" behavior by shaping thoughts and beliefs. Some values endorsed by the CPC differ from traditional Chinese values, emphasizing concepts like struggle over harmony, public life over privacy, collectivism over individuality, and proletarianization over tradition. These distinctions illustrate how CPC ideology has played a role in promoting and advocating for these specific values in Chinese society, ultimately leading to a transformation of societal values. According to Schurmann's analysis, the Communist Party of China places a strong emphasis on ideology and uses indoctrination methods to shape the beliefs of its members. The party acts as a platform for providing moral-political leadership training to prepare its members for roles that extend beyond the party. This is exemplified through the moral education curriculum and pedagogy, which are carefully designed to align with the Party's core ideology. Consequently, students are systematically trained to understand their roles and responsibilities within the broader Chinese community, in line with the CPC's approach to preparing its members for societal positions. Given the CPC's firm commitment to its values and norms, it is crucial for Party members to have a comprehensive understanding of these principles to effectively uphold the system. The Party's teachings stress the importance of comprehending both the external world and oneself. Additionally, the organizational structure of the CPC underscores its unwavering dedication to its ideology and its role as a structured representation of the people's will.

According to Schurmann (1966), two key concepts hold significant weight within this ideology: "theory", *lilun* (理论), and "thought", *sixiang* (思想). In the Chinese context, "thought" is viewed as a dynamic element that reflects an individual's continuous pursuit of accurate cognition. While achieving perfect thought is considered unattainable, individuals persistently strive to enhance their understanding. Mao Zedong's ideas play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the theoretical and practical dimensions of Chinese Communism. Within this framework, Chinese Communist theory is regarded as universally accepted, and the ideology retains a degree of adaptability. This blend of enduring theoretical foundations and evolving personal ideologies allows for flexibility in navigating the intricate socio-political landscape. Mao Zedong emphasizes the historical underpinnings of Marxism-Leninism, asserting that a Marxist theorist should not confine themselves to abstract principles but should apply the theory to China's specific conditions, rendering it existentially meaningful.<sup>3</sup> Karl Mannheim's concept of ideology aligns with Mao's framework, where "thought" encompasses a broader

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<sup>3</sup>Harris and Wölfl (1970) discuss how ideologies can evolve and adapt to different contexts, illustrated by the transition from Marxism to "Chinese Marxism". The example demonstrates how ideologies developed in one context can be repurposed in a vastly different context, and how opposing objectives can share similar terminology.



interpretation of ideology, while “theory” implies a more precise perspective. From a Marxist perspective, theory is considered a powerful tool for achieving transformative goals in the face of a constantly evolving reality. It serves as the driving force behind practical actions that hold the potential to shape future events. When practical actions fall short of achieving the anticipated outcomes, it becomes crucial to reevaluate and, if needed, modify existing theories to better accommodate evolving circumstances.

In his analysis, Schurmann distinguishes between two categories of ideology. He proposes the existence of a “pure ideology”, similar to theory (*lilun*), as exemplified in ideologies like Marxism-Leninism. Pure ideology serves as the foundation for a cohesive and all-encompassing worldview, establishing a fundamental theoretical framework. According to this view, the total structure of CPC ideology is comprised of pure ideology. In contrast, he identifies a “practical ideology”, similar to thought (*sixiang*), as evident in Mao Zedong Thought, which provides the logical tools necessary for practical implementation. Both forms of ideology hold significance within the context of the CPC’s ideology. Pure ideology within the CPC imparts credibility to the principles articulated by practical ideology, offering a theoretical framework that bolsters the core beliefs and convictions that underlie practical actions. This foundational theory is instrumental in grounding the CPC’s perspective. On the other hand, practical ideology in the CPC translates theoretical principles into actionable norms and regulations. This translation into actionable directives is pivotal for the effective realization of the CPC’s worldview. Based on Schurmann’s analysis, the legitimacy of practical ideology’s ideas is dependent on pure ideology. Additionally, for an organization to translate its worldview into consistent action, practical ideology is essential. This highlights the interconnectedness of both concepts. Pure ideology in the context of the CPC represents the organization’s fundamental values, shaping its overall beliefs, including moral and ethical principles. In contrast, practical ideology within the CPC focuses on specific behavioral norms and rules that directly impact the behavior of individuals within the organization (Schurmann, 1966, p. 38-41).

Scholars, such as Bauer (1980), have expressed criticism of Schurmann’s interpretation of ideology, particularly concerning the Communist Party of China. Bauer argues that Schurmann’s differentiation between *lilun* (theory) and *sixiang* (thought), is conceptually flawed. According to Bauer, *sixiang* already encompasses the content of *lilun*. In this perspective, *sixiang* integrates both descriptive and prescriptive aspects, effectively bridging the gap between theory and practical implementation. This critique highlights the importance of recognizing the comprehensive nature of ideology, especially within the context of the Communist Party of China. From a CPC ideology standpoint, the CPC’s guiding thinking, known as *zhidao sixiang* (指导思想), is considered to be both a theory (*lilun*) and a doctrine (*xueshuo* 学说). Consequently, *sixiang* includes not only an objective understanding of reality but also perspectives on how to transform it (p. 54-55).<sup>4</sup> Bauer contends that Schurmann’s model of

<sup>4</sup>As stated in Chapter three, the revised 2022 curriculum standards explicitly establish the *guiding thinking* (指导思想) for education implementation within each of the sixteen standards. It says that “Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, our Party comprehensively implements education policies that conform to education laws and teaching principles. Our fundamental task is to establish moral character and develop quality education. The people are at the center of our educational model, and

CPC ideology, which distinguishes between pure and practical ideology, does not provide a comprehensive interpretation. In the context of the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong Thought is regarded as a theory that encompasses doctrinal principles similar to Marxism-Leninism, categorizing it as a form of pure ideology. This perspective differs from Schurmann's binary concept.

Within the framework of CPC ideology, two contrasting societal perspectives have emerged: idealism and materialism. Idealism posits that the transition from individual rational decision-making to collective action occurs. It argues that collective consciousness primarily shapes collective action, while individual action is driven by individual consciousness. Aspects such as collective consciousness are considered essential in shaping social life. In contrast, materialism establishes a distinct framework of factors that influence both group and individual behavior. While individual choices may prioritize consciousness, it plays a supplementary role in collective action. Materialism's significance in CPC ideology lies in its comprehensive examination of the motivations and methods for individual action, advocating for a more humane understanding of individual behavior. The transition from individual to collective action suggests a change in the essential character of endeavors. The concept of shared consciousness has historically served as a critical element in mobilizing collective action. As China has progressed toward a more market-based economy and society, collective action is evolving. While collective constructs and ideals remain important, economic and material factors increasingly shape the goals and behavior of individuals and groups. From a CPC perspective, the idealist view falls short in explaining collective action through the use of homogeneous, idealized constructs such as community awareness. This construct is often used to explain individual actions which is an inaccurate representation of collective action. According to Buczkowski and Klawiter (1986)'s perspective, this assumption is inadequate as collective activity demands additional constructs beyond collective consciousness. As described by Harris and Wölfl (1970), the concept of the "ideal" serves as a fundamental framework that influences our thoughts and actions. These constructs shape our understanding of human existence, personal aspirations, and principles. They set the parameters that guide our choices and decisions, creating a hierarchy of constructs that govern our conduct.

#### (1) Marxism-Leninism and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (Xi Jinping)

The People's Republic of China has consistently adhered to Marxism-Leninism as its guid-

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we will run education on Chinese soil. Prioritize moral education, enhance intellectual education, strengthen physical and aesthetic education, and implement labor education. Our goal is to create a compulsory education curriculum system that reflects the values of contemporary society and meets global standards. Focusing on fundamental qualities essential for the advancement of Chinese students, we aim to instill in them the right values, necessary skills, and key abilities for their future growth. By guiding them towards their life goals, we aspire to produce well-rounded individuals who can contribute to society and continue the socialist legacy. Our approach focuses on nurturing moral, cognitive, physical, aesthetic, and labor competencies." (own translation) (Ministry of Education, 2022b, p. 1-2) This approach combines theoretical with practical applications.

ing thinking since its establishment<sup>5</sup> in 1949.<sup>6</sup> This decision is rooted in the belief that Marxism-Leninism provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the complex social and economic challenges facing China. Developed by thinkers like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and elaborated upon by Vladimir Lenin, Marxism-Leninism emphasizes social transformation and the struggle between social classes. By adopting this guiding principle, the CPC seeks to eliminate historical inequalities, promote social equity, and work towards the creation of a classless society. In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics under General Secretary Xi Jinping, Marxism continues to play a significant role. The CPC recognizes the need to adapt and innovate while upholding Chinese socialist values to align with the evolving Chinese society.<sup>7</sup> Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s represent the synthesis of planned and market-oriented approaches to economic growth and development, creating a socialist system with distinctive Chinese characteristics. This system prioritizes principles like equality, justice, and the leadership of the Communist Party, aiming to ensure political stability and effective governance. The CPC's commitment to Marxism-Leninism and socialism with Chinese characteristics reflects its dedication to improving the quality of life for citizens while respecting China's cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup> General Secretary Xi Jinping states that "with this dynamic application of Marxism, we can fearlessly advance reform, open new doors, and forge ahead with renewed determination" (Xi, 2017).<sup>9</sup>

## (2) Mao Zedong Thought

Mao Zedong Thought has played a substantial role in the nation's development and continues to influence it. His thought has guided the Party's leadership since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and remained a foundational principle until the late 1970s when it was gradually phased out. Mao Zedong Thought is rooted in core principles

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<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that the ideology of the CPC originated prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China and even before the foundation of the Communist Party of China in 1921. However, this outline specifically focuses the period *after* 1949.

<sup>6</sup>The Communist Party of China has a unique approach to guiding thinking (*zhidao sixiang*, 指导思想) and ideology or worldview (*yishi xingtai*, 意识形态). The Party's *guiding thinking* acts as the official and primary ideological framework, guiding governmental policies and decision-making. Additionally, the CPC manages *ideology* with caution, acknowledging the heterogeneous ideological foundation prevalent in Chinese society. The Communist Party of China exercises control over education, media, and public discourse to shape and influence the broader ideological landscape in line with the CPC's guiding thinking. This dualistic approach enables the CPC to uphold its ideological control while recognizing the existence of diverse perspectives in Chinese society.

<sup>7</sup>In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced the "Four Comprehensives", *sige quanmian* (四个全面), as an extension of the existing Party ideology and his own guiding principles for governance. These are the four primary objectives: comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society, deepening reforms comprehensively, promoting the rule of law comprehensively, governing the Party comprehensively and striving towards the Chinese Dream (Xi, 2017).

<sup>8</sup>The concept of "Chinese characteristics" reflects its unique nature and ability to adapt to the specific circumstances of Chinese society. The *guiding thinking* presented in the 2022 edition of the curriculum standards for Morality and the Rule of Law states that "必须坚持马克思主义的指导地位, 体现马克思主义中国化最新成果" (We must maintain the guiding position of Marxism and embody the most recent accomplishments of the Sinicization of Marxism) (own translation) (Ministry of Education, 2022b).

<sup>9</sup>Additionally, General Secretary Xi Jinping follows the "Four Cardinal Principles" as the foundation of China's government. These principles include following the socialist path, maintaining the people's democratic dictatorship, honoring the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and embracing the principles of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. They support both the survival and advancement of the Party and the nation (Xi, 2017). Deng Xiaoping consistently adhered to these fundamental principles during his tenure as a leader.

of Chinese nationalism, self-reliance, and unwavering determination to resist external pressures. These principles have significantly contributed to the formation of a strong and unified China, fostering a sense of national identity and solidarity among its citizens. Mao's emphasis on the importance of peasants, the role of the Red Army, and the transformative potential of political education has been instrumental in the nation's progress. His ideas provided the basis for significant historical milestones, including the urban-to-rural city liberation and the transition to a socialist system. The enduring principles of contradiction and perpetual revolution inherent in Mao Zedong Thought serve as a reminder of the ever-evolving nature of society and the ongoing need for growth and reform (Dittmar, 1975). The resolution of the Sixth Plenum in 1981 emphasized that Mao Zedong's thought was a fusion of universal Marxist-Leninist principles and China's distinct revolutionary experience. Today, Mao Zedong Thought is still acknowledged as relevant and acts as a reference point for the Party's guiding principles. It shapes the Party's pursuit of economic development, social stability, and cultural revitalization. Although Mao Zedong Thought has evolved over time, moving beyond its original focus, it continues to inspire and serves as evidence of the CPC's ability to adapt and endure (Xi, 2018). The resolution underscores Mao's accurate understanding of the pre-1949<sup>10</sup> Chinese revolution as a collaborative effort between workers and peasants aimed at overthrowing imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. This foundation laid the groundwork for a successful transition to socialism, with Mao establishing a people's democratic dictatorship to oversee socialist industrialization and property reform. Mao emphasized the ideological work of the Communist Party, focusing on three essential principles: conducting objective inquiries based on factual evidence, following the mass line, and promoting autonomy and self-sufficiency (Mackerras et al., 1998). While certain aspects of Mao Zedong's philosophy still hold significance in China's political culture, the nation has moved beyond absolute dedication to ideology. As a result, China has adopted a more practical and market-driven approach to its economic and political reforms.

### (3) Deng Xiaoping Theory

Deng Xiaoping Theory comprises political and economic principles developed by Chinese revolutionary and statesman Deng Xiaoping, who served as the paramount leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1989.<sup>11</sup> This theory places a strong emphasis on economic growth and development, which has been essential in driving China's economic transformation over recent decades. It has significantly contributed to the upliftment of millions of Chinese citizens from poverty and the enhancement of their overall quality of life. Deng Xiaoping Theory's pragmatic approach has enabled China to adapt to shifting global dynamics and seize

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<sup>10</sup>From the 1950s until the late 1970s, China experienced a tumultuous period marked by intense ideological debates and power struggles within the Chinese Communist Party, commonly known as "two-line struggles". This era was characterized by the dominance of Mao Zedong Thought, which manifested through extreme and often violent campaigns like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. These conflicts extended beyond mere discussions and resulted in the purging, condemnation, and use of force as different CCP factions vied for control. This turbulent period had a profound impact on Chinese politics. It was only after Mao's death and the rise of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s that China moved away from extremist measures and embraced a path of economic reform and global engagement, breaking free from the dominance of Mao Zedong's Thought.

<sup>11</sup>Deng Xiaoping Theory represented a practical departure from certain Mao Zedong concepts while preserving the "four cardinal principles" of the Communist Party of China.

opportunities for development. Another crucial aspect of this theory is its dedication to seeking truth from facts. This principle underscores the importance of making decisions based on evidence and practical problem-solving, promoting flexibility and responsiveness to the evolving needs of society and the intricacies of modern life (Xi, 2017). Deng Xiaoping Theory underscores the importance of strong leadership and the indispensable role of the Communist Party in guiding China's future. The theory advocates for political reforms designed to improve the party's efficiency and effectiveness in governance, ultimately leading to the maintenance of social stability and good governance while pursuing economic modernization. Deng aimed to enhance party democracy and increase the efficiency of the political system to expedite economic modernization. Simultaneously, he sought to revive previously abandoned party traditions from the Cultural Revolution era. Deng's political reform strategy aimed to establish "socialism with Chinese characteristics", acknowledging the need for China to uphold its socialist principles while implementing market-oriented reforms to drive economic growth and development. At the core of this vision was the reform and opening policy, which aimed to integrate China into the global economy, encourage foreign investment, facilitate international trade, and revitalize China's economy (Goodman, 1994; Mackerras et al., 1998).<sup>12</sup> Deng Xiaoping's Theory remains a crucial guiding philosophy for the Communist Party of China due to its pragmatic and forward-thinking approach that aligns with China's objectives for economic development, political stability, and global participation.

#### (4) Theory of the Three Represents

The Communist Party of China adopts the theory of the "Three Represents", which was introduced by Jiang Zemin in the early 2000s, acknowledging its practical framework and significant role in influencing the nation's current trajectory and that of future generations. The theory of the Three Represents outlines that the Communist Party of China should consistently embody three key aspects: representing the developmental trends of China's advanced productive forces<sup>13</sup>, the orientation of China's advanced culture<sup>14</sup>, and the fundamental interests of the Chinese people.<sup>15</sup> These three representations are interconnected and collectively constitute a comprehensive unit, evident both in theory and practice. The theory of the Three Represents encompasses a wide array of areas, including economics, politics, culture, military affairs, foreign relations, and party administration. It offers a comprehensive and innovative approach to addressing the complex challenges of the era. By adopting this principles, the ob-

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<sup>12</sup>The concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" allowed for a departure from rigid Marxist principles, such as collective ownership, and encouraged individuals to pursue their economic interests. However, this economic transformation raised concerns about declining socialist morality and increased social diversity. In response, the Communist Party of China launched campaigns like the "Patriotic Education Campaign" in the 1990s and "suzhi campaigns" in the late 1990s and early 2000s to strengthen socialist values and enhance the population's quality. These reforms and campaigns demonstrate the CPC's capacity to adapt while remaining committed to its core beliefs.

<sup>13</sup>To achieve the advancement of society, it is necessary to align theoretical models, policy-making, and actions with the laws governing the productive forces. This includes promoting liberation and progress, particularly the development of advanced technologies, and improving people's quality of life through progress.

<sup>14</sup>Alignment of theory, policy and action is required with the modernization-oriented national, scientific and socialist culture to foster intellectual and moral growth, and facilitate economic development and social progress.

<sup>15</sup>To achieve this, it is necessary to align all aspects of the Party's policies with the people's needs, enhance their participation, and guarantee that they derive economic, political, and cultural benefits from the ongoing social progress.

jective is to ensure that reforms are not confined to theory alone but lead to tangible progress that positively impacts the well-being of Chinese citizens. The theory of the Three Represents respects the historical values of the party and charts a path for the nation's future. Its adaptability and dynamism make it a valuable guide for future endeavors, steering the course of socialism with Chinese characteristics and reaffirming the commitment to the nation's welfare and prosperity (e.g. Jiang, 2002).

#### (5) Chinese Nationalism

The Communist Party of China strategically employs Chinese nationalism as a tool to shape China's identity and bolster its global influence. This calculated use of nationalism draws upon a deep sense of national pride, unity, and cultural heritage, aimed at cultivating unwavering patriotism and allegiance among the population. The CPC recognizes that fostering this collective sentiment fosters a strong shared national identity and instills a sense of belonging among citizens. By utilizing Chinese nationalism, the CPC seeks to solidify its authority and maintain social stability. This form of nationalism plays a pivotal role in strengthening the party's control and reaffirming its legitimacy. The CPC's promotion of Chinese nationalism underscores its commitment to preserving and upholding Chinese culture, language, and traditions. Ultimately, this strategy enables the CPC to navigate the complex landscape of socio-political development, ensuring its continued political and socio-economic advancement while enhancing its global influence (Barabantseva, 2013).

#### (6) Chinese Dream

The Communist Party of China utilizes the concept of the Chinese Dream, as articulated by General Secretary Xi Jinping, to advance its political objectives and maintain its leadership position. The CPC's interpretation of the Chinese Dream incorporates a blend of traditional and innovative elements, culminating in the "Two Centenary Goals". By striving for a "moderately prosperous society" by 2021 and aspiring to become a highly developed major power by 2049, the CPC underscores its commitment to achieving economic progress, military strength, its unique interpretation of "democracy", cultural resurgence, and societal cohesion. This goal serves to unite the nation under the CPC's leadership, thus bolstering the party's credibility and influence. The Chinese Dream serves as a motivational force for individuals to pursue their aspirations within a framework that promotes national unity and shared values. It fosters a sense of collective destiny and purpose, which is conducive to the CPC's continued governance. Moreover, it allows the CPC to fulfill its core mission of promoting economic growth, improving the well-being of citizens, and enhancing overall prosperity while upholding its role as the guardian of a democratic, culturally diverse, and resilient socialist state (Xi, 2017).<sup>16</sup>

#### (7) Harmonious Society

The Communist Party of China strategically promotes the concept of a harmonious soci-

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<sup>16</sup>The "Four-Pronged Strategy", introduced by Xi Jinping to realize the goals of the Chinese Dream, involves the capacity to understand and adjust to changing economic conditions. Xi Jinping states that through a collaborative and all-encompassing effort, China can build a well-rounded, moderately prosperous society while simultaneously promoting reform, enforcing legal regulations, and enhancing Party discipline. By implementing this strategy, China can elevate its journey toward modernization, reform, and openness to an unprecedented level (Xi, 2017).

ety, known as *hexie shehui* (和谐社会), to advance its political objectives and strengthen its leadership. This concept serves as a crucial tool for establishing and maintaining social stability, balance, and unity, all in line with the CPC's goal of ensuring the overall well-being of the nation. The CPC's intention is to uphold its authority and legitimacy by fostering social cohesion, driving economic advancement, and promoting the fair distribution of resources. The idea of a harmonious society provides a framework for addressing significant challenges that arise from rapid economic development, urbanization, and social changes. Through this vision, the CPC strives to achieve stability and social unity, which, in turn, influences various government policies and initiatives in areas like education, healthcare, urban planning, poverty reduction, and rural development. Ultimately, the CPC uses the concept of a harmonious society to strengthen its governance, address societal issues, and advance its vision of a prosperous and unified socialist nation.

In the realm of Chinese ideology, it is essential to recognize the multifaceted role of Marxism-Leninism. It is considered a universal and pure ideology (similar to *lilun*) that takes on a practical form (similar to *sixiang*) when applied within a specific national context. By making this distinction, it highlights the dynamic nature of Chinese thought, particularly in the case of figures like Mao Zedong, who exemplifies the pragmatic implementations of these ideological underpinnings (Schurmann, 1966). Consequently, China often refers to Mao Zedong's thought rather than his ideology or Maoism (Mackerras et al., 1998). Ideology, within the Chinese context, serve as the underpinning for the construction of moral education and societal norms. They are intentionally integrated into the educational framework, serving a dual purpose: to shape a distinct national identity and to transmit social values and norms. Consequently, this deliberate infusion of ideological content significantly influences students' worldviews, social perceptions, and moral values, actively contributing to their sense of identity and social roles. However, this construct presents complexities and challenges. The imposition of such ideological concepts on moral education can inadvertently limit diverse moral perspectives within the educational system. This potential limitation might obstruct alternative ethical viewpoints that do not align with the guiding principles, thereby posing challenges for students seeking to engage in critical thinking and exercise independent moral judgment. Furthermore, this approach could unintentionally lead to disparities within the education system, potentially favoring or disadvantaging certain groups based on their adherence to a specific ideology. Therefore, CPC leadership advocates a balanced and nuanced approach that involves the harmonious integration of collective identity and individual moral autonomy. Achieving this balance necessitates careful consideration of how ideology is integrated into education to foster unity while respecting the diversity of moral perspectives.

#### **4.1.2 Interplay of ideal types and guiding norms in shaping moral values**

In the context of Chinese society, class consciousness holds significance, especially in its connection to ideal types and guiding norms. Class consciousness refers to the beliefs that individuals hold, which tend to favor a specific social class under specific societal conditions. However, the alignment between an individual's beliefs and their belonging to a particular

class is not always accurate. Several factors influence these beliefs, including intellectual customs, authoritative sources, and propaganda that align with societal norms. These influences can lead to situations where individuals do not fully adhere to the intended values set by ideal standards. The formation of class consciousness is not a direct result of a single person's influence. Typically, members of a social class look to influential figures or ideologues whose principles and actions align with the goals of their collective identity. To establish class consciousness in line with these objectives, a two-step process is involved. First, it includes marginalizing or excluding individuals whose beliefs or actions contradict the interests of the collective identity. This helps maintain a more unified ideological stance by suppressing dissenting voices within the social class. Second, the process involves individual learning, where previous beliefs or behaviors gradually evolve, shifting toward new perspectives that align with the core values and guiding norms of the social class. This evolutionary process plays a vital role in shaping and reinforcing class consciousness, gradually aligning it with the dominant ideal types and guiding norms within the context of Chinese society (Buczowski and Klawiter, 1986).

In Chinese ideology and moral education, creating ideal models or types can function as aspirational role models for individuals to emulate. These ideal types are thoughtfully crafted to embody the values, principles, and behaviors advocated by the party leadership. For instance, the ideology of the Communist Party of China outlines a set of fundamental principles and values deemed essential for social progress, such as collectivism, socialism, patriotism, and self-reliance. Outstanding individuals who have demonstrated a strong commitment to these values through their actions, accomplishments, and contributions to society are identified within the historical and contemporary context of the ideology. These individuals may include prominent political leaders, heroes, scientists, or ordinary citizens who have shown exceptional dedication to the ideology's values. Based on the qualities and attributes displayed by these exceptional individuals, ideal models are constructed. These ideal types represent what the Chinese society and its guiding ideology considers a morally upright and socially responsible individual, embodying the desired characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes in line with the ideology's principles. These constructed ideal types are integrated into the education system, specifically as a component of moral education curricula. Students are presented with these exemplars and sources of inspiration. Schools, textbooks, and educational materials often feature stories, biographies, or case studies of these exemplary figures to illustrate how they lived their lives in harmony with the ideology's principles. Students are encouraged to analyze and follow these ideal models, internalizing the values and virtues demonstrated by these exemplary figures and striving to apply them in their daily lives. The aim is to foster a sense of commitment to the principles of the ideology. Assessing students' capacity to incorporate the values and actions of the ideal types into their decision-making and behaviors serves as a measure of progress in moral education. Students who demonstrate exemplary commitment to these values may receive recognition and awards. Over time, individuals become educated and inspired by these ideal types, which the Communist Party of China employs to shape social norms, behaviors, and attitudes in alignment with its principles. The ultimate objective is



to create a cohesive and morally upright society where individuals collectively work toward the betterment of their community and nation. Essentially, the construction of ideal types within Chinese guiding principles serves as an educational tool to guide moral education and offer concrete examples of how the CPC's principles can be put into practice.

### **Ideal types as conceptual frameworks in China**

Ideal types offer a framework for comprehending observable social realities and aid in analyzing complex social phenomena. However, it is vital to acknowledge that ideal types possess limitations in completely encapsulating the intricacy of Chinese society. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between ideal types and ideology. Ideal types provide frameworks for analyzing specific social aspects, while ideology forms comprehensive belief systems that include values and concepts that prescribe social structure, power distribution, and individual behavior. Max Weber asks the pivotal question: What motivations determined and continue to determine the behavior of individual functionaries and members of the community that led to its formation and sustenance? (Weber, 1947, p. 9) The following examples offer insights into possible expressions of ideal types within the context of Chinese society.

#### **(1) Confucian Ideal Type**

The Communist Party of China incorporates the Confucian ideal type into Chinese society to serve various fundamental objectives that are in line with the Party's ideology. This construct provides a normative framework for organizing social relations and behavior, guided by the principles advocated by Confucius and subsequent Confucian scholars, all of which align with the Party's objectives. The intentional construction of this framework aims to instill a sense of order, harmony, and moral virtue within Chinese society, thus promoting the Party's vision of social stability and unity. The Communist Party of China utilizes the Confucian ideal type to exert influence over various aspects of Chinese society, impacting educational systems, family structures, and ethical standards to align with the Party's ideology and strengthen its authority. The Party encourages conformity and loyalty among the population by highlighting hierarchical structures, the importance of filial piety, moral virtues, the value of education, the significance of collective identity, the role of ethical leadership, and the preservation of traditional values. The development and propagation of the Confucian ideal type by the Communist Party of China function as a means of reinforcing its ideological narrative and legitimizing its rule. By drawing from the deep cultural and historical roots of Confucian thought and adapting it to suit modern political objectives, the Party aims to achieve its goals in a practical and effective manner.

#### **(2) Communitarian Ideal Type**

The construction of the communitarian ideal type in Chinese society is a complex process directed by the Communist Party of China and influenced by a range of historical, cultural, and political factors. This ideal type places a strong emphasis on collective welfare, mutual support, and social harmony, in line with the CPC's goal of building a socialist society characterized by unity and harmony. The primary objective of the Communist Party of China

in promoting the communitarian ideal is to ensure social stability, foster unity among the population, and legitimize its authority. By promoting communal values while stressing interdependence and shared responsibility, the CPC aims to reinforce its hold on power and maintain its ideological stance. However, the promotion of the communitarian ideal raises questions about individual rights and autonomy within a closely-knit society. The CPC's focus on collective principles may give rise to concerns about striking a balance between the welfare of the group and individual liberties. Chinese government policies often reflect the communitarian principle, prioritizing the welfare of the collective over individual interests. This is particularly evident in areas such as public health, social services, and community development, where the CPC's commitment to the common good informs policy decisions.

### (3) Market Socialist Ideal Type

The construction of an ideal type of market socialism in Chinese society is a response by the Communist Party of China to the country's historical and developmental context. This approach is pragmatic in nature and aims to reconcile China's socialist legacy with the imperatives of modernization. The CPC has intentionally developed this ideal model to align with the specific needs and opportunities of China. First, market socialism, as crafted by the CPC, places a strong emphasis on economic progress by using the power of market forces. It recognizes the importance of competition, entrepreneurship, and innovation in driving economic growth. Second, under the guidance of the CPC, this approach addresses social welfare concerns through government oversight. It ensures that the benefits of economic growth are distributed equitably, thus reducing issues related to income inequality and social welfare, which are significant in Chinese society. Third, the concept of market socialism highlights the crucial role of the CPC in governance and policy-making, acknowledging the Party's integral leadership in maintaining political stability and unity. Fourth, it encourages innovation by creating an environment that fosters the flourishing of market mechanisms. The CPC acknowledges that technological advancements and industrial upgrades are critical for enhancing China's global competitiveness. Finally, the CPC's vision of market socialism includes policies aimed at eliminating poverty, a major social issue in China. This underscores the importance of lifting citizens out of poverty and improving their overall quality of life.

### (4) CPC Leadership Ideal Type

The CPC leadership ideal type characterizes China's political system within the context of the country's history and the CPC's ascent to power. This construct represents a deliberate decision by the CPC to concentrate political power, reflecting the party's historical position as the leader of the Chinese revolution. The creation of this ideal type by the CPC serves various functions in Chinese society. It provides the CPC with a structure for sustaining its central and commanding position in governance, ensuring the party's continued leadership and control in political and administrative affairs. Additionally, it aids in effective and smooth decision-making, allowing the government to implement policies with precision and cohesion. This governance strategy is deemed crucial in promoting China's economic growth and advancement. However, the CPC leadership ideal also has significant implications for Chinese society, raising concerns about political pluralism and accountability, despite its effectiveness

in governance. The CPC's monopoly on power limits political competition, leading to questions about the representation of diverse interests and the government's accountability to its citizens.

### **Guiding norms and their influence on the formation of a moral identity**

In the context of China, guiding norms function as descriptive realities that shape a social framework perceived by individuals as an "ideal" to aspire to. This framework prioritizes voluntary pursuit over coercion, influencing the decisions of individuals and the collective. Guiding norms significantly influence behavior, impacting choices and maintaining social order. Their significance lies in maintaining stability and guaranteeing the efficient operation of the community. These norms stem from a blend of cultural, historical, and social factors, including the impact of the political framework governed by the Communist Party of China, cultural ideals of harmony and respect, and the aspiration for individual achievement through economic advancement. Using didactic methods is crucial for defining social boundaries and controlling their impact on individuals. These techniques help address the challenges associated with reconciling moral education and existing ideological systems in China. The guiding norms presented in this study provide a framework for ongoing research that connects it to moral education and the realities constructed within existing guiding norms.

#### **(1) Patriotism and National Identity**

The construction of the guiding norm of patriotism and national identity in Chinese society can be attributed to deliberate efforts made by the Communist Party of China within the complex historical and political development of the country. The CPC aims to foster unity, pride, and belonging among Chinese citizens, with the ultimate goal of instilling a deep sense of loyalty to the Chinese nation and a shared identity based on cultural heritage. This effort promotes patriotism among citizens, encouraging their active participation and contribution to the progress and well-being of the country. Additionally, it aims to foster a shared sense of identity, reinforcing social cohesion, and alleviate possible causes of division in the multicultural society. Furthermore, this norm influences China's engagement with the global community by emphasizing the need to protect the nation's interests and sovereignty while promoting peaceful coexistence and cooperation with other countries (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2001b,c).

#### **(2) Collective Identity and Harmony**

Chinese culture places a strong emphasis on collectivism and the welfare of the community, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals with their families, communities, and society at large. China's history, marked by a large population, regional diversity, and occasional social disruptions, has presented various challenges. In response, the Communist Party of China prioritizes the collective welfare over individual interests, seeking to address historical divisions and conflicts and promote internal harmony. The norm of collectivism has played a significant role in China's economic development, supporting policies like rural collectivization and communal projects that facilitated early growth. Additionally, the emphasis on na-

tional unity and pride contributes to a cohesive sense of Chinese national identity, fostering a sense of belonging among citizens of the broader Chinese nation. In the context of China's one-party state system, political stability is of paramount importance, and collectivism is instrumental in promoting social harmony and reducing the potential for dissent. However, it also raises questions regarding individual freedoms and autonomy within closely-knit communities, presenting a complex challenge for Chinese society in reconciling the collective good with individual rights (e.g. Jing, 2022).

### (3) Socialist Market Economy

The guiding norm of the socialist market economy in Chinese society has evolved in response to a complex interplay of historical, economic, and political factors. The Communist Party of China has been motivated by the recognition that China needed to adapt its economic system to address pressing challenges and leverage opportunities in the late 20th century. Historical factors have played a critical role in shaping this norm. China's previous experiences with centrally-planned economies, particularly during the Maoist era, revealed the shortcomings and inefficiencies of such a model. The challenges and economic stagnation faced by the population during that period underscored the need for economic reform. Concurrently, China observed the success of market-driven economies in other parts of the world and recognized the potential for rapid economic growth and development through a market-oriented approach. The CPC's construction of the guiding norm of the socialist market economy aimed to strike a balance between the lessons of history and the prevailing global economic trends. The goal was to preserve the core principles of socialism, such as social equity and collective welfare, while promoting the efficiency and innovation of market-driven economies. It has resulted in significant economic growth, reduced poverty, and improved living standards for millions of people. However, it has also presented challenges, as questions have arisen regarding the concentration of economic power, wealth inequality, and the government's role in the economy.

### (4) Socialist Core Values

The guiding norm of socialist core values encompasses a set of moral and ethical principles promoted by the Chinese government to nurture a shared national identity, social cohesion, and unity among the diverse population of China. The Communist Party of China recognizes the importance of fostering a sense of national identity and social unity in a country characterized by significant diversity in terms of ethnic groups, languages, and regional cultures. The rapid processes of modernization and globalization have reinforced the need to cultivate a common identity that transcends these differences. The emphasis on values like patriotism, dedication, and integrity in the norm aims to establish a moral framework that unites the nation and strengthens the foundations of Chinese society. This is seen as crucial in maintaining social stability and order amidst the ongoing transformations in the world. By promoting principles such as civility, harmony, and justice, the norm provides ethical guidelines for individual behavior and interactions, contributing to a more harmonious and well-organized society. Education plays a pivotal role in the promotion of these values, particularly among the younger generation. The CPC views the inclusion of socialist core values

in the educational curriculum as a means of shaping the ethical standards and worldviews of the nation's youth. By emphasizing values that blend tradition and innovation, China aims to position itself as a progressive nation with a deep appreciation of its history and culture. The values offered by this norm guide various aspects of daily life, work, and social interactions (e.g. Xi, 2018). However, the promotion of these values may raise questions about the extent of government involvement in shaping and disseminating such principles, potentially leading to concerns about ideological influence and the homogenization of opinions.

#### (5) Chinese Cultural Revival

The development of the guiding norm for revitalizing Chinese culture in Chinese society is closely linked to China's specific guiding ideology. This norm is crafted to address the particular needs and aspirations of Chinese society and may not hold the same significance in other contexts. Within the Chinese context, the revitalization of Chinese culture is seen as a response to a range of key factors, with a primary focus on preserving cultural identity. China boasts a rich history with a distinct cultural identity. There are concerns that the forces of globalization may erode traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the construction of this guiding norm places significant emphasis on the importance of preserving and promoting Chinese cultural identity as a source of national pride and unity. While tradition preservation is crucial, the norm also encourages adaptation to modernization. To remain relevant and dynamic in the contemporary world, Chinese culture must find a balance between tradition and progress and integrate traditional values into modern contexts. Chinese culture is perceived as a form of soft power that can enhance China's global influence. By revitalizing and promoting its culture, China aims to project its unique identity and values on the world stage, contributing to its role in global affairs. In addition, Chinese society places a high value on learning from historical events. Chinese historical records, philosophies, and cultural achievements are seen as valuable resources that can be utilized to address contemporary challenges. Furthermore, it promotes social cohesion by stressing the importance of shared cultural values and traditions in fostering unity and social cohesion within Chinese society. The principle of revitalizing Chinese culture is designed specifically for Chinese society, reflecting its unique ideological framework, objectives, and cultural requirements. It signifies China's commitment to preserving its cultural identity, modernizing, projecting soft power, and drawing from its rich historical heritage, all within the distinct framework of Chinese society (e.g. Xi, 2017).

#### (6) Respect for Authority and Hierachy

The Communist Party of China aims to establish a norm that embodies respect for authority and hierarchy, influencing social interactions, family dynamics, and the overall social structure. This norm reflects the CPC's recognition of the enduring influence of Confucian values in Chinese culture, which have played a significant role for centuries. Confucianism places strong emphasis on hierarchical relationships and the importance of honoring authority figures to maintain social stability and harmony. Consequently, the construction of the guiding norm of respect for authority aligns with and upholds these traditional cultural values. Additionally, the CPC recognizes that exhibiting respect for figures in positions of authority

is imperative for fostering social harmony and stability. Compliance with authority figures, including parents, teachers, and elders, is crucial for maintaining discipline and order in families, communities, and society at large. It fosters a sense of unity and shared values among Chinese citizens. In the context of China's rapid modernization and increasing global influence, the CPC is aware of the need to adapt this guiding norm to address contemporary challenges. While the fundamental value of hierarchy and respect for authority remains unchanged, its manifestation may evolve to accommodate shifting social dynamics and global influences. This adaptation ensures that the norm remains relevant and practical in a rapidly changing world (e.g. Keane, 2001).

#### (7) Filial Piety

The Communist Party of China places a strong emphasis on preserving traditional values, with filial piety holding a significant position among these values. Filial piety is regarded as a longstanding Chinese virtue that promotes respect for cultural heritage and continuity. In the rapidly changing context of modernization and globalization, the CPC views the preservation of filial piety as a means to uphold cultural identity and historical traditions. Moreover, the emphasis on filial piety aligns with the CPC's broader objective of strengthening familial bonds and enhancing social stability. It underscores the family's central role in society, fostering a sense of unity and inclusiveness among Chinese citizens. Recognizing the need to adapt the concept of filial piety to suit contemporary circumstances, the CPC acknowledges that China's modern society is characterized by economic challenges, evolving lifestyles, and shifting values. Therefore, the development of filial piety in Chinese society aims to blend traditional filial responsibilities with modern challenges, creating a concept that remains significant and relevant in the lives of Chinese people. The construction of the guiding norm of filial piety is tailored to meet specific requirements and objectives within the ideological framework of Chinese society. (e.g. Xi, 2018).

#### (8) Education and Academic Achievement

High expectations for academic excellence are a notable norm in China, viewed as pivotal for individual development, social mobility, and overall progress. Within this context, the Communist Party of China recognizes the significant role of education in facilitating upward mobility and advancing social progress. In the modern, rapidly changing, and highly competitive global landscape, the CPC encourages individuals in China to prioritize their education. It is well understood that academic excellence can open doors to improved career opportunities and elevated social status, aligning with the CPC's commitment to fostering social and economic development. The competitive nature of China's education system, exemplified by standardized tests like the *gaokao*, fosters an environment of competition that motivates students to strive for academic excellence. This competitive ethos nurtures qualities such as diligence, dedication, and resilience, which hold great value in Chinese society and support the CPC's goal of cultivating a skilled and hardworking labor force. However, it is important to note that the pursuit of academic excellence under such high expectations can place immense pressure on students. The intense competition and the weight of these expectations can contribute to stress and mental health challenges among students. This is a concern that

the CPC is actively addressing through educational reforms and support systems (such as the double reduction policy), demonstrating the party's commitment to the well-being of the younger generation.

#### (9) Work Ethic and Perseverance

A strong work ethic and the value of perseverance are deeply embedded in Chinese culture, influencing how individuals approach work, education, and personal growth. This cultural emphasis on self-improvement and long-term objectives is reflected in people's attitudes and actions. The Communist Party of China acknowledges the profound influence of traditional Chinese culture, which places importance on values such as self-improvement, dedicated pursuit of long-term goals, and fulfilling one's responsibilities. These values have historically played a significant role in shaping how individuals in China view and engage in work, education, and personal development. The CPC's formulation of a guiding norm that promotes a strong work ethic aligns with and perpetuates these enduring cultural values. The CPC also takes into account the highly competitive nature of the job market and education sector in China, influenced by the country's large population and thus limited opportunities. The CPC encourages hard work and perseverance, recognizing that these qualities are essential for individuals to stand out and secure better prospects in this competitive environment. Furthermore, the CPC emphasizes the importance of social responsibility. Individuals are expected to contribute to the betterment of society by working diligently and fulfilling their duties to the best of their abilities. This guiding norm promotes social harmony and prosperity, in line with the CPC's vision of creating a thriving and harmonious society.

#### (10) Face and Social Etiquette

The concept of "Face" (*mianzi* (面子)) carries significant weight in Chinese culture, encompassing social status, reputation, and personal dignity. The Communist Party of China recognizes its cultural significance, emphasizing the value of respecting individuals' dignity, social status, and feelings, which shape social interactions and behavioral norms. This promotion encourages people to be considerate and avoid actions or words that might cause embarrassment or harm to one's or others' social standing. In an educational context, this norm becomes particularly crucial. Educators bear a significant responsibility in providing constructive feedback that upholds students' dignity while also acknowledging their achievements. This approach aims to foster a positive self-image among students and aligns with the CPC's commitment to nurturing a harmonious and prosperous society. Understanding and adhering to the principle of "Face" and its associated social norms are essential for building positive relationships and fostering unity in Chinese society.

### **Contrasting ideal types and guiding norms**

Ideal types serve as abstract analytical constructs, providing a theoretical framework for comprehending broad social phenomena. On the other hand, Chinese guiding norms focus on specific cultural values, beliefs, and expectations deeply rooted in Chinese society. These norms offer a more tangible and context-specific framework compared to ideal types. This methodological difference underscores the complexities associated with integrating moral

education into Chinese practice. However, gaining a comprehensive understanding of moral education within the Chinese context necessitates a combination of both theoretical models. Ideal types are valuable for comparing and categorizing educational strategies, facilitating the analysis of how moral education aligns with the prevailing ideological framework. In contrast, Chinese guiding norms shed light on cultural norms and values that influence moral education. This can aid in identifying areas of alignment or potential conflict between moral ideals and societal expectations.

The presented models offer a comprehensive perspective on the complex relationships among ideal types, guiding norms, and ideological framework. Guiding norms are an integral part of the ideological principles, functioning as specific directives that prescribe social behavior within that particular ideology. This interconnected relationship between guiding norms and ideology highlights their mutual dependence and reinforces how they shape each other. Effectively aligning moral education with the existing ideological framework in China requires a nuanced understanding of this complex interplay between theoretical models and practical, context-specific norms. To effectively integrate moral education into the Chinese educational system, it is essential to comprehend this complex dynamic. This understanding offers a roadmap for shaping social progress based on an “ideal” orientation while adapting to changing social needs.

## **4.2 Perspectives on moral learning and socialization**

The interplay between socialization and moral education forms the foundation for the ethical development of students. Both deliberate moral instruction and social influences contribute to shaping individuals’ moral frameworks, which, in turn, influence their actions and relationships. This intricate relationship is particularly evident in China’s educational system, where educational institutions play a significant role at the intersection of cultural values, historical traditions, and moral education. A deep understanding of this dynamic relationship is essential for addressing the challenges faced by educators. Effectively integrating moral education into the existing ideological framework in China requires a comprehensive grasp of how socialization and deliberate moral guidance interact within the educational context.

### **4.2.1 Socialization through education in China**

In recent decades, Chinese academics have been placing more emphasis on the role of socialization in shaping individual personalities (Shu, 2004; Ren and Wang, 2010). This shift indicates a transition from the conventional teacher-centered approach in favor of prioritizing teacher-student interaction and personal development, which has produced a significant impact on education in China. This change has had a profound influence on education in China and has given rise to ongoing discussions among scholars. While scholars generally concur on the central objective of socialization, which is to nurture individuals’ capabilities for effective engagement with and adaptation to society, they engage in debates about the best approaches and methods to achieve this aim (Xi, 2002; Gu, 2011). In this context, socialization



refers to the process of individuals internalizing the culture and knowledge related to social roles. Essentially, it involves the transformation of individuals from biological entities into social beings.<sup>17</sup> Hu and Qin (2012) discuss two interconnected forms of socialization: “individual socialization”, which trains individuals to meet society’s needs, and “social individualization”, which internalizes society’s concepts and leads to developing distinct personalities and interests through educational processes.<sup>18</sup>

Effective socialization, according to Yue (2004), comprises a process where students align their personal desires with societal expectations, internalize ethical norms and values, and bridge the gap between their practical needs and the idealized needs of society. Chinese education history has traditionally emphasized communal identity over individuality. Students were often regarded as integral components of a collective identity deeply influenced by cultural norms. However, recent developments indicate a noticeable shift towards embracing both communal and individualistic values in Chinese education. This transformation signifies a new phase, aiming to promote the development of individual talents while simultaneously nurturing a sense of belonging in society. In contemporary education, the primary objective is to help students understand their societal responsibilities while also recognizing and fostering their unique qualities for comprehensive development. As proposed by Xi (2002), achieving effective socialization requires a delicate balance between individual personality development and adherence to societal norms, facilitating a seamless integration into society. This equilibrium is dependent on an ongoing interplay between schools and society. Education is not merely shaped by the dynamics of society but also exerts a significant influence on the functioning of society itself. Effective socialization is a dynamic process that harmonizes personal growth with societal expectations, mirroring the evolving landscape of education in China.<sup>19</sup>

Socialization, according to Yue (2003)’s definition, is a constantly evolving and mutually influencing process influenced by both society and the individual. It involves creating a social community where people adopt shared values and norms, while simultaneously developing their unique identities and personalities. This self-regulation enables students to in-

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<sup>17</sup>In the discourse, it is significant to note that Yang (2009) introduces the concept of “community culture” as a significant influencer of students’ social values. This influence can have both positive and negative effects on their socialization. Striking a balance between the cultural norms of a community and those of the broader society is essential in this context.

<sup>18</sup>According to Settersten and Owens (2002), sociology has two long-standing approaches that explain the dynamics of human interaction within society. The first approach, originating from a theoretical tradition of structural functionalism, underscores the significance of individuals conforming and adapting to the formal and informal norms of the groups and societies to which they belong. This perspective generally assumes a more passive outlook on human life, as it stresses the imposition of social expectations. The second approach, originating from a theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism, examines individual development, specifically regarding the creation of self-concept, through ongoing social interactions. It considers these interactions as dynamic processes in which individuals construct and reconstruct both their self-perception and the social situations they experience.

<sup>19</sup>According to Handel et al. (2007), the primary objective of socialization is to prepare individuals to actively participate in society. Participation, in this context, goes beyond mere conformity or adaptation to social norms; it entails the ability to take actions with social relevance. However, there is no universally accepted criterion for complete and “successful” socialization according to their perspective, as strict adherence to all major values and norms is not always essential. Most individuals deviate from these standards occasionally. Some instances of noncompliance may even be intentional and innovative, potentially leading to social transformation. Illegal or aberrant behavior may evolve over time, challenging and transforming societal norms.

dependently shape their perspectives, rather than being wholly responsive to external social stresses. According to Handel et al. (2007), socialization can be defined as the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge and behaviors required to effectively interact with their society or specific social groups. This multifaceted development is shaped by various social contexts, emotional connections, modes of communication, and interactions with “significant others” over time. Their perspective on socialization emphasizes the importance of gaining a deep understanding and integration within one’s social environment, rather than simply conforming mindlessly. At its core, socialization entails individuals internally regulating or self-regulating their behavior to navigate social interactions and make positive contributions to the broader social order. This capacity for self-regulation is cultivated through interactions with influential individuals in an individual’s life, ultimately equipping them with the essential skills to meaningfully engage in their society. Schools assume a fundamental role as significant agents of socialization, responsible for the transmission of essential knowledge and the inculcation of cultural norms and values.<sup>20</sup> Their mission goes beyond academic instruction, aiming to cultivate intellectually capable individuals of strong moral character. In this context, schools function as essential institutions for instilling positive values, promoting moral awareness, and developing students’ character. Moreover, schools offer guidance to aid students in understanding and aligning with prevailing social norms, while also internalizing broader social values. This multifaceted role underscores the crucial importance of schools in shaping the character and perspective of students (Hu and Qin, 2012).<sup>21</sup>

Xi (2002) emphasizes the concept of political socialization, which involves acquiring political beliefs and behaviors that align with established political systems.<sup>22</sup> This process serves a dual purpose, contributing to national stability and individual development. Families, par-

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<sup>20</sup>Brint (1998) outlines three primary purposes of schooling: transmitting school knowledge, socialization, and sorting individuals into higher or lower-level job roles. This underscores that education goes beyond the mere provision of information or the promotion of literacy. What is taught and how it is taught significantly influences the process of socialization. The knowledge acquired in various schools is a pivotal factor in a child’s integration into society.

<sup>21</sup>In his work, Tillmann (2006) characterizes schools as significant institutions in the socialization process. They stand as the largest and most influential educational institutions with a clear educational mission. Beyond the transmission of knowledge, schools have explicit objectives related to socialization planning and implementation. The educational system is a structured entity that encompasses norms, role expectations, and resources, all designed to facilitate the socialization of the younger generation. Schools not only provide education but also play a role in shaping students’ values, norms, and social skills. Consequently, Tillmann concludes that they contribute to the formation of students’ identities, prepare them for their social responsibilities, and promote their integration into society.

<sup>22</sup>Political socialization, as defined by scholars, is the process through which political values and norms are conveyed from society to its younger members. These young individuals, in response, form their civic identity by interpreting and applying these concepts. The process involves factors such as understanding power distribution, decision-making mechanisms, and civic responsibilities. It significantly influences how young people perceive concepts like social groups, individual rights, and societal responsibilities. Moreover, political socialization entails the development of social and civic affiliations, the shaping of political preferences, the formation of societal attitudes, and the acquisition of relevant skills (Avery, 2002; Wiseman et al., 2011). Political socialization serves as a mechanism for upholding various forms of government by influencing individuals’ attitudes and behaviors to align with the prevailing political system. Additionally, Andersson (2015) introduces the concept of situational political socialization, which departs from traditional views of political learning. It places importance on individuals’ active engagement, emotions, and contextual factors, avoiding rigidity and formality. This approach is rooted in the present, embraces change, and seeks to promote both individual autonomy and societal progress. It adapts to unique circumstances and acknowledges individual agency as a driving force in shaping political beliefs and actions.

ticularly parents, play a pivotal role in political socialization. Children often emulate their parents' political views and attitudes until they form their own. Parents serve as primary role models, imparting a sense of social responsibility while aligning life goals with political interests. Family values are closely connected to societal values, and education has a significant role in guiding political socialization. The ultimate aim is to nurture students' emotional connection to cultural norms and instill an internal commitment to political engagement. To facilitate mutual understanding between schools and parents, educational institutions can involve families in meetings and home visits (Hu and Qin, 2012). By following these principles, schools can strengthen their relationships with families and foster a productive educational environment.

Teachers can employ various methods to foster the skills and abilities of individual students, facilitating their growth and development. These approaches frequently involve promoting peer-to-peer communication and collaboration. These interactions have a significant impact on both the physical and mental growth of students, offering opportunities for self-expression, collaborative projects, and shared goals. In this environment, individuals can engage in open debates, express their unique perspectives, and challenge incomplete conclusions, often more freely than in traditional teacher-student interactions (Liu and Chen, 2003; Zhu, 2004).<sup>23</sup> In her work on cooperative learning and student development, Zhu (2004) underscores the significance of willpower in maintaining innovation, overcoming challenges, and staying focused on objectives. Educators have the capacity to instill valuable attributes in students, such as self-awareness, determination, perseverance, and decisiveness. Zhu places particular emphasis on the importance of perseverance in overcoming challenges and the need for self-control in managing impulses and emotions. Positive classroom experiences and clear teaching methods are foundational for achieving academic growth. Creating a supportive learning environment involves encouraging open communication and demonstrating respect for student perspectives. Zhu also advocates for the integration of dialogic communication methods to foster productive teamwork, self-reflection, inquiry, and development, which can transform the traditional teacher-student dynamic into a more equitable and democratic relationship.

### **Self-education in Chinese schools**

In contemporary China, self-education serves as a bridge between an individual's external environment and their inner world. The strategies employed by educators have the potential to influence how students align their self-constructed realities with societal norms. The practice of self-education in Chinese culture has deep historical roots, including self-critical

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<sup>23</sup>According to Ryan and Powelson (1991), nurturing supportive peer relationships and a sense of belonging within a group can positively impact an individual's well-being. Such peer relationships can play a role in facilitating the internalization of values. Additionally, interactions within peer groups tend to increase the similarity among group members (Ryan, 2000).

methods advocated by Confucius<sup>24</sup> and the promotion of self-awareness by Mengzi.<sup>25</sup> Traditional educational systems have often undervalued self-education, prioritizing the acquisition of objective knowledge through formal educational channels while overlooking personal subjectivity. Scholars argue that self-education can complement formal educational methods (Wang and Huang, 2008). During socialization, students assimilate societal values and norms, whereas self-education involves introspection, proactive intervention, and self-discovery in defining one's role in society. External education primarily emanates from family and educational institutions, while self-education is self-motivated and self-directed. Encouraging individuals to take on the roles of both learners and self-educators promotes personal growth, independence, and the capacity to adapt to societal norms. The cultivation of self-education skills contributes to character development, enhances moral decision-making abilities, and fosters a habit of self-reflection (Wang, 2011). Effective education should encompass not only the external acquisition of knowledge and skills but also their internalization. This process of internalization equips individuals with the ability to make meaningful contributions to society by integrating external and internal knowledge.<sup>26</sup>

Self-education involves the exploration of new subjects and an objective analysis of social norms through self-directed inquiry and structured exploration. This approach promotes extended periods of self-reflection, leading to the reevaluation of established beliefs. The continuous internalization of societal norms, along with internal and external dialogues, plays a pivotal role in shaping an ever-evolving self, influenced by past experiences, knowledge, and cultural expectations.<sup>27</sup> A critical aspect of the self-discovery process, as noted by Gu (2011), involves dealing with role conflicts. Gu identifies two essential interaction processes that contribute to self-discovery: coercion, where external influences shape a student's beliefs, and conflict, arising from the tension between individuality and social norms. Coercion often compels students to conform to prevailing social norms, while conflict arises from the struggle to balance personal growth with the pressures of socialization. Balancing socializa-

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<sup>24</sup>Self-criticism, as viewed through the lens of Confucian philosophy, involves individuals examining their thoughts and behaviors to identify areas where they may have deviated from Confucian moral principles. This practice encourages introspection and self-assessment, with the aim of promoting personal growth and moral development.

<sup>25</sup>In Mengzi's philosophy, self-awareness entails acknowledging and understanding one's inherent moral inclinations. It involves an ongoing effort to nurture and cultivate moral virtues in alignment with Confucian principles. This process is seen as crucial for achieving moral self-improvement and ethical development.

<sup>26</sup>Settersten and Owens (2002) acknowledge that socialization can be examined from various perspectives. Some regard it as a mechanism for social control, imposing constraints on individuals, while others perceive it as a gentle guidance, allowing for personal experiences and diverse life journeys. Regardless of the viewpoint, it is generally accepted that social controls, though often necessary for maintaining social order, can sometimes become overly restrictive for individuals. The life course perspective combines action-oriented and structure-oriented viewpoints by considering lives as actively shaped by individuals and groups within their social contexts. As society undergoes changes, the process of socialization also evolves, transitioning from parental guidance to individual self-discovery, and from internalized social control to self-initiated learning and personal development.

<sup>27</sup>According to Rosenberg (1979), the concept of self is characterized as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings regarding oneself as an object" (p. 07). This concept encompasses an individual's beliefs related to their physical characteristics, personal traits, and socially ascribed identities, such as family, gender, and age. As individuals mature, they also develop achieved identities, which are formed through their actions and experiences. These achieved identities, along with their ascribed identities, collectively contribute to an individual's self-concept and influence how they perceive themselves and their role in the world.

tion and individualization poses a significant challenge within the context of Chinese school education. Educators play a vital role in nurturing students' self-education and self-discovery, which are skills that can be cultivated rather than inherent qualities.

According to Wang (2011), involving students in class leadership roles, cultural and athletic activities, active participation, and class meetings can result in benefits. These advantages include enhanced mutual understanding among students, the recognition of individual talents, and opportunities for personal growth. When students take on leadership roles, it often leads to an increased sense of responsibility, contributing to their self-education and socialization. Educators can employ various pedagogical strategies to nurture class leaders who can improve interpersonal relationships and teamwork. By empowering students to collaboratively establish classroom rules related to areas such as study conditions, cleanliness, and behavior, among others, they can undergo a transformative shift in perspective. This shift involves perceiving rules as principles they have a say in, rather than as external mandates imposed upon them.

Teachers can significantly influence students' abilities to set and pursue their goals, whether inside or outside the classroom. This process serves as a valuable tool for deepening their understanding of their unique qualities and can be tailored to address each student's individual needs, ultimately enhancing their socialization skills. In addition to the academic sphere, students can also benefit from various extracurricular activities available on campus, such as student clubs, interest groups, sports, and youth leagues. These experiences offer valuable opportunities for hands-on learning for Chinese students, which can be particularly advantageous for those facing limited social opportunities due to demanding academic schedules. Participation in such activities contributes to self-discovery and personal development, providing students with a platform to articulate their aspirations and engage in constructive dialogues with peers who share similar interests. This, in turn, fosters critical thinking and reinforces important concepts (Hu and Qin, 2012). According to Li (2003)'s framework, self-education encompasses various interconnected components, including self-knowledge, self-design, self-motivation, self-shaping, and self-improvement. These elements work together to facilitate overall personal growth. Self-study refers to the independent acquisition of knowledge, while self-discipline underscores personal responsibility and rigor. Self-encouragement plays a pivotal role in surmounting challenges, and self-esteem enhances self-awareness and perseverance. Independence within this framework contributes to the development of critical thinking and effective decision-making. Ambition acts as a driving force for ongoing personal development and adaptation to life's various transitional phases through self-directed learning.

### **The role of teachers in education**

Educators' responsibilities, identities, and philosophies have an influence on the moral development of students. Teachers' roles are complex and shaped by cultural norms and the prevailing ideology. They fulfill their responsibilities while being influenced by their personal experiences, societal expectations, and continuous professional growth. Within this

ever-changing context, the role of educators continually evolves and can either reinforce or challenge established moral values, making it a crucial element in the realm of moral education. The identity of educators is a multifaceted and dynamic concept influenced by various internal and external factors. This process encompasses personal and professional dimensions and is of considerable importance in the broader field of education. This identity is flexible and responsive to changes within the educational landscape, enabling the adoption of effective teaching practices. The integration of these dimensions occurs within sociocultural contexts defined by both implicit and explicit values, as well as personal beliefs and societal norms that outline the attributes of an “ideal” teacher. Factors like commitment, self-esteem, agency, and self-efficacy play a significant role in shaping the professional identities and characteristics of educators (Beijaard et al., 2004; Richards, 2021). In the context of moral education, teachers extend their role beyond that of curriculum enforcers to become active participants deeply involved in influencing the outcomes of moral education. This transformative role is shaped by the continuous evolution of their professional identity and the practical teaching methods they employ. The beliefs held by educators serve as a crucial link between broader ideological frameworks and the real-life experiences of students. Teachers in China typically receive a high level of respect and are viewed as knowledgeable authorities, highlighting the significant role they play in the country’s educational landscape, as noted by Ding and Sun (2007).

The development of a teacher’s identity is influenced by a variety of factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, educational background, as well as sociocultural, political, economic, and institutional pressures. These factors collectively contribute to shaping the moral education strategies and approaches employed by educators, as demonstrated in studies by scholars such as Hao (2011) and Li (2022). Successfully integrating moral education into the existing ideological context requires teachers to respond objectively to socio-cultural, political, and institutional pressures. Understanding navigational strategies can be gained by recognizing the fluidity of teacher identity formation while considering students’ diverse experiences. The process of becoming an educator in China’s educational context is closely tied to the development of one’s identity. It involves not only the transmission of knowledge and pedagogical skills but also the cultivation of overarching beliefs and self-understanding. These beliefs play a crucial role in shaping a teacher’s approach to their role and provide insight into the kind of educator they aspire to be, as noted by Capps et al. (2012). Teachers navigate a dynamic range of role identities when determining their place as a “teacher” amongst other potential roles, such as “colleague” (Beijaard, 2019). This complex system of role identity is influenced by their beliefs about existence and knowledge, self-perception, goals, and sense of agency. Shifts in teacher role identity have the potential to influence other aspects of an individual’s identity, ultimately resulting in either cohesion or conflict. In China’s educational context, the evolution of teacher identities is closely intertwined with shifts in national education policy. Studies suggest that Chinese educators undergo unique identity journeys influenced by a combination of personal experiences, educational theories, values, and interpersonal relationships, particularly with school leaders and colleagues. The level of agency, or the capacity to understand alterations in policy and integrate them into the development of one’s profes-

sional identity, differs among educators.

Drawing on Ye and Zhao (2019)'s framework for comprehending the development of teacher identity, it is important to consider the multifaceted dimensions that encompass personal, interpersonal, and institutional realms. Various factors interact within and across these levels, yielding both linear and reciprocal outcomes. Institutional factors, including the regulatory, normative, and cultural policy context, shape teachers' perceptions of their roles and values (Scott, 2008). According to Beijaard et al. (2000), school leaders also play a crucial role in shaping teacher identities by influencing school culture and policy implementation. Personal factors, such as gender, teaching experience, and life experiences, also impact educators' belief systems and their sense of agency. Sachs (2005) further asserts that teacher identities serve as a framework for educators to define their roles within the education landscape and society. These identities have an influential impact on their behaviors and values. Research suggests that educators who participate in curriculum development often feel a greater sense of control and effectiveness in their roles. Depending on their adaptability to specific educational contexts, educators may take on various roles, such as curriculum transmitters, developers, or creators. Active involvement in curriculum development has profound implications for shaping their professional identity and increasing their professional awareness (Zhu and Shu, 2017; Shower, 2010). In the context of moral education, curriculum development holds particular significance as it influences the content and teaching methods related to ethical principles. When educators actively engage in curriculum development, they improve their ability to align moral education with the prevailing ideological context.

Understanding how teacher training prepares educators to engage with curriculum development provides valuable insights into the initial phases of their professional identity formation. Research highlights the concept of teacher agency, signifying their proactive role in shaping working conditions, which is a significant factor affecting the quality of education (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley, 2011). This marks a departure from previous decades when strict curriculum mandates and rigorous evaluations aimed to restrict teacher autonomy. Teacher beliefs can significantly influence the decision-making process in the classroom and the implementation of moral education (Pajares, 1992; Meirink et al., 2009). Evolving teacher identities, influenced by institutional policies and cultural norms, impact their capacity to bridge curriculum mandates with the practical realities of students' lives. Their role in interpreting policies and customizing pedagogical approaches is essential in addressing this challenge. Traditional learning models are undergoing significant changes due to the emergence of the concept of student agency. This shift towards student-centered learning highlights the crucial role of active student involvement in their academic journey, in contrast to previous teacher-centered instructional models with passive student participation. While educators still have a vital role in shaping the learning environment and facilitating the learning process (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011), recent research indicates that Chinese students' identities are evolving, and they are more inclined to collaborate with educators as active partners in higher education (e.g. Liang et al., 2020; Dai and Matthews, 2023). Furthermore, in the traditional teacher-student-parent relationship, teachers historically held exclusive authority.

However, evolving societal dynamics, particularly within China's market-driven economy, have resulted in a restructuring of power dynamics. Parents are progressively viewing teachers as service providers rather than unquestionable authorities. This shift is bringing about substantial changes in the dynamics of their relationships and has significant implications for how teachers fulfill their roles and associated responsibilities, as analyzed by Ye et al. (2022).

China's education system places significant importance on promoting teachers' morality and ethical behavior, as evident in official documents and education laws. These regulations extend beyond legal requirements and demonstrate a profound dedication to nurturing a passion for teaching, facilitating student development, and exemplifying positive societal roles. Additionally, these policies underscore the significance of teachers' steadfast commitment to the People's Republic of China and the Communist Party of China. They highlight educators' responsibilities to impart knowledge and support students, ultimately serving society and making substantial contributions to its betterment (Chinese Government, 2018a). Teacher ethics are built upon altruistic motivations, characterized by a genuine concern for students and a strong sense of teaching responsibility. This integration is further reinforced by the broader societal respect for the teaching profession, which includes tangible incentives such as financial rewards and higher professional status in the field of education. While teachers in China have diverse experiences, the formation of their professional identities often centers around common themes. The principles outlined in the *Teacher Law of the People's Republic of China* play a pivotal role in this process. This statute highlights teachers' dual roles as both educators and subject matter specialists, showcasing their ability to integrate state policies into their professional personas. In the vast and dynamic context of China, where policies carry immense symbolic significance, educators demonstrate their proficiency in interpreting policies with discretion. Consequently, the stability of teachers' identities emerges from the intricate interplay between their individual agency and the structural factors present in the Chinese education system. These factors encompass policy directives and cultural norms, both of which play vital roles in shaping teachers' professional identities.

#### 4.2.2 Ideal types in moral education and the construction of “ideal” citizens

Ideal types can serve as valuable tools for understanding the prevalent ideology and values that have a significant impact on curricula, teaching methods, and education in China. Exploring the dynamic relationship between ideal types and moral education provides insights into the complex process of integrating moral values into Chinese society. Furthermore, the concept of the “ideal” Chinese citizen is ever-evolving and influenced by a range of historical, cultural, and political factors.<sup>28</sup> This perception of an “ideal” citizen may vary across different

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<sup>28</sup>It is important to note that China is a multi-ethnic country, known as “duo minzu guojia” (多民族国家), due to the presence of various ethnic groups within its borders. The Chinese government is committed to officially recognizing and safeguarding the rights of the diverse ethnic minorities living in the country. This recognition and protection are integral components of China's official policy. In the curriculum standards of Morality and the Rule of Law (2022 edition), there is limited focus on the history of multi-ethnicity. However, it is mandated that students should have knowledge of China being a unified multi-ethnic country with 56 ethnic groups (“知道我国是一个统一的多民族国家，了解我国有 56 个民族”). This knowledge is typically introduced to students during primary school as part of a lecture. In the later stages of compulsory education, particularly



social groups, and it remains adaptable in response to changing social and global dynamics in the era of globalization. One essential question is then how ideology, and particularly moral education, construct ideal types that are meant to serve as models for individuals to aspire to. To address this question, it is important to outline the characteristics evident in the literature, official policy documents, and curriculum standards for the related subject Morality and the Rule of Law. This framework allows for an examination of the contemporary “ideal” traits of a Chinese citizen and how the educational system aims to impart these ideals to students across China. This overview of ideal types and the “ideal” characteristics that arise from moral education underscores their interrelated nature. It also highlights that in China, the portrayal of “ideal” citizens through policy documents and moral education initiatives is a purposeful effort to guide students towards these ideals.

### **The role of ideal types in moral education**

While ideal types offer valuable insights, the way they are put into practice among Chinese students in real-world scenarios may exhibit variations. The analysis underlines a crucial insight – these ideal types are more likely to be interconnected constructs rather than distinct entities. This perspective provides a nuanced view of how multifaceted influences shape moral education in China and underscores the significance of investigating their complex interplay. These ideal types demonstrate how existing literature and party leadership shape ideal types and the attributes they exhibit in moral education classes. Several notable types emerge:

#### **(1) The Patriotic Citizen**

In this ideal type, students are imbued with a strong sense of national consciousness and patriotism, which is actively promoted through deep identification with the Chinese nation and commitment to its improvement. The Communist Party of China plays a vital role in cultivating this sense of identification with Chinese culture and the country via channels such as moral education in schools or the media and state propaganda. Students are encouraged to develop an appreciation for China’s multicultural heritage and historical accomplishments, while instilling a sense of pride in their national identity. The emphasis is on cultivating patriotism and a commitment to the common good, aligning with social values linked to collectivism, socialism, and party leadership. School activities, like flag-raising ceremonies, are often implemented to foster a sense of national identity among students (e.g. Guo, 2014; Halstead and Zhu, 2012).

#### **(2) The Traditional Guardian**

In this ideal type, traditional cultural values and norms are strongly emphasized, with a particular focus on respect for older generations, fulfillment of family obligations, and preservation of Chinese traditions. The Communist Party of China is credited with fostering this ideal type and encourages students to uphold cultural continuity and safeguard China’s rich

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in secondary school, students learn about national rights, how to protect them, and how to maintain unity. While there is not an explicit emphasis on the multi-ethnic nature of the country, the curriculum standards contain several references to 中华民族 (zhonghua minzu), which can be translated as Chinese people which includes a collective reference to all ethnic groups in China (Ministry of Education, 2022b).

cultural heritage. Additionally, individuals are expected to exhibit a profound appreciation for the nation's cultural accomplishments and extensive historical heritage while operating within this framework. The Ministry of Education implements this approach by integrating revolutionary traditional culture with contemporary history in moral education classes through various means (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2001b,c).

### (3) The Community Caretaker

In this ideal type, fostering a commitment to building strong social communities, such as families, neighborhoods, or work groups, is emphasized. Within this ideal type, the influence of the Communist Party of China encourages students to demonstrate empathy towards others and proactively engage in social activities and volunteer efforts aimed at enhancing community well-being. This type prioritizes the common good over individual interests and advocates for values such as social harmony, mutual support, and a sense of responsibility to the community. It is consistent with China's focus on enhancing group cohesion and maintaining social stability. Moral education classes reflect this approach by structuring lessons that progress from the local to the broader social context, emphasizing community and societal values (e.g. Jing, 2022).

### (4) The Innovative and Self-Reflective Citizen

In this context, the focus is on nurturing individuals who prioritize creativity, critical thinking, and innovative capabilities. Students are encouraged to acknowledge the complexity of moral decision-making and to recognize that ethical choices often necessitate careful consideration and self-reflection. The moral education course guides students to question traditional values and norms, as well as encourages them to explore innovative solutions to social challenges. This underscores the importance of critical thinking in the potential enhancement of current social structures and norms. Innovative ideas and social innovation are seen as key drivers of social progress and positive change. Those who embody this ideal consistently scrutinize their motivations, biases, and intentions to ensure that their actions align with their values. Moral education classes facilitate the development of these attributes through critical thinking tasks that enhance students' abilities to question presented facts (e.g. Yang, 2022; Li et al., 2004; Costello, 1995; Li and Wang, 2015).

### (5) The Ambitious Citizen

In this ideal type, students are shaped by the influence of the Communist Party of China to exhibit characteristics such as ambition, strong work ethics, and a drive for personal achievement and social recognition. The educational system and society at large endorse specific moral values that individuals identify with profoundly. Consequently, they display heightened motivation to pursue their objectives and are dedicated to personal and professional growth. The educational system highlights attributes like diligence, determination, and individual success as fundamental aspects of responsible citizenship (e.g. Westheimer and Kahne, 2004).

## Characteristics of an “ideal” citizen in China

The traits associated with the “ideal” Chinese citizen, as outlined below, are drawn from the literature and official policy documents previously discussed. These traits represent the contemporary *constructed* concept of the “ideal” citizen, with certain attributes to aspire to, some of which are readily apparent while others are more nuanced and incorporated into moral education programs within the Chinese educational system. This synthesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of moral education and its profound impact on the development of individuals in China. It underscores the importance of reevaluating existing paradigms and adopting a holistic perspective that takes into account the intricate interplay between education, societal norms, and the evolving ideological framework.

### (1) Sense of Discipline and Work Ethic

The expected traits of an ideal citizen or student in China include a strong emphasis on discipline and a solid work ethic. Attributes such as diligence, perseverance, and hard work are highly regarded for their potential to contribute to academic achievement and personal development. Educators typically emphasize the importance of students committing themselves to their studies and persisting in the face of challenges as a means to attain success. The value of hard work is instilled from an early age, with parents, teachers, and society at large encouraging students to pursue academic excellence diligently. Furthermore, students are encouraged to acquire knowledge earnestly and participate in friendly competition with their peers, with criteria like ambition, hard work, and dedication playing a central role (e.g. Xi, 2018).

### (2) Ethical Values and Moral Integrity

The expected traits of an ideal citizen or student further revolve around the adherence to ethical values, moral integrity, and a sense of social responsibility. Citizens or students are required to exemplify virtues like honesty, respect for authority, and empathy towards others. Furthermore, they are encouraged to conform to social norms, promote good character, and actively contribute to the progress of society. It is important to recognize that individual value orientations can play a role in shaping future social values. Thus, it is crucial for students to embrace and practice fundamental values as guiding principles. This entails the ability to differentiate between right and wrong and make ethical decisions. Integrity, diligence, sincerity, and honesty are highly valued. To act conscientiously, one must bridge the gap between knowledge and action, effectively translating core values into moral principles (e.g. Xi, 2018; CPC Central Committee, 2019a; Ministry of Education, 2017d).

### (3) Patriotism and National Identity

The notion of ideal citizens and students is closely tied to a strong sense of patriotism and national identity. This encompasses a deep love for their country and a profound loyalty to the Chinese nation. Such sentiments give rise to a strong sense of pride in their Chinese identity and motivate them to actively contribute to their nation’s development. The Chinese education system places significant emphasis on educating students about the nation’s his-

tory, including historical events, notable figures, and their global contributions. To promote this sense of patriotism, the Chinese government organizes patriotic education campaigns and encourages student involvement in activities that showcase their love for the country. These activities may include flag-raising ceremonies, singing the national anthem, and participating in patriotic events. The overarching goal of these initiatives is to nurture a collective spirit that reinforces the unity and cohesion of the Chinese nation, while also cultivating a sense of pride and responsibility among citizens. Additionally, students are encouraged to dedicate themselves to their country and serve the people (e.g. Xi, 2018; Halstead and Zhu, 2012).<sup>29</sup>

#### (4) Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

The concept of an ideal citizen or student entails the ability to think independently, objectively analyze information, and apply knowledge to real-world situations. This aligns with the nation's advancement in various fields, emphasizing the importance of individuals equipped with critical thinking, innovation, and adaptability to navigate the constantly evolving global landscape. In recent times, the Chinese education system has underscored the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Citizens and students are encouraged to maintain a sense of curiosity, open-mindedness, and a willingness to explore various perspectives. They are also expected to question assumptions, challenge longstanding beliefs, and seek evidence-based solutions to complex issues. To promote active participation and independent thinking, educators may consider adapting their teaching methods accordingly (e.g. Arthur et al., 2008).

#### (5) Leadership and Social Engagement

The concept of an ideal student or citizen involves the demonstration of leadership skills, proficiency in teamwork, and a strong commitment to social causes. Chinese education places significant emphasis on fostering teamwork and collaboration from an early age. Students are encouraged to work together toward common goals, with group projects and extracurricular activities integrated into the curriculum. This emphasis on collectivism extends beyond the classroom and permeates various aspects of Chinese society. Furthermore, Chinese educational institutions provide opportunities for students to develop their leadership abilities through various activities, including participation in student councils, involvement in volunteering groups, and attendance at leadership seminars. The overarching goal of Chinese education is to cultivate leadership qualities in individuals, enabling them to inspire and influence others, make well-informed decisions, and take the initiative in addressing societal issues. In addition to academic knowledge, students are encouraged to prioritize the values

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<sup>29</sup>In the Morality and Rule of Law curriculum standards (2022 edition), the term *gongmin* is utilized to reflect on national identity. Examples of this can be seen in “提高公民道德修养和法治素养” (improve citizens' moral accomplishment and legal literacy), “认识公民的内涵, 了解公民的权利和义务” (understand the connotation of citizens and understand the rights and obligations of citizens) or “社会的好公民” (good citizens of society). On the other hand, the term *renmin* is used more broadly when referring to institutions and educators, as is demonstrated in the proposed guiding thinking “以人民为中心, 扎根中国大地办教育” (take the people as the center and take root in China to run education) and other similar examples such as “了解中国共产党带领中国人民进行革命” (understand that the Chinese Communist Party leads the Chinese people in revolution) or “具有为人民服务的奉献精神” (dedication to serving the people) (own translations based on Ministry of Education (2022b)).

of individuals, their nation, and the global community. Understanding their responsibilities to society is considered imperative (e.g. Xi, 2018).

### 4.3 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the process of instilling moral values and norms was explored, highlighting its crucial role in shaping social behavior and establishing social standards in society. The chapter mainly focused on the examination of ideology, guiding norms and “ideal” traits, which is intimately connected with moral education in China. The objective was to illuminate how CPC ideology significantly impacts the social perception of morality. With this analysis of the educational process, it became clear that certain moral values become firmly ingrained in the collective consciousness. These values are viewed as universally accepted and essential to ethical behavior. In contrast, alternative moral values may be marginalized, labeled as deviant, or even entirely rejected. This underscores the important role of ideology in delineating moral boundaries within Chinese society and further stresses the challenges educators encounter in conforming their pedagogical strategies to a pre-established and constructed CPC-framework that governs behavior.

China’s socio-political context is shaped by a multifaceted ideology grounded in the principles of Marxism-Leninism. General Secretary Xi Jinping’s perspectives on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and Mao Zedong Thought adhere closely to this ideology and it further draws from various sources, such as Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of the Three Represents, and Hu Jintao’s concept of “scientific development”. At its core, these ideological principles aim to achieve the Chinese dream (as proposed by General Secretary Xi Jinping) and emphasize the creation of a harmonious society. This ideological framework significantly shapes the establishment of ideal types and guiding norms, which, in turn, play a crucial role in shaping social behaviors and individual conduct. These guiding norms set the stage for the social context in which individuals operate, creating expectations and behaviors that influence various aspects of life. They encompass a range of ideals, such as patriotism, national identity, collectivism, the promotion of socialist core values, respect for authority, and the pursuit of educational excellence. These guiding norms define the moral landscape of Chinese society by outlining acceptable ethical behavior. Moral education, primarily undergone by Chinese students in the process of socialization, is a fundamental component of this ethical environment. It leads to the emergence of specific “ideal” categories associated with moral education, instilling particular traits and attributes considered desirable for an “ideal” Chinese citizen. These characteristics are closely intertwined with the ideological principles and established norms promoted by the Chinese government and educational institutions. The intricate relationship between ideology, moral education, and the cultivation of an “ideal” citizen offers insights into the various dimensions of moral development and its profound impact on individuals and society.

CPC ideology holds a central role in shaping individuals’ moral knowledge, norms, and identities in the realm of moral education in China. This influence operates across different aspects of the educational system in multifaceted ways, such as forming the foundational

framework for developing curricula and educational materials. Government directives underscore the importance of instilling core values in the education system, based on prevailing ideological principles. These moral norms deemed significant by the authorities are deliberately integrated into educational content to promote patriotism, socialism, and deep-rooted Chinese cultural values among students. This alignment between ideology and education is a conscious effort to convey essential values. The impact of ideological principles on educational methods and pedagogical approaches ensures that teaching practices align with government objectives. This alignment aims to cultivate students' loyalty to both the government and the ruling party while shaping their national identity. Teachers play a significant role in imparting the government's ideology and promoting the adoption of these values. However, strict adherence to ideological principles can impede critical thinking, particularly on sensitive issues. In upholding certain ideological beliefs, there is a risk of suppressing alternative perspectives which could reduce the diversity of moral viewpoints within the educational realm. Furthermore, teachers face the challenge of aligning their own perspectives with official views, which may require them to disregard diverse perspectives that students may present. This is done to promote a pre-determined outlook on life based on ideological principles established by the Communist Party of China. The relationship between ideology and moral education is complex, as it is intricately linked with political, cultural, and historical factors. As China undergoes significant social and political change, this dynamic relationship may evolve, reflecting the overall trajectory of the country's progress.

The concept of an "ideal" Chinese citizen is complex and influenced by China's lengthy history, rich culture, and ever-changing political landscape. These perceptions of the "ideal" citizen can evolve over time and may vary from diverse perspectives. Historically, Confucian values have played a crucial part in shaping the notion of an "ideal" Chinese citizen, highlighting virtues, ethical character, and social harmony. According to Confucian thought, the "ideal" Chinese citizen was expected to embody principles which include filial piety, respect for authority, benevolence, and strict adherence to social norms. However, the concept of an "ideal" citizen has transformed due to political and social changes. The Communist Party of China's ideology became more prominent after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This ideology emphasizes values including absolute Party loyalty, patriotism, unwavering commitment to the common good, and adherence to socialist principles. The perspectives on the "ideal" citizen may vary across different segments of Chinese society, and are further complicated by the influences of globalization. In contemporary China, the "ideal" citizen, attained via moral education, integrates conventional and contemporary principles, all of which are guided by CPC ideology. This underscores the distinctive attributes of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

## Chapter 5

### Field Study on the Example of Schools in Beijing

Before China's reform and opening-up policy, moral education focused mainly on transmitting knowledge and political ideologies while disregarding the individual needs of students. This fostered a culture of strict obedience that emphasized unquestioning adherence to authority. In contrast, the Ministry of Education has made significant changes to its approach to moral education, placing strong emphasis on instilling moral standards like patriotism, adherence to the law, and unity among students. The overarching goal of education now revolves around achieving national prosperity, promoting the happiness of the people, and cultivating and practicing socialist core values. Furthermore, education is viewed as a method to equip the next generation to contribute to the rejuvenation of the nation. These revisions of education curriculum standards aim to diminish the disparity between theoretical concepts and practical implementation in moral education and address the often-neglected obstacles hindering the effective execution of these policies.

China's educational system is grounded in the transmission of political ideologies, moral doctrines, and social conventions that are officially endorsed. This approach shapes students' realities, values, attitudes, and overall worldviews to a considerable extent. Despite this, the heavy emphasis on gaining objective knowledge sometimes leads to neglecting the unique needs of individual students, which may result in overlooking their personal perspectives and values. As a result, this may inhibit the growth of critical thinking in relation to the principles instilled in individuals. Traditionally, Chinese teachers have been expected to provide objective solutions to ethical and moral dilemmas without much consideration for students' personal opinions or interpretations. This method rarely fosters independent moral judgment among students. In the broader context of educational reform in China, the primary objective is to meet the perceived social needs of Chinese culture and discover relevant solutions within this particular cultural and ideological framework. However, it is essential to recognize that Chinese schools have often fallen short in providing students with the requisite autonomy and opportunities for independent thought. This constraint can be attributed in part to the entrenched authority of teachers who, historically, have encouraged indoctrination and inflexible instructional practices. Although Chinese teachers are striving to overcome challenges to implementing updated curriculum changes and transitioning to a more innovative educational perspective, emphasizing the "right" answer remains a common phenomenon. This approach disregards students' moral development efforts, highlighting the demand for a fairer and learner-focused moral education approach in China, which would enhance the formation of individual worldviews, promotes critical thinking, and encourages autonomy in the development of moral and ethical reasoning.

## 5.1 Insights from textbook analysis: Moral Education perspectives

Central to the process of understanding moral and legal issues, fostering personal and social growth is the *Morality and the Rule of Law* course. The course is designed to meet the evolving needs of society and the developmental stages of students. The curriculum standards of 2022 prioritize the cultivation of individuals with a strong moral foundation, accomplished through the development of five core competencies: political identity, moral cultivation, concept of the rule of law, sound personality, and a sense of responsibility. Primary schools provide students with a comprehensive set of instructional materials consisting of twelve volumes, with two designated for each grade level. Secondary school students have access to six volumes, with two books for each grade. The analysis conforms to the 2022 curriculum standards, which prioritize the unification of the *Morality and the Rule of Law* course, departing from the prior model of utilizing three separate subjects. This assessment aims to determine the degree to which the present curriculum standards fit the available textbooks. The focus is to illuminate the advantages and drawbacks of policy implementations and the obstacles confronted by educators in aligning curriculum standards with supplied teaching materials. This examination primarily concentrates on the first and last stage of compulsory education and is grounded on the academic qualities outlined in the curriculum standards, which were not presented in prior versions of the curriculum standards.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1.1 Building foundations: Textbooks for grade one and two

In Chinese primary education, the Ministry of Education focuses on the cultivation of students' moral sentiments, the inculcation of core national values, and the development of their capability to analyze moral principles. The primary education curriculum emphasizes the significance of rules, discipline, and courtesy, and delves into critical aspects of Chinese society, such as the functions of the Communist Party of China, socialism, and the role of the collective. This educational approach aims to provide students with the skills and values necessary to actively contribute to the socialist framework. The curriculum is strategically designed to be relevant to students' lives, covering a range of topics including personal relationships, family dynamics, social interactions, national identity, and global perspectives. The structure employs a spiral approach, ensuring a gradual deepening of subject matter and the acquisition of corresponding skills as students advance through the primary school level.

#### Main topics covered in each grade of compulsory education's first stage

During the early years of primary education in China, the *Morality and Rule of Law* curriculum plays a vital role in shaping the moral and ethical foundations of young learners. As

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<sup>1</sup>For an informative analysis of textbooks used in China and Taiwan during the 1950s and 1990s, see Fairbrother (2004) who showed that curricula were designed to serve national interests, rather than social ones. Furthermore, Tse and Zhang (2017) analyzed the role models portrayed in primary school moral education textbooks from 1999 to 2005.



they transition from kindergarten to a structured academic environment, the curriculum concentrates on fundamental skills such as personality development, behavioral norms, positive habits, understanding of rules and responsibilities, and their practical implementation in daily life. In first grade, the focus is on personal development and adjusting to the school environment. Second graders, in contrast, delve into more intricate moral ideas pertaining to public spaces, environmental preservation, and community involvement, laying the groundwork for their primary school years.

In the first textbook, the Morality and Rule of Law course covers four main topics: “I am a primary school student”, “Happy campus life”, “Safety and health at home”, and “It’s cold and warm”.<sup>2</sup> The primary objective of the initial unit is to foster a positive attitude and pride in students as they begin their education. This unit centers on establishing fundamental principles, arranging school materials, and cultivating self-care practices. The unit prioritizes the development of social skills, fostering friendships, and understanding the support offered by teachers. Initially, safety awareness is introduced, covering potential hazards during the journey to school and basic traffic regulations. The second unit introduces students to various aspects of school life, including orienting them to the school’s physical layout, buildings, and facilities. Students will learn about school discipline, bell schedules, break times, and appropriate classroom behavior. The third unit focuses on family life by addressing home safety, respect for elders, kindness to younger family members, courtesy, and healthy habits within the family. Lastly, the final unit will explore environmental changes while also promoting a love for nature. Students learn about seasonal transitions and develop a positive outlook towards them while taking part in New Year celebrations with blessings. The textbook features photographs that portray the diverse cultures’ New Year festivities, advancing cultural awareness among the students.

The second textbook of the first grade covers the main topics of “My good habit”, “Me and nature”, “I love my home”, and “We are together”.<sup>3</sup> These themes build upon the foundational principles established in the first textbook, with the first unit focusing on promoting healthy growth in students. It prioritizes teaching students about good living habits, personal hygiene, and promoting healthy habits throughout their lifetime. The second unit shifts the focus towards nature and environmental conservation and educates students about the significance of protecting the natural environment and understanding its interconnection. The inclusion of actual photographs within instructional materials assists in conveying the importance of appreciating animals and understanding the origins of diverse resources. Unit three serves as a connection between individual development and familial existence. It instructs students on how to apply learned insights and routines to household situations, such as cleaning and the upkeep of healthy lifestyle habits. Additionally, students will delve into their family history, strengthening familial connections and solidifying their sense of identity. The fourth unit focuses on communal living, highlighting the advantages of shared experiences, the cultivation of social skills through peer interaction, the necessity of orderliness, and the importance of seeking assistance when required. This unit expands students’ comprehension of moral ed-

<sup>2</sup>The original is: 我是小学生啦，校园生活真快乐，家中的安全与健康，天气虽冷有温暖。

<sup>3</sup>The original is: 我的好习惯，我和大自然，我爱我家，我们在一起。

ucation beyond the individual and familial realms, underscoring their participation within a wider communal framework.

The four main units of the first textbook of the second grade are “Our holidays”, “Our class”, “We are in public places”, and “Where we live”.<sup>4</sup> These units emphasize the students’ collective roles in various aspects of life, shifting the focus from individual development. The first unit teaches students about the importance of holidays and managing leisure time. The unit also introduces students to national events, such as the National Day and the Mid-Autumn Festival, fostering a sense of Chinese identity through knowledge of cultural symbols and traditions. Emphasis is placed on collective participation in and celebration of these cultural events. The second unit underscores the significance of the class as a cohesive group. Students learn the importance of following class rules and the advantages of working together. They fulfill class duties, such as the student on duty role, and help maintain the classroom environment. This unit highlights the notion that students jointly contribute to their class’s welfare. In unit three the focus moves towards the wider community and public areas. Here, students learn about responsible citizenship, the maintenance of public property, and the necessity of adhering to rules in public spaces. Teachers provide clear explanations and relevant examples that aid in students’ comprehension of rules and their benefits. The objective is to instill a sense of accountability for communal areas and cultivate awareness of community norms and regulations. The fourth unit aims to cultivate students’ appreciation for the diverse backgrounds of their peers and the contributions of hardworking citizens to the country. By exploring the multifaceted nature of their living environment, students gain a broader perspective and develop respect for their community.

The four main units of the second textbook of the second grade are “Let me try”, “Let us have some fun”, “Little green guard”, and “I will try hard”.<sup>5</sup> Its objective is to cultivate positive life attitudes, bolster comprehension of community life, enhance environmental consciousness, and foster personal development among students. The first unit encourages students to confront challenges with bravery, adopt a positive attitude, and acknowledge the repercussions of their conduct on others. This unit centers on cultivating a resilient mindset and stressing the significance of persistence in overcoming obstacles. It emphasizes that individual actions can impact the collective welfare of the community. Transitioning to the second unit, the textbook highlights cooperation and harmonious interactions amid students while participating in traditional games. This unit not only fosters the value of teamwork, but also encourages inventive peer relationships. It reinforces the idea that collaborative play can lead to shared enjoyment and positive social experiences. The third unit focuses on environmental protection and responsible resource use. Students learn about water conservation and paper production, among other topics. This unit equips students with practical skills for sustainable living and encourages them to make informed choices regarding resource consumption. The final unit encourages students to embrace challenges and persevere in their pursuits while emphasizing responsible environmental citizenship for future generations. Throughout the unit, students explore their unique learning styles, develop problem-solving skills, and learn

<sup>4</sup>The original is: 我们的节假日, 我们的班级, 我们在公共场所, 我们生活的地方.

<sup>5</sup>The original is: 让我试试看, 我们好好玩, 绿色小卫士, 我会努力的.

the importance of determination in overcoming obstacles. The underlying message is that personal growth and success are attainable through effort and resilience.

### **Academic qualities for first and second grade curriculum standards**

The curriculum standards for Morality and the Rule of Law outline the academic qualities for students who have completed the second grade that guide teachers to ensure that students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. While moral development is vital during the first stage of primary education, the other core competencies also hold critical significance in the first two grades. By the end of the second grade, students ought to possess a comprehensive array of knowledge, expertise, and competencies that will serve as a basis for their continued growth and advancement throughout their education.<sup>6</sup> The analysis aims to match the academic qualities of the curriculum with relevant textbook topics to investigate their dissemination to students. The objective is to provide comprehensive organization, and as such, the identified subjects will be summarized under an appropriate heading. The assessment considers whether current textbooks cover all necessary aspects.

- Be able to give the full name of China; know that the national flag, national anthem, and national emblem are symbols of the country; know the origin and meaning of major traditional programs; have a sense of pride as a Chinese; be able to identify road traffic and traffic signs; have a certain sense of security (political identity, concept of rule of law).
- be able to respect the national flag, sing the national anthem and the Young Pioneers' anthem of China with affection (political identity).

#### (1) Political Identity and National Pride

The textbooks, particularly in first grade, utilize lively and captivating methods to instill a feeling of national pride. This is achieved through highlighting the importance of national symbols, including the flag, anthem, and emblem.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, this establishes a strong association between young learners and their Chinese heritage at an early age. The incorporation of activities such as flag salutations and anthem singing has a twofold purpose: fostering national pride while improving students' focus and listening skills. Additionally, the inclusion of references to organizations like the Young Pioneers<sup>8</sup>, accompanied by encouragement for student involvement by presenting the characteristics and habits, bolsters their political identity and sense of belonging within Chinese society.

#### (2) Cultural Awareness and Appreciation

The second-grade textbook emphasizes traditional Chinese festivals, which enhances students' cultural awareness and pride in their heritage. The integration of visual aids, such as

<sup>6</sup>The original Chinese description of the academic qualities for the first two grades can be found in the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Morality and the Rule of Law (2022 Edition)* (p. 44).

<sup>7</sup>The textbook covers Chinese customs and basic information, including the founding of the People's Republic of China. These topics are presented under headings such as "We have spirit" (我们有精神) and "This place is special" (这个地方很特别).

<sup>8</sup>In order to motivate students to participate in the organization, expressions such as "be a good student" (做个好学生) are used.

pictures, makes the content more accessible and engaging, leading to a better understanding of China's national symbols and their cultural significance. The focus is particularly on the National Day<sup>9</sup>, the Autumn Festival and the Chinese New Year. The study of various regions and customs in China's textbooks provides students with a comprehensive understanding of urban and rural characteristics, resulting in greater recognition and appreciation of the country's diverse ethnic and cultural features.<sup>10</sup>

### (3) Safety Consciousness

The textbooks cover crucial topics, including traffic regulations, safety, and self-protection, necessary for ensuring student safety and well-being. Teachers have a vital role in guiding students to comprehend and apply concepts related to caution, punctuality, and traffic safety. Interactive training and practical scenarios integrated into the classes aim to impart students with a profound understanding of the significance of maintaining safety and order in group activities. The second textbook equips students with essential skills to predict and respond to hazardous situations, allowing them to effectively handle unexpected events and provide assistance in dangerous circumstances.<sup>11</sup> These textbooks equip students with essential safety skills, including interpreting safety signals and responding appropriately to hazardous situations. As a result, improved well-being and conscientious behavior are the ultimate outcomes.

- Be able to combine personal and school life; to analyze one's own progress; to act in accordance with the requirements of correct behavior; to have a quality of good will; to know reasonable methods for the regulation of negative emotions (moral cultivation, sound personality).

### (1) Moral Cultivation

The first-grade textbook intends to cultivate students' moral judgment by helping them distinguish between right and wrong. The textbook covers basic topics like politeness, honesty, and public order, promoting ethical behavior from an early stage. Additionally, students are given assignments to evaluate their behavior during school hours and breaks, inspiring self-reflection and moral development as they ponder over their actions.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the course materials explore topics such as hygiene and healthy habits, aiming to enhance students' understanding of personal responsibility and well-being. These lessons instill values that foster their overall character development.

### (2) Personality Development

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<sup>9</sup>For this occasion, the textbook presents a concise historical overview of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, accompanied by relevant visuals including photographs of Mao Zedong, and elaborates on customs practiced during this festival.

<sup>10</sup>As previously stated, the curriculum guidelines do not directly mention “多民族国家”. Nonetheless, primary schools do cover topics related to minorities (民族) - particularly in the early years - to provide students with a better understanding of the diverse origins within the Chinese population.

<sup>11</sup>The textbooks employ a stimulating and enjoyable approach to educate students about hazardous situations by utilizing visuals of family members and peers, as well as interactive charts. This helps students comprehend and construct knowledge effectively.

<sup>12</sup>The distinction between good and bad is a recurring theme in early primary education. They are covered under headlines such as “Is this a good idea?”, “Is this right?”, “Is this good?”, “Is it good to play like this?”, or “Is it good to eat like this?” (这样做好不好, 这样做对吗, 这样做好吗?, 这样玩好吗?, 这样吃好吗?) Pictures will guide through these activities, depicting various behaviors.

The second-grade textbook prioritizes personality development by establishing a sense of interconnectedness in communities through family bonds and collaborative teamwork. It encourages self-reflection and highlights individual strengths and weaknesses to promote positive behaviors and foster personal growth. Teachers play an essential role in guiding students to develop a range of learning strategies, establish self-discipline in daily routines, and build self-confidence. These skills lead to adaptable and emotionally resilient individuals who can make a positive impact on their communities.

### (3) Emotional Expression

The second-grade textbook focuses on the cultivation of emotional expression. Within this lectures, several activities are integrated, including the encouragement of students to reflect on their vacation experiences and express their feelings with classmates.<sup>13</sup> This promotes personal expression and the development of active listening skills. The textbook presents the concept of happiness and its impact on mood, providing practical strategies for students to enhance their well-being and manage emotions in both personal and social contexts.

- Be able to explain the concept of socialist core values; recount the deeds of the older generation of proletarian revolutionaries and famous heroic and exemplary figures of the country and their exemplary roles; combine daily life with diligence, thrift and self-improvement, and know that these are the traditional values of the Chinese nation (political identity, moral cultivation, sound personality).

### (1) Cultivating Political Identity and Moral Values

The second-grade textbook presents the accomplishments of China, enhancing the legacy of previous generations. Students are encouraged to inquire and share their family stories to gain insight into China's development through authentic stories. The emphasis lies on older generations such as workers and ancestors, and how to respect and honor them<sup>14</sup>, there is no specific emphasis on proletarian revolutionaries. These educational materials provide students with the chance to embrace and link traditional values to their own cultural background, thus deepening their comprehension and connection to their cultural heritage.

### (2) Work Ethic and Practical Skills

In the first grade, students learn about hygienic habits, which establish the foundation for developing a strong work ethic and genuine passion for labor. Students not only comprehend the importance of sanitation but also acquire the necessary proficiencies for its efficacious maintenance. Expanding on the knowledge of hygiene and self-care learned in previous units, the textbooks effectively incorporate these concepts into daily household tasks. This approach cultivates a greater sense of responsibility and practical skills related to housework and provides a practical connection between everyday life and the essential values of hard work, savings, and self-development. By comprehensively illustrating how these principles

<sup>13</sup>For example, one unit covers the expression of happy and sad feelings by presenting a poem that addresses these issues. It says "If you're happy, please tell me and we'll clap our hands together. If you're sad, please tell me that too, and I'll sing you a song..." (如果你开心, 请你告诉我, 我们一起拍拍手。如果你伤心, 也请告诉我, 我来为你唱支歌...). With this playful method students are encouraged to share their emotions and feelings.

<sup>14</sup>The textbook uses expressions such as "I want to give them a thumbs up (我要为他们点赞).

intersect with their everyday lives, this approach inspires the cultivation of a diligent work ethic.<sup>15</sup>

### (3) Identification with Chinese Culture

The second-grade textbook especially employs a multifaceted methodology to enhance students' connection with Chinese culture by examining cultural symbols and traditions. Within the lectures, students take part in interactive activities, including traditional games, which deepen their comprehension and cultivate a sense of familiarity with the cultural symbols treasured by previous generations. The employed pedagogical methodology fosters students' creativity, enabling them to create games that highlight China's cultural traditions. This innovative approach not only bolsters student engagement but also develops an extensive understanding of the nation's cultural legacy, promoting identification and appreciation of China's cultural heritage. Furthermore, by engaging in learning about different hometowns (家乡) and their characteristics, students can feel a sense of pride towards their previous generations.<sup>16</sup>

### (4) Promoting Socialist Core Values

The socialist core values are a vital component of a child's education, and it is crucial for every child to be acquainted with them and implement them in their actions. However, the socialist core values are integrated in an implicit way, lacking a direct connection to their comprehensiveness, interpretation, and origin. This situation could create challenges in genuinely apprehending them and complying with them.

- Be able to keep agreements with others in family, school and other living environments; to use polite words correctly; to cooperate in learning and make progress together; to know gratitude; to keep classroom discipline and school order; to adapt well to school and care for public facilities (moral cultivation, concept of the rule of law, sense of responsibility).
- Be able to do your own things in daily life; to do housework within your abilities; to have safe and healthy living habits; to have a sense of thrift and love for nature (moral cultivation, sound personality, sense of responsibility).

### (1) Understanding and Following Rules

The textbooks take a pedagogical approach that highlights the importance of rules and discipline in the school environment. In the early stages of their education, students learn class rules as the foundation for their understanding of rules in all areas of life. Furthermore, the textbooks engage students in delineating civilized and uncivilized behavior, thereby prompting their active involvement in formulating classroom rules.<sup>17</sup> This experiential learning cultivates an understanding of how rules influence behavior while highlighting their importance

<sup>15</sup>The textbooks start with exercises that focus on students' own behavior such as keeping their rooms clean and organizing their toys. It then progresses to include family members, highlighting the benefits that children can bring to their families. For instance, activities like "How many apples can I pick" introduce various household chores, encouraging healthy competition among students, to see who can complete the most.

<sup>16</sup>It will be especially enhanced with topics such as "The story of my hometown" (家乡的故事) or "What my hometown produces" (我的家乡产什么).

<sup>17</sup>The textbook urges students to collaborate in crafting classroom regulations using phrases like "Let's develop rules together to remind everyone!" (我们一起来制订规则提醒大家吧!) or "Let's discuss together!" (一起

in creating a favorable learning atmosphere. The textbooks instruct on classroom discipline and school order, instilling in students a sense of responsibility to comply with rules and promote a peaceful and productive school setting.

#### (2) Developing Positive Personalities and Effective Communication

The textbooks use a comprehensive approach that emphasizes students' personality development. They focus on cultivating a positive and optimistic attitude towards primary school roles, while fostering a genuine love for learning. This educational methodology incorporates structured activities and interactive games, aimed at providing essential knowledge and fostering interpersonal competencies, as well as the skill of seeking support when necessary. Furthermore, promoting active student participation in school activities, alongside fostering efficient peer communication abilities, serves as a significant factor in nurturing a sense of responsibility. Through engagement in activities and collaborative discussions, students develop the ability to work well with peers and positively impact both the classroom and the larger school community. This fosters their overall growth as responsible and engaged learners.

#### (3) Promoting a Sense of Responsibility

The textbooks emphasize cultivating a strong sense of responsibility through classroom duties. Classroom duties serve as a foundational pillar for instilling responsibility among students within the textbooks. Through this approach, students are urged to undertake diverse responsibilities, such as following classroom guidelines, solving problems, assisting peers, and assuming leadership positions when required. This approach cultivates both individual accountability and a collaborative mindset within the classroom, encouraging students to work together in harmony and recognize their contributions to the well-being of the classroom community.<sup>18</sup> It promotes a sense of shared responsibility among students, fostering a collective sense of ownership over their learning environment.

#### (4) Promoting a Love for Nature and Cultivating Practical Skills

The textbooks instill in students a deep appreciation and comprehension of the natural environment through and sense for environmental protection. Education on environmental protection emphasizes the significance of responsibility by familiarizing students with their duty to preserve the environment. This approach nurtures a wider sense of accountability towards the surrounding world.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, students are introduced to the intricate workings of the environment, including factors like wind. This not only increases their awareness of personal safety but also encourages a sense of accountability for environmental preservation. Practical activities such as creating a seedbed not only impart knowledge about the natural

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来商量一下吧!). The textbook also provides a link to the *Overall Code of Conduct for Primary and Secondary School Students* (中小学生守则), which fosters a sense of universal regulations.

<sup>18</sup>The textbook fully covers the responsibilities of the student on duty (班级值日生), illustrating the benefits of assuming that role and how fellow students acknowledge and esteem the student on duty. The unit includes several pictures that foster the aspiration of representing a role model for others. This aligns with the assumptions of Wang (2011) that taking on such roles can lead to benefits, such as a shift in perspective from hearsay to having a say.

<sup>19</sup>The textbook presents a coherent sequence of topics, starting with the classroom and progressing to the school ground and broader environmental concerns. Charts and investigations help students understand how they can play a role in environmental protection. The book again includes a link to the *Overall Code of Conduct for Primary and Secondary School Students*.

world, but also equip students with practical skills. These activities foster a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature, and in turn cultivate a love for the ecosystem. Furthermore, the textbooks explore sustainability, water resources, and water conservation, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of water's crucial role in sustaining life and the significance of responsible management of water resources. Learning about topics such as waste and pollution empowers students to actively participate in water conservation efforts, cultivating a strong sense of environmental responsibility and stewardship for future generations.

## Conclusion

The grade one and two textbooks in Chinese primary schools are designed to foster students' development in multiple aspects through the use of interactive pedagogical strategies, hands-on exercises, and relevant real-world scenarios. These textbooks aim to develop individuals who possess strong moral values, an appreciation for their cultural heritage, a sense of responsibility, and a love for nature and the environment. In the early stages of primary education in, it is apparent that educational materials coincide with the *Curriculum Standards for Morality and the Rule of Law (2022 version)*. Ensuring this alignment is essential, especially for students who are at the beginning of their compulsory education journey. At this stage, it is crucial to merge educational objectives with age-appropriate teaching methods. The instructional materials developed for lower grade levels take on a notably more engaging and imaginative tone than those meant for higher education. This educational approach is deliberate in its intent to captivate young learners by providing fewer written materials and incorporating more visual aids to facilitate their understanding of new concepts across a range of disciplines.

Within the context of the curriculum standards, the initial stage of primary education emphasizes the significance of well-rounded integration of core competencies. Teachers are urged to explore various teaching methods that accommodate the distinctive requirements of young learners. This is especially critical in the early phases of education, where students shape their understanding, abilities, and competencies. After scrutinizing the academic qualities presented in textbooks for first and second grade, it is evident that they implicitly follow the objectives outlined in the course curriculum. Even though core competencies are not explicitly found at all times, they still serve as an underlying framework that provides guidance to the educational process. In this context, teachers have a crucial role in utilizing instructional advice and online resources to promote student learning. They are encouraged to use varied teaching methods that prioritize a student-centered approach. Such adaptability guarantees that young learners receive a comprehensive and engaging education, aligned with moral education objectives in the early stages of their schooling. However, while the academic qualities receive direct recognition in textbooks, the incorporation of socialist core values into exercises that provide context, origin, and meaning appears to be relatively limited. This can lead to a potential lack of understanding among students as they progress in their educational pursuits.



### 5.1.2 Expanding horizons: Textbooks for grade seven to nine

In Chinese secondary education, the Ministry of Education strives to cultivate a strong national identity, foster qualities such as self-esteem and confidence, and enhance students' comprehension of socialism and legal knowledge. Moreover, the curriculum highlights the relevance of the Chinese constitution within the nation's socio-political environment. The curriculum is designed to develop responsible citizens through the integration of personal and collective experiences, social norms, constitutional principles, and the rule of law. This approach fosters a sense of community and a deeper understanding of social values. It aligns with the historical accomplishments of the Communist Party and the nation, enabling students to establish parallels between their education and the Party's and country's historical milestones.<sup>20</sup>

#### Main topics covered in each grade of compulsory education's last stage

During grades seven through nine of compulsory education, the curriculum concentrates on enhancing students' national identity and their role in advancing China's continual development. Grade seven emphasizes personal growth, social interaction, and crucial life principles. Grades eight and nine shift towards cultivating national identity, imparting detailed knowledge of the constitution, and stressing the importance of national security. Grade seven to nine contribute to the ultimate goal of cultivating responsible citizens with a strong attachment to their nation's values and principles.

The seventh-grade textbooks aim to cultivate personal growth and promote positive behavioral patterns towards oneself, peers, and the community. The first textbook covers four main topics: "The beat of the growth", "The sky of friendship", "Friendship with teachers", and "Reflections on life".<sup>21</sup> Upon transitioning to junior high school in seventh grade, students are tasked with adapting to their new academic environment while also focusing on personal growth. This phase includes the exploration of a redefined sense of self-identity and the discovery of untapped potential. Students are urged to establish personal ideals, embrace a positive worldview, and cultivate self-awareness. Teachers have a crucial role in instructing students to enhance their knowledge and skills, while focusing on the inherent value of learning. The initial unit equips students with vital tools for self-improvement, elevating their ability to self-reflect and offering techniques to handle obstacles. The following unit explores the intricacies of familial, peer, and teacher relationships. The objective of the unit is to broaden students' understanding of social interactions, foster an appreciation for life's diverse facets, and cultivate meaningful friendships. It offers a comprehensive understanding of the rewards of companionship, emphasizing the dedication necessary to uphold such relationships and the many advantages they provide. Additionally, students are encouraged to

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<sup>20</sup>For further reading, Li and Li (2022) analyzed the 8th-grade textbook's content, comparing it with the newly revised curriculum standards (2022 edition). They identified similarities and discrepancies between these two resources and indicated how teachers can be guided and assisted through the use of the new curriculum standard in the teaching process. Furthermore, the study highlighted adjustments that need to be made to completely incorporate the new requirements.

<sup>21</sup>The original is: 成长的节拍, 友谊的天空, 师长情谊, 生命的思考.

collaborate effectively with teachers while embracing diverse teaching methodologies. Unit three emphasizes connecting with Chinese traditions and valuing familial bonds, while honoring parental figures. This unit promotes a sense of cultural heritage and the significance of family within Chinese society. The fourth unit focuses on life reflection, helping students to understand their role in the continuation of human life and to find their mission. It fosters the growth of students' sense of purpose and their comprehension of their position in the global community.

The second book of the seventh-grade covers four main topics: "Youth time", "Master of moods and emotions", "Grow in the collective", and "Enter the world of rules".<sup>22</sup> The textbook caters to the physical and psychological changes that adolescents undergo, emphasizing the importance of self-care during this transformative phase. During this period, adolescents undergo significant physiological and emotional transformations. The textbook aims to support them throughout this transition by fostering self-awareness and stressing the significance of self-care. The second unit focuses on the complex domain of emotions and mood regulation. Adolescents frequently confront various emotions in diverse settings. This unit's objective is to enable students to comprehend and competently handle these emotions. Developing emotional intelligence equips students to better navigate the complexities of adolescence. The third unit focuses on communal living and the significance of collective values. It fosters positive group dynamics, cultivates meaningful relationships, demonstrates respect towards one another, and promotes self-awareness in a collective environment. This unit highlights how personal development is linked with functioning well in a team. The last unit familiarizes students with the idea of regulations and their importance in society. It stresses the interdependence of life and law, instilling legal awareness among students. By comprehending the significance of the rule of law, students are better equipped to tackle the intricacies of a structured society.

In eighth-grade textbooks, the focus shifts from individual development and personal growth, to a more encompassing understanding of national interests and societal complexities. The first textbook covers four main topics: "Step into a social life", "Follow the rules of society", "Taking social responsibility" and "Safeguarding national interests".<sup>23</sup> This change in focus reflects the curriculum's goal of readying students for active and responsible participation in society. The initial unit introduces students to social life, stressing the significance of their membership in a larger society. This lays the foundation for forthcoming topics that emphasize the importance of social awareness and engagement. The second unit examines social norms and underscores students' social development. Students examine the complex interplay between social order and regulations. They acquire an appreciation for the varied regulations governing diverse life domains and the crucial need to comply with these social norms. The unit highlights rules' significance in sustaining a peaceful and well-organized society. The third unit of the textbook aims to instill in students a sense of individual and social responsibility. The unit equips students with the necessary skills to care for others, and elevates the discussion to a national level in its final unit. The protection of the country's

<sup>22</sup>The original is: 青春时光，做情绪情感的主人，在集体中成长，走进法治天地。

<sup>23</sup>The original is: 走进社会生活，遵守社会规则，勇担社会责任，维护国家利益。

interests is a crucial aspect outlined by the textbook. Students are urged to comprehend the connection between the nation's interests and the societal welfare. Through this course, they acquire the skillset to express patriotic sentiments in a legal and structured manner while forming a refined perception of national interests. The unit motivates students to contribute actively to the growth and development of their respective nations.

The second textbook for eighth-grade students covers key topics that provide a comprehensive understanding of civic education and governance principles. These topics include “The supremacy of the constitution, “Rights and obligations, “People ownership”, and “The spirit of the rule of law”.<sup>24</sup> The first unit of the book teaches about the fundamental principles of the constitution, government protection, human rights recognition, and comprehension of the constitution as a safeguard for citizens' rights. The teacher has a crucial role in fostering students' awareness of the constitution, emphasizing its significance as the basis of the country's legal system. This unit highlights the need to advance the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics. In the second unit, students explore citizens' responsibilities and duties, gaining insight into their importance and the consequences of neglecting them. Additionally, the textbook instructs students on standardizing personal behavior and conscientiously meeting legal obligations, thereby enhancing their sense of social responsibility. The third unit expands students' knowledge by examining China's political and economic systems. This unit aims to provide students with a thorough grasp of these fundamental aspects, emphasizing the rationale and significance behind their establishment. Students will investigate the People's Congress system, framework of regional-based ethnic autonomy, and multi-party cooperation political system in China. In the final unit students learn about the intricate relationship between the rule of law and freedom, the responsible exercise of freedom, and the importance of ensuring equal treatment in various aspects of life. Additionally, they are encouraged to advocate for fairness and justice and take action in response to injustice.

In the ninth-grade textbook, there is a shift in focus from an in-depth examination of China's political system to a broader global viewpoint. The first textbook covers the topics “Prosperity and innovation”, “Democracy and the rule of law”, “Civilization and homeland”, and “Harmony and dreams”.<sup>25</sup> In the beginning, students delve into China's reform and opening-up policy. Students acquire a comprehensive understanding of Chinese socialism with distinctive features and its correlation with innovation and its influence on life quality. This study aids in augmenting their feelings of national pride, cultural identity, and belief in embracing China's innovative accomplishments. The second unit scrutinizes the fusion of democracy and the rule of law in China. Students investigate China's democratic landscape, acquiring knowledge on the different elements, structures, and frameworks of the national people's democratic system. An essential goal is for students to understand the fundamental significance and genuine sense of socialist democracy, as well as its execution in the context of China. The third unit promotes students to establish a deep bond with Chinese culture, recognizing its collective formation by individuals from varying ethnic backgrounds. Students analyze the role and impact of Chinese culture in the nation's development, thus reinforcing

<sup>24</sup>The original is: 坚持宪法至上, 理解权利义务, 人民当家作主, 崇尚法治精神.

<sup>25</sup>The original is: 富强与创新, 民主与法治, 文明与国家, 和谐与梦想.

their confidence in identifying with the Chinese nation. Additionally, this unit introduces students to current population trends, family planning resources, environmental factors, and core national policies. The final unit focuses on the collective pursuit of the Chinese Dream. Teachers have a crucial role in fostering students' awareness of embracing individuals from all nationalities, promoting national unity, and nurturing a sense of responsibility in a diverse, multiethnic nation. Students gain an understanding that the achievement of the Chinese Dream contributes to the great rejuvenation of the nation. In addition, they discover ways to make individual contributions while pursuing their personal aspirations.

The ninth-grade's second textbook covers three critical topics: "The common world", "China on the world stage", and "Teenager heading into the future".<sup>26</sup> These topics progressively broaden students' global awareness, emphasize China's part in the international arena, and culminate in an evaluation of future opportunities for high school graduates. The first unit highlights the benefits of economic globalization and the diverse tapestry of cultures evident in everyday interactions. Within this context, students explore the concepts of globalization, cultural diversity, and China's principles of foreign relations. The primary objective is to foster a sense of global unity and promote global awareness, urging students to consider individuals all around the world. This unit establishes a foundation for students to acquire a broader perspective and recognize the interconnectedness of the globalized world. In the second unit, students will examine China's prominent contributions and active participation in the global arena. This examination will reinforce national self-assurance and pride by illustrating China's global influence. The aim is to help students understand the paramount importance of China's role in the global community and acknowledge the reciprocal progress that emerges between China and the world. It enhances a more profound comprehension and awareness of global issues. The final unit represents the culmination of the knowledge and insights acquired during junior high school. It lays a significant emphasis on fostering lifelong learning, equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate the stresses of life. Moreover, it prompts students to align their aspirations with the concept of Chinese Dream, make informed decisions concerning their careers, and highlights the correlation between their personal growth and overall national advancement. This unit aims to assist students in making informed career choices based on an objective evaluation of their strengths and interests.

### **Academic qualities for seven to nine grade curriculum standards**

The Curriculum Standards for Morality and the Rule of Law outline the qualities for students who have finished compulsory education's final stage. In the final stage of compulsory education, the core competencies undergo a change in priority. By the end of ninth grade, students should have attained specific academic qualities, such as responsibility and moral cultivation, with a primary focus on political identity.<sup>27</sup> The analysis aims to match academic qualities of the curriculum with relevant textbook topics to investigate their dissemination

<sup>26</sup>The original is: 我们共同的世界, 世界舞台上的中国, 走向未来的少年.

<sup>27</sup>The original Chinese description of the academic qualities for the first two grades can be found in the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards for Morality and the Rule of Law (2022 Edition)* (p. 46).

to students. The objective is to provide comprehensive organization, and as such, the identified subjects will be summarized under an appropriate heading. The assessment considers whether current textbooks cover all necessary aspects.

- Be able to explain the great spirit of party building in the light of historical facts (political identity, moral cultivation).
- Be able to explain the basic content and significance of the People's Congress System, multi-party cooperation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the system of regional ethnic autonomy, the system of grassroots democracy, and the "one country - two systems" approach (political identity, concept of the rule of law).

#### (1) Historical Understanding and Nationalism

The eighth-grade textbook explains the reasoning and significance of China's current basic economic system. Students are expected to comprehend the basic content of China's People's Congress System, as well as the advantages of its multi-sensory cooperation and political consultation system.<sup>28</sup> The textbook also raises awareness of the relationship between the People's Congress and other state organs.<sup>29</sup> The eighth-grade textbook focuses specifically on the system of regional ethnic autonomy, allowing students to gain insight into the multi-ethnicity of their country through a concise reading exercise.<sup>30</sup> Understanding of the autonomy of ethnic regions will be strengthened. This account will provide students with valuable insights into China's history and encourage them to deeply appreciate their country while maintaining a steadfast belief in its continued progress. In ninth grade, students strengthen their understanding of ethnic ties and learn strategies to preserve national unity.

#### (2) Democratic Values and Practical Application

The textbooks highlight the importance of democratic principles, respect, tolerance, criticism, and compromise. They provide photos and stories to display the proper and effective implementation of democratic rights in China's context. This fosters a democratic mindset among students and helps them appreciate the practical application of democratic values within the Chinese context. The ninth-grade textbook devotes an entire unit to the topics of democracy and rule of law. Within this unit, students gain knowledge on the democratic state in China and the characteristics, forms, and systems of national people's democracy, as well as information on the connotation and true meaning of socialist democracy. Students develop an understanding of how democracy is implemented in China and learn to exercise their democratic rights. All these endeavors contribute to their political identity and moral development.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The textbook offers extensive discussions on these topics, promoting student initiative to stay informed by covering subjects such as "How to find the People's Congress deputies around you" (如何找到身边的人大代表).

<sup>29</sup>The textbooks encourage students to make connections between various decisions and policies using questions that ask about their significance (有何意义).

<sup>30</sup>In this exercise, there is a direct statement about the multi-ethnic country (多民族国家), which is "The People's Republic of China is a united multi-ethnic country built by the people of all ethnic groups" (中华人民共和国是全国各族人民共同缔造的统一的多民族国家).

<sup>31</sup>The textbook covers this topic by providing charts, such as "Overview of democratic parties in China" (我国

### (3) Rule of Law and Responsibility

The textbooks highlight the significance of the rule of law, notably regarding property ownership, the People's Congress roles and functions, and China's economic system. A comprehensive approach is employed to foster students' sense of personal and collective responsibility in their communities, the nation, and broader societal contexts. The textbooks focus on comprehending the nature, function, and power of China's supervisory organs and raising awareness of national supervisory organs. Students should be able to distinguish between the functions and powers and know their duties.<sup>32</sup>

- Be able to understand China's development and the major contradictions between China's historical orientation and Chinese society; briefly discuss General Secretary Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era (as contemporary Chinese Marxism); deeply understand the historical achievements and changes in the cause of the Party and the country as socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era (political identity, moral cultivation).
- Be able to understand General Secretary Xi Jinping's thoughts on the rule of law; recognize the concept of the supremacy of the constitution; correctly understand and exercise citizens' rights and fulfill citizens' duties (concept of the rule of law, sense of responsibility).
- Be able to give examples of the main features of advanced socialist culture, revolutionary culture and excellent traditional Chinese culture; strengthen cultural self-confidence (political identity, moral cultivation).

### (1) Understanding China's Development and Political Identity

The textbooks provide a comprehensive analysis of China's history, with particular emphasis on the reform and opening-up period, offering a vital foundation for students to understand the country's developmental trajectory from ancient times to the present era.<sup>33</sup> This teaching strategy instills knowledge and fosters patriotic sentiment among students while acquiring a deep understanding of China's accomplishments and changes. The textbooks appear to lack a direct connection to socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and Chinese Marxism. While the higher grades of the course demonstrate a noticeable political undertone, relying solely on the textbook as a reference may hinder students' comprehension of the fundamental concepts due to the absence of clear guidance as proposed in the implementations made by the Ministry of Education and speeches of General Secretary Xi Jinping.

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各民主党派概况), and posing questions, such as "What kind of democracy do you have in mind?" (你心目中的民主是什么样的?) and "Tell us why the development of socialist democracy requires constitutional guarantees" (说说为什么社会主义民主的发展需要宪法保障).

<sup>32</sup>The textbook provides reflective questions such as: "What is the relationship between the National Supervisory Commission and the National People's Congress?" (国家监察委员会与全国人民代表大会是什么关系?) or "Do you agree with their viewpoints? Please provide your reasoning" (你是否赞同他们的观点? 说明理由).

<sup>33</sup>The textbook presents information in two ways: firstly, through reading tasks covering essential facts, such as "Reform and opening to the outside world for development" (改革开放促发展); secondly, through reflective exercises that encourage students to consider various viewpoints and form their own opinions (你同意他们的观点吗?).

## (2) Rule of Law and Civic Responsibility

The textbooks adopt a comprehensive approach that favors the rule of law while also stressing the supreme significance of the constitution<sup>34</sup> and the roles and rights of citizens within the legal framework.<sup>35</sup> This pedagogical approach is crucial in fostering an understanding of fundamental legal principles and concepts among students, thereby fostering the growth of responsible and law-abiding citizens through promoting students' awareness and active participation in their civic responsibilities and rights.<sup>36</sup> This approach advances an equitable system and encourages a responsible citizenry that promotes a fair and organized society.

## (3) Cultural Heritage

The textbooks utilize concrete examples and historical narratives to improve the educational experience and promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. This pedagogical approach cultivates cultural self-confidence, as students explore the complex nuances of China's rich heritage and contemporary society. As a result, students acquire the skills and knowledge required to embrace and contribute to their cultural legacy. These examples can be found in small paragraphs with or without illustrations in most units, which make reference to philosophical figures such as Confucius or important contributors to China like Deng Xiaoping. Through contemplation of China's accomplishments and comprehension of their extensive cultural heritage, students are instructed to develop an objective and impartial perspective on life. This approach is beneficial for personal growth and character development, cultivating individuals who possess academic proficiency and a well-rounded sense of self.

- Be able to try to solve adolescent problems; to take correct measures to face situations and the process of growth; self-management; pro-social behavior; love life (moral cultivation, sound personality, sense of responsibility).
- Be able to formulate personal career development plans in combination with social development and personal reality; have a sense of mission and responsibility for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (political identity, sense of responsibility).

## (1) Moral Cultivation and Pro-Social Behavior

The textbooks adopt a comprehensive approach, prioritizing the infusion of moral virtues, including equality, respect, honesty, and integrity. These values are thoughtfully incorporated into numerous sections, specifically designed for promoting personal development as well as nurturing healthy interpersonal bonds among students. A thorough investigation of the intricate relations between students, teachers, and parents within educational environments is conducted in textbooks that promote respect for parents and a deep appreciation

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<sup>34</sup>The textbook presents tasks that focus on understanding and interpreting the constitution. The reading material in this unit is more extensive than in other units. Topics covered include basic human rights guaranteed by the constitution.

<sup>35</sup>The ninth-grade textbook presents inquiries such as "What are the conditions for citizens to enjoy the right to vote?" (公民享有选举权需要那些条件?).

<sup>36</sup>The textbook offers exercises that involve describing "citizen's obligations" (公民义务) shown in real-life pictures.

for educators.<sup>37</sup> This fosters pro-social behavior and highlights the importance of courteous and nonviolent conduct in the educational community.<sup>38</sup> The textbooks present essential concepts of equality and courtesy, advocating for students to incorporate respectful conduct in all their interactions. This pedagogical approach makes a contribution to fostering a robust sense of obligation towards others. It equips students not only with academic expertise but also with moral and interpersonal abilities that are critical to their progress into responsible, empathetic, and socially conscious individuals.<sup>39</sup>

## (2) Sound Personality

The textbooks serve as a valuable resource for guiding students on their journey of personal growth and development. They actively facilitate the cultivation of a positive mindset and heightened self-awareness by covering topics related to self-reflection, emotional regulation, and self-improvement, which are integral to fostering sound and well-rounded personality development.<sup>40</sup> These components work together to bolster students' proficiency in effective self-expression. This approach empowers students for self-management, improve their personal development, and navigate complex interpersonal relationships with knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence.

## (3) Sense of Responsibility and Love for Life

The textbooks highlight civic responsibility and the importance of social contribution, while urging students to care for others and engage in community service. The values of optimism, happiness, and duty are promoted through activities that cultivate teamwork, cooperation, and crucial interpersonal skills, in line with an emphasis on civic engagement.<sup>41</sup> Students will learn about a civilized and healthy lifestyle. They will learn how to enjoy the learning process, cultivate collaborative learning abilities, and experience the joy of learning.<sup>42</sup> This course will expand students' self-discovery journey, helping them establish a correct outlook on life, worldview, and values, leading to self-awareness.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The admiration for teachers will be strengthened through exercises such as "Reflect on whether your impression of the teachers has changed. You can also share how your teachers have helped you grow" (老师在你心目中的印象有变化吗? 会议并分享老师对自己成长的帮助). Additionally, questions such as "How do you feel about the teachers around you?" (你如何看待身边的老师?) are raised.

<sup>38</sup>This behavior is further reinforced when students engage in textbook activities such as "Do you love all your loved ones in your family? Why?" (在家庭中, 你爱所有的亲人吗? 为什么?) or "How often do you use those ways to communicate with your family?" (你经常使用那些方式和家人沟通?). This can lead to improved communication skills among teachers and peers, as it enables them to better express their emotions.

<sup>39</sup>Students participate in activities to understand teacher roles and responsibilities. They create charts and list the various functions that teachers perform in different teacher-student interactions. The purpose is to gain knowledge regarding the duties and expectations of teachers in the learning process.

<sup>40</sup>The first secondary education textbook presents exercises and activities, including "The Gift of Growth" (成长的礼物), that prompt students to choose between various new situations and objectives they encounter during their progress. Other activities pertain to coping with sorrow during primary school and resolving it in this new juncture. (进入中学你打算如何弥补这些遗憾?)

<sup>41</sup>The textbooks prompt students to develop their aspirations and consider the potential implications if they are unable to achieve their goals. Through this exercise, students gain an understanding of how to connect their aspirations with real-world circumstances.

<sup>42</sup>Students gain an understanding of the significance of ongoing education through contemplative activities such as "Does everyone need to learn?" (每个人都要学习吗?) and "Do we still need to learn as adults?" (长大成人以后, 我们还需要学习吗?)

<sup>43</sup>Exercises involving evaluation from peers can aid students in self-reflection and improving their decision-making skills for the future. These exercises often center around "Listen to your classmates. What do they think of you?" (听听同学的意见, 他们对你的看法怎么样?) and provide valuable insight for growth.



#### (4) Colorful World of Me<sup>44</sup>

The ninth-grade textbooks aim to assist students in creating individual career development plans by providing insights into the driving factors behind China's advancements, particularly focusing on entrepreneurship and innovation. Studying China's innovative practices and the substantial role that businesses play in social innovation enhances students' understanding of these crucial factors for progress and cultivates a sense of duty to stimulate innovation and economic growth.<sup>45</sup> The textbooks emphasize the virtues of hard work, integrity, and the value of labor in enriching one's life. It motivates students to take responsibility for their career growth and accomplishments. During the last unit of ninth grade, students are encouraged to connect their personal development with the progress of the nation, strengthening their purpose and duty to aid in the rejuvenation of China.<sup>46</sup> The ninth-grade textbook features a unit devoted to exercises that aim to facilitate goal-setting and self-improvement, actively promoting a heightened sense of personal responsibility for one's future and career aspirations. This approach equips students with knowledge, skills, and values for their career journeys, fostering ambition and self-motivation. It prepares individuals to make meaningful contributions to society's advancement and prosperity.

- Be able to understand the importance of national security and how to ensure it (political identity, concept of the rule of law, sense of responsibility).
- Be able to know the importance of the common values of humanity; have a preliminary international perspective; understand the main international organizations (political identity, sense of responsibility).

#### (1) Cultivation of Law-Abiding Citizens<sup>47</sup>

The textbooks are strategically designed to encourage a firm belief in the rule of law and cultivate a community of law-abiding citizens. Students are guided to comprehend the essential importance of established regulations in governing society and preserving social order.<sup>48</sup> Real-life legal cases are presented in the textbooks.<sup>49</sup> This teaching approach aids students in comprehending the repercussions of unlawful actions, enhancing their ability to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the textbooks underscore

<sup>44</sup>The ninth-grade textbook speaks of “多彩世界的我”.

<sup>45</sup>Exercises, such as “Could you please list a few more examples of Chinese citizens contributing to the world?” (请你再列举几个中国公民为世界作贡献的实例), enhance students' awareness of the role that individuals have played in the development of China.

<sup>46</sup>This final unit of the textbook emphasizes speeches that motivate students to create a path in accordance with China. It is also noted that “Young people are strong, China is strong” (少年强中国强) emphasizing the strong connection between individuals and China.

<sup>47</sup>The eighth-grade textbook discusses being law-abiding citizens through the term 做守法的公民, while *gongmin* is used to refer to citizens. In other chapters, the text refers to *renmin*, addressing the people of China.

<sup>48</sup>In seventh grade, students are introduced to fundamental rules and laws and develop the ability to differentiate between their “rights” (权利) and “duties” (义务) through sorting exercises. Furthermore, the textbooks contain exercises highlighting the dichotomy between “law” (法律) and “morality” (道德), illustrated with examples.

<sup>49</sup>Students participate in exercises such as “Think about it, have you ever done any of these things yourself or anyone around you?” (想一想, 你自己或者身边有人做过这些事吗?)

<sup>50</sup>Issues of police accountability and respect are discussed within this context. Questions are raised such as “Why should violent attacks on people's police be penalized from this?” (为什么要对暴力袭击人民警察的行为从中处罚?).

the significance of compliance with the law in shaping ethical conduct, enabling students to comprehend the essential need for legal recourse and inspiring them to wholeheartedly adhere to established rules and principles.

#### (2) Awareness of National Interests and Security

The curriculum standards prioritize understanding topics related to the nation's interests, particularly in safeguarding national unity and sovereignty.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the textbooks have been constructed to encompass issues regarding national security and interest, with a focus on guiding students to grasp the critical function of upholding the rule of law within the broader context of national security. This approach provides students with a comprehensive understanding of their role in protecting national security while highlighting the importance of legality within this context. As a result, students will be able to feel a strong sense of responsibility to safeguard the unity, sovereignty, and general welfare of the nation.<sup>52</sup> This comprehensive education approach cultivates both knowledge and a strong sense of civic responsibility and national preservation within future citizens.

#### (3) Promotion of Social Responsibility

The textbooks equip students with a valuable understanding of their rights and obligations while placing significant emphasis on promoting social responsibility throughout society.<sup>53</sup> Students develop a comprehensive understanding of the significance of complying with the law and fulfilling civic responsibilities. This awareness enables them to go beyond mere legal conformity and become responsible and engaged contributors to society. Furthermore, they gain a profound comprehension of their considerable responsibilities in upholding the rule of law and reinforcing national security. As a result, students are able to develop into conscientious citizens, capable of making positive impacts in their communities and preserving their nation's well-being.

#### (4) Development of a Global Perspective

The textbooks play a crucial role in introducing students to fundamental concepts relating to international relations and fostering a global perspective. However, they tend to downplay the importance of a global outlook.<sup>54</sup> While the ninth-grade textbook includes some information about an international outlook, the main focus is on China's contribution to the international community, rather than an examination of different systems across other countries.<sup>55</sup> An international perspective is crucial for students to understand China's global position and its active participation in international organizations. Enhancing comprehension of global

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<sup>51</sup>The textbook underscores "When the country is good, everyone is good" (国家好大家才会好) and "The motherland is in my heart" (祖国在我心中)

<sup>52</sup>Exercises emphasize the role of each person in promoting society's well-being. It raises issues such as "What is the relationship between individual aspirations and the national interest?" (个人愿望与国家利益之间有说明关系?).

<sup>53</sup>Their comprehension is further advanced by sections that address the concept of "The law cannot be violated" (法不可违), which are prominently featured in eighth-grade course materials, and "Walking alongside the law" (我们与法律同行), covered in seventh-grade course materials.

<sup>54</sup>Although the Ministry of Education recognizes the value of a global perspective, the textbooks place little emphasis on it. Moreover, the textbooks encourage the acquisition of depersonalized knowledge. Consequently, students' ability to compare and understand different worldviews is limited, mirroring Li and Tan (2017)'s argument that citizenship education prepares young people to be "good" citizens within their community.

<sup>55</sup>This is particularly evident through the use of the term "China on the world stage" (世界舞台上的中国) or discussions surrounding "China's vision" (中国方案) in relation to its global contributions and influence.

dynamics can promote a more comprehensive and unbiased viewpoint, thereby facilitating a greater sense of accountability towards the global community. By providing students with global perspectives and insights, textbooks can prepare them to become informed citizens of their nation and engaged, empathetic global citizens who can effectively participate in and contribute to an interconnected and interdependent world.

## Conclusion

The textbooks for seventh to ninth graders aim to provide a well-rounded educational experience centered on developing a thorough understanding of China's political systems, moral cultivation, and political identity. They achieve this by offering historical context, promoting democratic values, and instilling civic and political awareness. Furthermore, they furnish students with a comprehension of China's political and legal systems. The textbooks allow students to attain the knowledge and mentality required for participating in active and responsible citizenship within China. Moreover, they encompass topics on responsibility, ethics, personal growth, and career preparation, serving as a motivation for students to embrace a feeling of mission and worldwide obligation. The analysis shows a significant alignment between the current textbooks and the Morality and the Rule of Law curriculum standards (2022 edition). As a beneficial tool for educators, these standards outline specific goals for each grade, identify essential academic qualities, and propose practical classroom activities that facilitate effective teaching. Secondary school textbooks generally incorporate more text while utilizing less visual aids for illustration. Assignments are becoming increasingly demanding, requiring students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios and engage in peer discussions.

Throughout the textbooks, the questions in various activities are noteworthy. These questions promote critical thinking, encourage reflection on diverse topics, and allow students to express their perspectives and ideas clearly. Phrases like "Tell us your reasons", "What other thoughts do you have?", "How do you view this opinion?" or "Please discuss your understanding"<sup>56</sup> facilitate individual involvement of students in numerous topics. However, this theoretical presentation does not consider the practical implementation of the idea and how it is utilized by teachers. What appears to be absent from the academic qualities is a clear connection to the development of a sound personality and moral cultivation. Although related to adolescent issues and growth processes, textbooks cover much more without the academic qualities addressing these attributes. For instance, grade seven focuses on the self, self-teacher interactions, and self in the community. It explores the topics of emotions, moods, and reflections on life; all vital components of integrating into the community and establishing a solid foundation as an active member of Chinese society. Additionally, it seems that the textbooks do not provide a thorough foundation that intertwines revolutionary traditional education with contemporary education, despite the emphasis placed on it by the Ministry of Education and the curriculum standards.

Although there is some alignment between the objectives for each school term and the

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<sup>56</sup>The original phrases are: 说说你的理由, 你还有那些看法? 你如何看待以观点? 请谈谈你的理解.

expectations for academic qualities, there exists a subtle inconsistency. This discrepancy is apparent in the ninth-grade textbooks' discussion of international relations and China's global influence. These subjects are pertinent to the general academic qualities outlined in the curriculum standards, including comprehending global perspectives and significant international institutions. Upon reviewing the objectives outlined for each grade level in the curriculum standards, it is apparent that neither the core competencies of political identity nor the sense of responsibility make explicit references to this subject matter. The curriculum standards provide valuable guidance and instruction for this grade level's course outline. One potential origin to explore is the role of ideologies and guiding norms outlined in Chapter four. These structures create a closed-knit society that controls teachings on various topics, including global perspectives. The tenets of a global perspective appear to be shaped to conform with the system's overall framework to steer how international organizations should be perceived, comprehended and most significantly, what China's role is in the worldwide community.

### **5.1.3 Discussion of the textbook analysis**

There are considerable differences between the first and last stage of compulsory education, especially regarding the curriculum and teaching methods. These variances affect the classroom environment and instructional materials. During the early stages of compulsory education, visual aids take precedence, with textbooks containing minimal textual content. Visual elements are vital for conveying information to primary school students, with teachers playing a central role in direct instruction. As primary school students are in a developmental stage, teachers ought to provide increased attention and create opportunities for active student involvement. Teachers should navigate external factors that can impact the learning environment and simultaneously work to enhance student engagement. As compulsory education shifts to secondary education, instructional materials undergo a transformation. Textbooks become more text-heavy while visual elements are reduced. Students have acquired valuable knowledge, skills, and abilities, which have enhanced their ability to understand written texts, express their viewpoints, and engage in meaningful discussions with both peers and teachers. The shift from a playful and visually-oriented approach to a lecture-style format may be intended to cultivate a mature mindset in students, promote active participation in topics related to the development of Chinese society, and encourage positive habits and behaviors. Teachers face the challenge of accommodating diverse student needs and keeping them engaged in classroom discussions, especially in the last stage of compulsory education.

Beyond the classroom, a significant difference appears when examining the shift from textbooks to curriculum standards, which have a vital role in guiding teaching practices and prescribing the use of educational materials. During the first stage of compulsory education, the primary teaching objectives include acquiring essential knowledge, developing specific subject proficiency, and understanding their broader implications. As students reach the final stage of compulsory education, the instructional objective shifts from familiarization with foundational knowledge to a comprehensive understanding of the essence of the curriculum and the proficiency to apply learned concepts effectively. This change in academic content is

marked by a progression from simple to more complex topics, promoting a deep comprehension of concepts initially introduced at the early stages of education. Essentially, upon completion of compulsory education, students must acquire a thorough and refined comprehension of the concepts presented during their outset. In addition, there is a noticeable development in the core competencies that support not only academic standards but also educational content. In the early years of compulsory education, a well-rounded focus is placed on cultivating essential skills, with each core competence receiving appropriate attention. During the first stage, the focus is on prioritizing the overall development of the students and taking care not to overlook any aspect. However, as students progress towards the end of compulsory education, there is a discernible shift in the significance assigned to particular core competencies, with one competency assuming greater importance than others. This prioritization of specific competencies in the final stage of compulsory education signals a broader shift towards new educational objectives. The curriculum standards seem to shift from promoting a balanced and well-rounded development of students' abilities to placing more emphasis on political indoctrination and the expectation that students actively contribute to furthering China's interests. Political identity now takes center stage, aligning with the overarching educational objectives aimed at instilling a sense of national identity and dedication among students. Consequently, these modifications indicate a deliberate advancement in the field of education. By emphasizing particular competencies, the educational system can attain broader goals.

Notable similarities in the educational process arise across all stages of compulsory education, despite their unique characteristics. A consistent theme pervades all educational levels. The topics in textbooks are remarkably uniform throughout the entire spectrum of compulsory education, covering individuals, families, schools, societies, nations, and the global community. Textbooks adhere to a structured framework that fosters a logical presentation of educational material. This framework progresses through a series of topics, beginning with self-exploration and progressing through school and family life. It broadens to incorporate social dynamics, and concludes with an examination of national and global aspects. By adopting this type of educational approach, authorities could gain greater oversight of academic outcomes and furnish a well-organized educational structure for students to operate within. Unlocking students' abilities seems difficult when they leave the "frame", but within this "frame", students appear to be able to move freely. This systematic approach could benefit the Chinese nation in the form of educational outcome control and the formation of an "ideal" individual by the conclusion of compulsory education. However, this educational trend also presents some drawbacks in the global context, as students may encounter difficulties adapting to the varying legal and national systems of different nations. On the other hand, this can benefit China by potentially discouraging its citizens from leaving the country. The close-knit structure of China's educational approaches might be able to help to maintain this control on a larger scale. Furthermore, core competencies are utilized throughout the entire educational journey, indicating a common thread. A fundamental coherence underpins their educational foundation and offers guidance to educators and learners. This coherence outlines the particular areas of knowledge, skill, and ability that will be enhanced and refined. The systematic

structuring of the teaching process transforms it into a cyclical progression, allowing teachers to build upon the foundation established by their predecessors. The intrinsic interconnectedness of academic qualities and content underscores educational continuity between the initial and final stages of compulsory education. A comparative analysis of the educational materials indicates that topics introduced at the first stage recur in subsequent phases with differing levels of comprehension depth, content elaboration, and proficiency.

## 5.2 Exploring learning contexts: Observations in case study schools

In order to gain a more profound insight into moral education in contemporary China, this study focuses on a specific set of schools in Beijing, selected as quintessential *de facto* demonstration models (典型) aligned with current policy objectives. These schools are among the best-resourced educational institutions in Beijing, exemplifying the ideals that policymakers strive to achieve. The inclusion of these model schools serves a two-fold purpose in this research. First, gaining valuable insights into how policy intentions are enacted in practice provides a lens through which we can discern the intended policy outcomes. Second, institutions play a crucial role in enacting policy principles through role-playing and actively socializing students, parents, and teachers into desired norms and values. The study conducted in these model schools, however, is limited to their particular settings, making it less indicative of the overall state of moral education in China. Therefore, the evidence presented primarily applies only to the policies and practices of these institutions, rather than offering a complete overview of moral education nationwide. Aiming to shed light on the challenges faced within this specific context, this study comprehensively examines the intricate methods and approaches employed by teachers in these model schools. The exploration offers a nuanced perspective on the role these schools play in nurturing values, ethics, and character in students, uncovering not only *what* is taught but also *how* it is taught in moral education.

### 5.2.1 Creating supportive environments: School climate and culture

Both educational institutions visited aim to create a learning environment that aligns with students' daily experiences while satisfying the Ministry of Education's objectives. A focus on student-centered design and meeting educational goals were evident throughout both institutions. The Ministry of Education diligently advances the establishment of conducive surroundings for students' progress, emphasizing the inculcation of the national ethos and socialist ethics. Apparently, this dedication is expressed through specific actions, including prominently exhibiting the national flag in classrooms and presenting students' accomplishments (Ministry of Education, 2017d). The school visits provided valuable perspectives regarding the effective implementation of moral education, showing glimpses of both in-class exercises and after-school initiatives. These thoughtfully designed initiatives seamlessly integrate subject-based moral education with complementary extracurricular approaches, aligning with the overarching educational philosophy (Zhu and Liu, 2004).

## Primary school education

The first educational institution was founded in 1954 and is situated in a densely populated district surrounded by residential and commercial properties, leading to heavy traffic. The school comprises one main campus and five branch campuses scattered throughout multiple districts in Beijing, having undergone various name changes and relocations. The running ideology of the school is “Creating an education environment suitable for children’s development” and the philosophy is to “Create a colorful education suitable for the diversified development of teachers and students”, with the school motto of “Become a talent, arrive the main road, learn richly, and pay attention to details”.<sup>57</sup>

The visit occurred on Monday morning, concurrently with the flag raising ceremony. Designated class leaders led groups of students and teachers on the playground. Students who exhibit exceptional performance and receive honors in their academic pursuits carry the flag. During this Monday morning, the leader of moral education reported that a student was feeling unwell. However, although the student felt unwell, he persisted with his task and participation. The leader of moral education summarized the flag-raising ceremony as illustrating “collective honor and responsibility”. Students who carry the flag wear beige pants, a white blouse, and a red scarf (红领巾, the symbol of Young Pioneers membership). From first grade onwards, students learn about the symbolism and significance of being a Young Pioneer and the corresponding responsibilities that they have towards their country.<sup>58</sup> This early introduction to civic duties and national identity reflects the school’s dedication to moral education and instilling values from a young age.

The school strives to actively support the five crucial categories of education: morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labor (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2022b). Morality is demonstrated in numerous school decorations. The school’s ideals and values are portrayed through wall decor that provides insight into historical context and even the national anthem. Moral teachings are conveyed to students through both direct and indirect methods. Furthermore, the school boasts a technologically advanced “future room” complete with video recording, brain science tools, and remote teaching equipment for reading. Teachers are offering remote instruction to students as a means of providing educational public welfare (教育公益). Students who excel in the classroom can earn coins that can be exchanged for gifts, thereby promoting motivation and healthy competition. Promoting physical health is a top priority at the school, which incorporates activities to enhance students’ physical well-being. These activities comprise guided eye exercises broadcast over the school’s speaker system and

<sup>57</sup>The school motto originally derives from “成仁才、至大道、得富学、重小事”.

<sup>58</sup>The “ideal” characteristics of a Chinese citizen are instilled from a young age, including a “sense of discipline and work ethic”, as well as “leadership and social engagement”. Not only does the student fulfill his duties despite discomfort, demonstrating a “strong sense of discipline” as well as “diligence, perseverance, and hard work” but participation in activities such as raising the flag also displays “leadership potential, teamwork skills, and a commitment to social causes”. These traits are highly valued and emphasized from an early age, as stated in chapter four, and align with the views of General Secretary Xi Jinping (Xi, 2018). The conduct of a single student can inspire and serve as a model for other students.

group gymnastics sessions conducted on the playground during short breaks. These initiatives demonstrate the schools' dedication to providing a comprehensive education that focuses on both intellectual and physical development.<sup>59</sup>

The school emphasizes aesthetics with various displays. The corridors showcase the institution's values through a wall of recognition that exhibits trophies, historical information, and the school's moral motto. Artwork created by students adorns the hallways, while handprints embellish the stairwell. Each classroom features a bulletin board recognizing outstanding students and accomplishments. The school offers a digital Chinese museum and a traditional Chinese culture classroom. The Chinese culture classroom features an introduction to ancient traditional classics and a map of *Taiji Tiangandi dizhi* on the floor. Additionally, it offers the opportunity to learn the traditional Chinese instrument *Guzheng* (古筝). In accordance with labor education principles, one classroom is devoted to the study of Chinese medicine, including the cultivation of medicinal herbs and the creation of sachets. This approach provides valuable hands-on learning opportunities while also fostering appreciation for traditional practices. A third classroom is designated for specific practical activities. Additionally, a neighboring Chinese museum explores traditional culture, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of their cultural heritage. These aesthetic elements collectively serve to establish an enriching educational environment that expands beyond the confines of traditional classroom instruction.

The school's philosophy towards education transcends conventional classroom instruction and encompasses experiential learning that enhances students' personal and moral growth. This involves participation in activities like animal care, where primary school students are accountable for rabbits and pigeons. The on-campus vegetable garden provides students with practical experience in labor while also incorporating mathematical concepts through the calculation of the field's area. These initiatives align with advanced moral education principles and aim to promote students' self-reliance, as emphasized by Ban (2002). The school features a special "compliment room" where students and teachers exchange compliments. This practice provides a refreshing focus on subjective evaluations in an educational landscape that is usually characterized by academic pressure and the pursuit of exceptional grades. As Hu (2019) highlights, it provides students with an opportunity to express appreciation for each other's achievements. Upon finishing their primary education, students obtain the official national primary school graduation certificate alongside a school-issued certificate acknowledging their embodiment of the institution's seven core values: love, positivity, gratitude, etiquette, innovation, ideology, and responsibility. These values highlight the school's dedication to a comprehensive education, prioritizing the development of character in addition to academic success.

The institution's dedication to incorporating students into all facets of campus existence is apparent and underscores their indispensable impact on shaping the organization. This strategy emphasizes a substantial shift from a past approach that was less centered on individuals to a more people-centered one that effortlessly incorporates students into their daily lives.

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<sup>59</sup>These initiatives are mandated by the Ministry of Education, and every school must fulfill these requirements.



Additionally, the school adeptly combines theoretical concepts with practical activities, as demonstrated by Shu (2021), which is apparent throughout various aspects of its operations.

### **Primary, junior, and senior high school**

The second school provides a striking contrast to the primary school. It is one of Beijing's leading educational institutions, offering education for primary, junior, and senior high school levels. The campus is located in an outlying district, where most students and teachers reside. Many parents moved from the city center to this area to secure better education for their children.<sup>60</sup> The district is less populated with residential areas, stores, and traffic, thus creating a more peaceful environment. Established in 2016 to meet the growing demand for quality education, the school is relatively new, having been founded in 2011. The educational philosophy of the institution centers on the principles of "love and respect" (爱与尊重) and aims to create a "leading in China, front ranking in the world"<sup>61</sup> school. The school has employed both experienced and newly graduated teachers from renowned academic institutions in Beijing and other respected universities. Each classroom is equipped with an advanced multimedia teaching system. The variety of available classroom themes includes music, science, technology, libraries, physical education, and a multi-functional sports field. These classrooms provide students with opportunities to engage in diverse extracurricular learning and activities.

The entrance of the main building highlight the school motto and corridors adorned with slogans that exemplify the institution's guiding principles. Important school events, developmental milestones, and profiles of distinguished educators are vividly depicted and elaborated upon through accompanying descriptions. The visit, scheduled shortly after Labor Day, afforded me the opportunity to witness the school's commemoration of this occasion. Notably, posters throughout the hallways pay tribute to outstanding students who have received distinctions, such as those recognized as the most organized in their dormitories or the most industrious in their academic pursuits. Each floor features a large board cataloging the accomplishments of every class, consistently updated on a weekly basis. The prevalence of healthy competition, both among grades and within classes, seems more apparent in the junior high school context than in the primary school setting. Moving to junior high school often entails an increased academic demand and it is often regarded as a transitional period marked by an increased focus on orderliness, quantifiable achievements, and learning acquisition, as opposed to the relatively free-spirited and relaxed atmosphere of primary school. During this phase, students must contend with a more stringent academic program, where tests bear more weight and coursework necessitates a greater degree of intellectual rigor.<sup>62</sup> The second school's ethos prioritizes the establishment of diligent study habits, pursuit of

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<sup>60</sup>Statistics show that urban areas with an academic focus receive more resources and have a higher number of educational institutions compared to their rural counterparts, as outlined in chapter three. However, Yin (2020) notes that certain institutions may benefit from better campus environments or teaching facilities, resulting in an overall enhancement of quality. Schools affiliated with universities could benefit from these resources.

<sup>61</sup>It is proposed as 国内领先, 国际一流.

<sup>62</sup>This is indicative for a strong "sense of discipline and work ethic", which emphasizes the importance for students to strive for academic excellence, embrace challenges to excel, and engage in competitions.

high academic performance, and preparation for future assessments. The classrooms feature a minimalist aesthetic, with wall hangings promoting values of courtesy, tolerance, and peer guidance.<sup>63</sup> This intentional cultivation of the learning environment signifies a deliberate endeavor to impart not just scholarly expertise but also a comprehensive suite of moral and social proficiencies.

### 5.2.2 Classroom dynamics: Observations and interactions

Two observations were conducted in different grade levels: eighth grade, which corresponds to junior high school, and sixth grade, the final year of primary school. The goal of these observations was to evaluate lesson content and structure, as well as teacher-student dynamics. The focal points of these observations included teaching methodologies, lesson substance, and classroom interactions. The use of digital resources has greatly impacted education in China, providing easy access to teaching materials, syllabi, aids, presentations, and a wealth of instructional videos and lessons online. However, these lessons are customized to meet the distinct dynamics and needs of each classroom, instead of being limited to predetermined templates. As educators, teachers often create their own presentations, which include related material, practical illustrations, and varied exercises that involve listening, reading, and critical thinking. This adaptable approach enables teachers to create their lessons to meet the unique requirements and capacities of their students, thus fostering an interactive and stimulating learning atmosphere.

#### Grade eight classroom dynamics

At the front of the room hangs the Chinese flag, accompanied by patriotic slogans encouraging students to “love your country” and “work hard on your study”. The room is equipped with a multifunctional screen and a bulletin board and can seat up to 40 students using single and double tables. Students are required to wear school uniforms and red scarves (红领巾). During the observed classroom session, the teacher utilized a multimedia presentation consisting of images, textual passages, and critical thinking exercises (思考问题), instead of relying on the textbook. The central topic of the class was the historical evolution of a prominent train station located in Beijing. The lesson’s objectives included a thorough examination of the challenges and changes linked to this development. Notably, the teacher related the topic to the recent Labor Day activities carried out by the students, drawing comparisons to General Secretary Xi Jinping’s influential notion of “The New Normal of Economic Development”, which was introduced in 2013. Within this pedagogical context, the lesson focused on the necessities of economic advancement, emphasizing the infusion of Beijing’s cultural heritage into the train station’s development while adhering to the principles of the new developmental paradigm. The teacher presented a comprehensive overview of several aspects of the station, such as its geographic location, construction details, and unique features. The lesson was thoughtfully structured into clear segments, each aligned with the framework of new development ideals, covering scientific innovation, cultural enrichment, environmental

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<sup>63</sup>The original words are 礼貌 (*limao*), 宽容 (*kuanrong*) and 好问 (*haowen*).

sustainability, tangible accomplishments, and a coordinated combination of elements. The teacher clearly stated one of the primary goals of the lesson as “let students establish their own understanding, know the brilliance, know the problems” (TEACHER B). The teacher aimed to cultivate independent critical thinking among students by encouraging them to develop their own understanding of the subject, recognizing its strengths and weaknesses. This emphasized the value of students’ ability to navigate complex subject matter, ultimately encouraging critical thinking and thoughtful engagement with the material.

The observed classroom session begins with the teacher leading a short reading exercise that centers on the assigned topic and asks a direct question to the class. Interestingly, multiple students actively engage in this exercise by raising their hands and standing, indicating their eagerness to participate. The teacher takes an all-encompassing approach by recognizing every student’s contribution. When doubt arises, the teacher poses additional questions to encourage student engagement and stimulate reflection. In instances where students offer incorrect answers, the teacher delivers aid by providing clues to guide them towards the correct solution. The teacher instructs by addressing the class as a whole, eliciting synchronized responses from everyone, and selectively calling upon individual students to share their insights. The teacher encourages participation from students who may not have initially raised their hands, creating an environment that accommodates multiple modes of engagement. Importantly, the teacher tolerates when some students spontaneously shout out answers or engage in whispered discussions without adhering to the conventional hand-raising protocol. Throughout the class session, the teacher maintains an enthusiastic and articulate demeanor while communicating with the students. The teacher employs dynamic movement around the classroom, complementing verbal communication and enhancing engagement. Additionally, one specific student exhibits high levels of engagement, frequently volunteering answers to a significant proportion of the questions posed during the session. The active involvement of this student highlights the diverse levels of engagement and participation demonstrated by the class.

The teaching approach observed in the class primarily depends on the teacher’s pre-made presentations, with additional support from the blackboard to document vital keywords. In order to encourage students’ active participation and critical thinking, the teacher assigns small group discussion exercises, consisting typically of two to four classmates. Despite students’ initial engagement in these discussions, there is frequently a gradual reduction in activity, resulting in the passive involvement of certain students. During the discussion phase, the teacher primarily assumes the role of an observer, maintaining minimal interaction with the students. Then, the teacher asks the students to present their findings, with the selection of the presenting students being randomized. It is noteworthy that students are not required to physically come to the front of the class for their presentations; instead, they may remain seated while standing up to speak. Interactions during these presentations are characterized by the teacher’s active engagement, which includes listening to students’ responses and posing follow-up questions. This process seeks to establish connections between their presentations and the initial inquiries. Expressions such as “The word is well used”, “The students

know a lot”, and “As soon as you hear it, you know that he is a meticulous young man who loves life”<sup>64</sup> are utilized by the teacher to provide feedback and acknowledge the quality of students’ contributions. Furthermore, when student discussions exhibit lower levels of engagement, the teacher uses comments like “It is a little quiet today” to encourage more active participation. The class under observation adheres to a regular format that comprises critical thinking and reading exercises. The emphasis is on oral discussions and presentations, and no written assignments or note-taking are expected from students during the session.

### **Grade six classroom dynamics**

The attended class was observed in a culturally-themed classroom, which serves as a shared area for resources not commonly found in single classrooms. The observed class centered on the birthplace of early civilization, highlighting ancient Chinese civilization’s intelligence and wisdom in housing, food, and cultural heritage. The primary objective was to foster a sense of pride in Chinese citizenship among the students. The classroom’s physical layout includes two large tables and wooden benches. The classroom’s design embraces a minimalist aesthetic, without any adornments or depictions of the national flag. Necessary teaching equipment such as a multifunctional screen and traditional chalkboard is present. To aid instruction, the teacher created a presentation on the assigned topic, referencing the textbook and making use of small notes attached to the chalkboard.<sup>65</sup>

The class begins with the teacher initiating a class discussion with a thought-provoking question, to which nearly every student responds enthusiastically while receiving comments for their input. Displaying important vocabulary on the blackboard and utilizing concise sentences and visuals, the teacher guides the ensuing conversation. While the class overall appears engaged, certain individuals participate more actively than others. The teacher chooses not to intervene when a group of students engages in off-topic conversations or shows signs of being distracted. The teacher-student interaction is consistently present in class with the teacher actively engaged in providing guidance and individualized attention to the students. Initially, note-taking is not common among students, but as the class progresses and they complete textbook exercises, they gradually start taking notes. One noteworthy aspect of this course is an interactive exercise that employs six sizable sand bowls, carefully arranged by the teacher for student inquiry. The sand bowls are organized on tables in a manner that prompts small-group work and facilitates a joint learning environment. The teacher actively participates in overseeing the groups, providing guidance and answering any questions. The level of student engagement is high during these hands-on activities. The textbook serves as a foundational reference for the assignment, while a thoughtful small task devised by the teacher supplements it. There is enough time allocated for completion, with periodic reminders and teacher availability for assistance, which further enhances the students’ learning experience.

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<sup>64</sup>The original phrases used during the class are “这个词用得很好”, “同学们知道得非常多”, “一听就知道是一个细致、热爱生活的小伙子” and “今天稍微有些安静啊”.

<sup>65</sup>The class design aligns with Liu and Zhu (2001)’s argument that teachers should produce lessons customized to their students’ interests, difficulties, and motivations. Through the incorporation of hands-on experiences and practical applications, students are empowered to create and participate actively.

During collaborative activities, a clear pattern emerges as students engage in peer-assisted learning. As the activities conclude, the teacher strategically selects specific groups to present their findings to the class, accompanied by commendation and constructive feedback. During a group presentation, a student expresses surprise at another student's extensive knowledge, asking, "how do you know that?" (怎么知道呢?). This interaction highlights a culture of knowledge-sharing and recognition among peers. At one point, the group establishes a direct connection to the textbook, leading to a thorough review of the material by the entire class. Following the initial activity, the teacher adds theoretical insights to enhance the learning experience, followed by a second practical exercise. Afterwards, a more detailed explanation is provided along with a reading exercise obtained from the textbook. The teacher utilizes a comprehensive teaching approach during these segments, integrating theoretical and practical components within the classroom. The lessons are based on the textbook, but the teacher adds personalized preparations to create an interactive learning environment that engages all students. This pedagogical approach highlights the teacher's commitment to cultivating a dynamic and participatory classroom setting.

The classroom dynamic is characterized by a diversity of student ideas, which the teacher actively embraces. When a student presents an idea, it often elicits interjections from others, signaling dissent or alternative perspectives with phrases such as "don't agree", "I refute the point of view" or "I have doubts".<sup>66</sup> The student speaking typically opens the floor by asking, "Who wants to add?" This fosters a constructive discussion and encourages multiple viewpoints. It invites fellow students with phrases like "I help you to summarize", "I will add" or "You and me have a different idea".<sup>67</sup> One noteworthy student consistently demonstrates high engagement in the class, often vocalizing a desire to speak by exclaiming "I want to speak" (我想说), and occasionally even standing up to do so. This active participation sometimes results in the occurrence of several students raising their hands or standing up concurrently, causing confusion. The teacher contributes to this participatory classroom environment by formulating questions aimed at eliciting diverse perspectives on diverse class subjects. Additionally, the teacher continually stimulates students to express their views, fostering an inclusive and candid atmosphere.<sup>68</sup> At the end of the class a few students volunteer to help the teacher in arranging tables and chairs, exemplifying a shared sense of accountability and participation in preserving the classroom atmosphere.

During a recorded session of another lesson observation, the classroom environment adhered to the standard setting for this grade level. Above the blackboard, the school's motto and the national flag were displayed, while a large world map served as both an educational tool and interactive classroom decoration. Students are seated in groups to create an environ-

<sup>66</sup>The original phrases used are: "不同", "我反驳一下观点" and "我有质疑".

<sup>67</sup>The original phrases used by the students are: "谁还想补充吗?", "我来帮你们总结", "我来给你补充" and "我和你有不同的意见".

<sup>68</sup>This appears contrary to the findings of Liu and Zhu (2001) and Reed (1995). During my observations of the class, students displayed a strong inclination towards conveying their personal ideas and feelings, with relatively little emphasis on established *official words* or *stereotypes*. The teacher did not reject or provide *reasonable excuses* when opinions or ideas did not align with official ideas. Instead, the teacher explained the issue and provided materials to enhance students' thought processes. Further observations are necessary to explore the pattern behind this dilemma and make justified statements.

ment suitable for collaborative and interactive learning. The primary objective of this lesson is to explore the world's civilizations and their unique cultural characteristics. The teacher has created a sequence of practical tasks and examples, aimed at encouraging creative engagement among the students during the class. Furthermore, the teacher enriches the educational experience by presenting authentic attire representing diverse cultures, urging students to adorn these garments and participate in conversations about their symbolic and cultural importance.

The lesson comprises two primary parts. The first focuses on architecture and its correlation with environmental factors. During this part, students actively participate in group activities constructing houses that can withstand various weather conditions. The teacher takes a highly interactive approach, actively engaging with each student group. The learning space fosters an environment where students can freely express their opinions, ask questions and delve into a variety of concepts. The teacher consistently embraces differing viewpoints and inquiries, offering explanations when refuting incorrect beliefs.<sup>69</sup> In the second part of the class, students work in groups to explore and identify the distinct characteristics of a range of countries, with a particular focus on countries located in Asia, among others. The selection of countries includes regions such as Africa, Europe (such as Italy and Denmark), and East Asia (like Mongolia and Japan). After each group's presentation, their corresponding countries are marked on the world map. Students are sincerely interested in the cultures and traditions of these countries, displaying enthusiasm by asking questions and engaging in discussions. The teacher encourages students to ask questions, share perspectives, inquire about their peers' ideas, and engage in collaborative learning. The teacher dedicates ample time to providing clear and concise explanations aimed at enhancing students' understanding of cultural practices and customs. This well-organized and interactive learning space proficiently advances lively student participation, nurtures inquisitiveness, and stimulates the investigation of varied customs and concepts. Such an approach conforms to overarching academic goals, which strive to enhance cross-cultural understanding, analytical reasoning, and unimpeded communication between students.

### **5.3 Moral Education: Unifying morality, teaching strategies and school activities**

A brief description of the interviewee's characteristics is essential, as their attitudes significantly influenced the research process. One school requested the interview guidelines, which were shared with them. Interestingly, there was significant variation in the teachers' responses to the guidelines, with some carefully preparing their responses while others took a more spontaneous approach. During the interviews, all six teachers from one school were

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<sup>69</sup>This phenomenon is frequently observed in these classes, where teachers must differentiate between correct and incorrect beliefs. Research highlights that teachers confront the difficulty of avoiding subjective evaluations while adhering to their professional role (e.g. Veugelers, 2000). It is imperative for teachers to differentiate and conform to the "official" beliefs imposed by authorities and the societal structure established in Chinese culture.

present to facilitate a group discussion.<sup>70</sup> During this discussion, three teachers were actively engaged in the conversation while the remaining three were relatively silent. One teacher exhibited hesitancy in their responses, while the teacher whose class was observed displayed a high level of engagement and participation. At the primary school level, a concise conversation occurred with the teacher of the observed class due to time constraints, although further discussions were welcomed. Interviews with parents revealed distinct patterns: one preferred a written format, one provided detailed responses, and another displayed skepticism. Despite their differences, all parents actively engaged in candid discussions, enriching the research findings.

### **5.3.1 Exploring Moral Education: Locating Morality and the Rule of Law**

China's educational objectives focus on promoting the holistic development of students, integrating moral education into various academic subjects (Zhu, 2006). This student-centered approach is not confined to traditional classroom settings, but extends to all aspects of the school day. The visited schools are regarded as top-tier educational institutions in Beijing. Therefore, they have access to a wealth of educational resources and maintain a commitment to unparalleled standards of academic excellence. Significantly, the perspectives of many educators in these schools emphasize placing students at the forefront of the educational model as essential. This commitment to prioritizing the well-being and development of students underscores the schools' dedication to comprehensive education and the fostering of moral values within the school setting.

Conversations with teacher across various grade levels uncovered a clear comprehension not only of their individual roles in moral education but also of the purpose and content of moral education within school settings. However, interactions with parents exposed a notable lack of understanding regarding the nature and importance of moral education in schools. Parents seemed to have a limited understanding of the differences between general moral education and the specific subject of Morality and the Rule of Law. When viewed in isolation, parents found the latter's content unremarkable. However, teachers demonstrated the ability to distinguish between the two and effectively convey their significance and distinct contributions to student development. This gap in understanding emphasizes the need to differentiate between the general concept of moral education and the specific subject of Morality and the Rule of Law for a more thorough understanding among teachers and parents.<sup>71</sup> Parents and educational authorities share the same belief of incorporating Morality and the Rule

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<sup>70</sup>Group discussions here involve a conversation among individuals who come together to exchange ideas and discuss a research topic. These discussions are commonly utilized to explore the perspectives and experiences of group members, as well as to gain insights into social phenomena. Through group discussions, a deeper understanding of social dynamics, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within a specific community, organization, or society can be obtained.

<sup>71</sup>The disparity in comprehension between teachers and parents bears great significance as it can greatly impact the efficacy of moral education. Specialized teachers typically obtain a more thorough and transparent grasp of moral education, encompassing specific subject areas and wider contexts, on account of their alignment with educational institutions and adherence to rigorous training. There may be challenges in comprehending certain concepts, specifically for parents who lack consistent involvement in the educational process. Parents could encounter difficulties in understanding the advantages of particular educational techniques when they are not closely involved in all facets of the academic process.

of Law into the overall educational structure while highlighting their interdependence. This alignment emphasizes the importance of unity from both parental and educational perspectives (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2019b). One parent stressed the significance of practical and effective educational material, as well as advocating against repetitive content. The need for continual reinforcement of acquired knowledge throughout the educational journey was emphasized (PARENT A). Another parent noted the continued integration of ideology and politics with other subjects, but perceived a more “formal way” and increased focus on other subjects, particularly during final exams (Parent B). In primary school, the teacher of Morality and the Rule of Law course acknowledges the significance of integrating this subject into the wider moral education framework. Though he conducts just two weekly classes, these sessions present prospects to instill knowledge, cultivate moral character, and improve legal literacy. Nevertheless, the teacher has concerns about the restricted time available for fostering discipline and positive behavior.<sup>72</sup> He assesses his role and influence, emphasizing the correlation between the subject matter and students’ daily conduct. Although it appears ambiguous, as it could convey either a redundant emphasis on the significance of the subject matter or a limited relevance by reiterating his assertion (TEACHER Z).<sup>73</sup>

A key difference between moral education and the subject Morality and the Rule of Law is the time allocation. Moral education is a daily practice, occurring from Monday to Friday, and primarily supervised by the class teacher and grade leader. On the other hand, Morality and the Rule of Law takes place twice a week and necessitates specialized teachers for content delivery. According to a sixth-grade teacher, the key feature of moral education is its ongoing supervision by the class teacher, which involves overseeing student behavior in all settings and verifying their access to required resources (TEACHER Z). The impact of moral education reaches throughout the entire school community, sometimes without explicit recognition. While teachers may not always explicitly label these aspects as moral education, many elements within the school environment are inherently related to principles of moral education. The leaders who oversee moral education were proud to present the various dimensions of moral education within the school context. As such, virtually *every* aspect of school life can be seen as contributing to moral education. However, some parents raise questions about how it can be measured or quantified (PARENT B). This reveals a potential gap in understanding and assessing the impact of moral education.<sup>74</sup> One teacher explained her understanding of moral education in a very clear sense, she said:

If you ask me about the main purpose of moral education, then I think it should be

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<sup>72</sup>Teachers acknowledge the value of participating in the broader context of moral education and actively shaping the curriculum design for greater impact, as noted by Zhu and Shu (2017). Involvement in lesson planning reinforces the connection to the ideological framework, leading to enhanced effectiveness of moral education.

<sup>73</sup>His literal statement is 有一定的联系, 有一定的联系, the repetition marks the importance of his words.

<sup>74</sup>Large-scale, cross-national studies that investigate citizenship and moral education typically focus on individual aspects of moral education and their immediate impact on students, disregarding the wider, lasting repercussions of moral education on students’ all-encompassing development (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2010). This methodology prompts a relevant inquiry for future research: How can the effectiveness of moral education be accurately evaluated within the education framework, taking into account its long-term significance in shaping students’ realities? This issue highlights the necessity for extensive and ongoing research into the field of moral education, involving thorough and long-term investigations.



what we talk about nowadays: *morality*, moral character, *intellectual*, intellectual development, as well as *body*, sports, our physical quality, and then *beauty*, our aesthetic, aesthetic education, and our *labor* education. Then this is my main purpose of moral education, my personal understanding.<sup>75</sup> [...] It is also our President, Comrade Xi Jinping, who mentioned that we should cultivate builders and successors of socialist modernization with the qualities of moral, intellectual, physique, aesthetic and labor (TEACHER B).

Another teacher described the diverse purposes of moral education, covering ideology, morality, moral character, psychological traits, and personal abilities. In her perspective, the identification of students as Chinese nationals is influenced by their nation, ethnicity, and history. According to her, ideology and morality are contributing factors to this identification. The development of moral character is a vital aspect in cultivating this sense of nationality. This cultural formation encompasses qualities such as honesty, friendliness, optimism, and positive behavior, while psychological qualities are stressed to help develop a well-rounded personality and the necessary individual skills for promoting a self-reliant work ethic (TEACHER C).<sup>76</sup> Throughout the educational process, students engage in sharing their viewpoints and ideas with peers and educators to enhance their intellectual growth. In contrast, according to one parent, moral education primarily serves as an opportunity to improve self-awareness and personal identity by aligning this knowledge with their perception of society and its challenges (PARENT C). Notably, a comparison of perspectives between teachers and parents reveals a significant difference in orientation. Teachers often display mechanistic behaviors, reflecting their professional training, while parents promote life-theoretical approaches that prioritize individual development within normative boundaries.<sup>77</sup>

Diverse parental perspectives regarding the topic of Morality and the Rule of Law have surfaced in the interviews. While one parent spoke highly of the subject, providing examples of engaging discussions with her child, two other parents expressed a notably negative view of its impact and importance. The optimistic parent has emphasized how the subject plays a vital role in promoting a wider perspective and broadening one's horizons. She emphasized its ability to foster a broad perspective among students that other disciplines may overlook. She perceives that primary education may not always resonate with students' personal interests, yet as students transition into junior high school, they begin to recognize the varied

<sup>75</sup>Emphasis is taken by the author, to underpin the five principles of moral education. The original words used are 德, 智, 体, 美, 劳动. The emphasis is taken for one reason: these five qualities of moral education are the five qualities for basic education instilled by General Secretary Xi Jinping (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2022b).

<sup>76</sup>Here, a clear connection to the ideological framework and guiding norms is apparent. The Ministry of Education emphasizes not only national identity and loyalty to the party but also values such as collectivism, patriotism, and socialism in the foreground of the moral education understanding (Ministry of Education, 2001b). Furthermore, teachers' comprehension of the purpose of moral education may be influenced by the policy context that ultimately shapes their role perceptions and values, as explained by Scott (2008).

<sup>77</sup>This contrast challenges previous assumptions, such as those proposed by Qi and Tang (2004), which emphasized the shift from "objectified knowledge" to a focus on holistic growth and the cultivation of personal values. While teachers recognize the significance of student-centered education, instructional materials often contain objectified knowledge which could result in an "authority-oriented" approach. This incongruity is evident in the emphasis on adhering to leadership directives and in the alignment of textbook content with political goals by teachers. Such duality highlights the intricate nature of moral education in modern-day Chinese schools.

lessons taught by different subjects and the intrinsic value of gaining knowledge. In the early stages of education, primary school instruction primarily emphasizes the development of moral character, behavioral norms, respect for teachers, and concern for one's peers. Upon entering high school, however, knowledge takes on a new dimension as a means of wielding influence. Students recognize that the greater their store of knowledge, the greater their potential to shape their community and the wider world, "from little things around us to things far away" (PARENT A). The account by the parent underscores the growing significance of education in forming the perspectives and aspirations of students. Moreover, it demonstrates how studying Morality and the Rule of Law can foster independent reasoning and understanding of multifaceted societal concerns. As a guide, parents bear the responsibility of shaping their child's understanding of the pros and cons of various topics.

The perspectives of two other parents on the subject of Morality and the Rule of Law sharply contrasted with the positive viewpoint expressed by the other parent. One parent perceived that the subject is less significant to students compared to other subjects. She observed that students prioritize passing the final exam rather than truly comprehending the subject's content. The subject has a "subtle influence" on students, which becomes progressively apparent during their development. According to her, children usually consider it as a subject that necessitates memorization for exams while focusing on fulfilling minimal requirements. She sees the integration of moral education into other subjects as a means of addressing the issue of rote memorization. This approach could heighten awareness of important issues and inspire students to engage more meaningfully. She referred to the current state of moral education as "becoming bigger" (PARENT B). However, according to her, the Morality and the Rule of Law course is the least discussed subject in their household, and unlike other topics, she has never seen the textbook.<sup>78</sup> While recognizing the potential benefits in terms of fostering social responsibility, patriotism, and obedience to laws, she argues that this subject matter is losing out to other academic priorities. Another parent concurs on the importance of the subject for developing moral fiber and inculcating proper values, yet criticizes the lack of educational direction and overemphasis on academic pursuits.<sup>79</sup> This parent expressed concern that academic demands have reduced the substance of the subject matter (PARENT C). The diversity of parental perspectives emphasizes the intricate connection between students, parents, and morals and legal guidelines in education. Additionally, they emphasize the significance attributed to the subject and its impact on students' growth, as well as the difficulties of balancing moral education and academic aspirations.

During the interview, an eighth-grade student conveyed that she lacked genuine interest in the Morality and Rule of Law course, viewing it solely as a means to achieve high scores

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<sup>78</sup>The actual words used by the parent are (translated): "I never saw the textbook before, I saw all the other subject textbooks."

<sup>79</sup>In this context, students may conform to the "ideal" characteristics and feel pressure to excel academically. However, giving in to such pressure might hinder an individual's authentic involvement with the topic. This may inadvertently promote rote memorization as a means of meeting expectations, instead of fostering true comprehension and internalization of moral education. As a consequence, there is increasing examination of the efficacy of moral education in relation to other subjects in the curriculum. This raises questions about the actual effectiveness of the measures and initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education, as they strive to successfully integrate moral education into the entire educational system.

on exams. Her focus primarily lies in English and Math classes, alongside participating in extracurricular activities, specifically her school's athletics group, which entails a substantial time commitment with multiple training sessions and competitions every week. From her perspective, the Morality and Rule of Law course involves extensive reading materials, although only particular sections need to be memorized for assessments and coursework. She noted that the teacher is friendly and employs a variety of teaching resources, including movies and occasional classroom debates. Nevertheless, she mentioned that the subject matter was not a topic of discussion at home. When queried about her interests, she indicated a stronger preference for themes pertaining to responsibility and ethical conduct, as opposed to areas such as ancient history or the examination of different Asian cultures. This viewpoint from a student demonstrates the diverse levels of engagement and attraction towards the Morality and Rule of Law course. It further emphasizes how other academic disciplines and extracurricular pursuits influence students' perceptions and priorities in relation to various subjects in the curriculum (STUDENT).

Perspectives on moral education and the subject of Morality and the Rule of Law differ between teachers and parents. Teachers typically possess a more comprehensive grasp of these concepts. Parents, on the other hand, frequently encounter difficulty in fully comprehending moral education and its significance due to various demands on their children's school routines. In higher education, the emphasis on academic achievement makes it difficult for parents to actively participate in their children's moral education. This underscores the discrepancy between the desired concept of moral education and its practical implementation within schools. One parent spoke of an "idealization of moral education, when we study it, we idealize it, whether it can really reach its present" (PARENT B).<sup>80</sup>

### 5.3.2 Optimal instructional methods: Seeking the "ideal" way of teaching

Teaching techniques in Chinese education have undergone significant changes over time. The shift from traditional teacher-centered and authoritarian approaches to more student-centered and didactic methods reflects the changing educational landscape in China. Teaching materials have significantly advanced, a transformation acknowledged by both teachers and parents. Parents who studied in underdeveloped parts of China can now witness the integration of modern technology into education. Today's teachers enrich conventional learning materials with digital resources like videos and presentations. This shift in teaching approaches corresponds to a wider educational trend. There is an increasing emphasis on transitioning away from traditional approaches and toward interactive methods. However, although this shift shows promise, it is still challenging to comprehensively address all aspects of student development. One crucial factor is teachers' need to cater to students' individual needs, as emphasized in multiple sources within the educational literature (e.g. Bellous, 2008).

Several teachers have reported a significant shift in teaching practices when reflecting on

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<sup>80</sup>As outlined in chapter three, Liu and Zhu (2001) and Zhang and Du (2023) distinguish between ideal needs and realistic needs of society. Whereas ideal needs not necessary reflect the actual realistic needs of the current society. If we consider moral education as idealization, the question of these very ideal and realistic needs is justified. I will discuss this in more detail in the last chapter.

their own educational experiences. They noted a marked difference in the availability of educational resources. During their own schooling, there was a clear absence of multimedia tools and teaching aids, resulting in a heavy reliance on textbooks as the primary teaching resource. This resulted in a classroom atmosphere defined by didactic teaching methods, reduced student engagement, and a strong emphasis on textbook-oriented instruction. This traditional approach essentially encouraged classroom indoctrination, with teachers primarily delivering lectures centered on memorization and exam preparation.<sup>81</sup> Emotional and character development was overlooked, and one teacher mentioned that it did not make a lasting impact, with the only conscious memory being the importance and honor of labor (TEACHER Z). Moreover, due to a lack of specialized teachers, the subject was typically taught by regular class teachers with little or no training in moral education. The class was treated as a “subject” rather than as a “character cultivation” (PARENT C). Nevertheless, recent changes in educational policy have led to a shift in this approach. The topic of moral education has become increasingly integrated into a comprehensive approach to education.<sup>82</sup>

Interestingly, one teacher shared a positive memory of her moral education class, which contrasts with the views of other participants.<sup>83</sup> Her account is an exception and provides valuable insights into the potential impact of moral education. This teacher recalls two specific subjects taught during her school days: Marxist philosophy and political economy. Although she recognized that these courses may have been superficial, they were instrumental in familiarizing her with these fields and served as an impetus for her choice to major in them at the university level. Significantly, she attributed her passion for these subjects in part to her teachers’ teaching methods. Although the teacher was described as autonomous, also serving as the class teacher, the teacher also offered supplementary courses on Confucianism. These courses included reading the Confucian classics, exploring traditional culture, and even hosting film classes (TEACHER B). Another teacher mentioned that when she was in school, the school provided extracurricular tutoring in activities like martial arts and dancing. These activities were viewed as a common expression of moral education, indicating a diverse method of character development beyond typical classroom teaching.

One teacher has observed a clear trend in contemporary education towards fostering stu-

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<sup>81</sup>As Qi and Tang (2004), indicated, prior to the opening-up reform, moral education predominantly followed a closed-loop approach in which the teacher indoctrinated students, emphasizing objective knowledge transmission and political ideology instillation. This approach persisted in many schools for some time even after the reform, reflecting the teachers’ experiences as students. Further, the teaching materials are currently undergoing a revision and integrating new technologies into today’s instructive practices. This enables schools to incorporate their own materials and establish customized classes (Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2014).

<sup>82</sup>Liu and Zhu (2001) emphasized the importance of shifting moral education from mechanistic approaches towards a life-theoretical framework, prioritizing individual students over standardized methods in China’s educational development. This transformational shift aims to enhance education quality by giving priority to personalized, student-centered approaches to moral education and recognizing individual needs, motivations, challenges, and interests. It departs from conventional approaches by embracing the diversity of learners and recognizing that effective moral education must engage students personally. This shift highlights genuine moral and ethical development rather than rote learning and conformity, which may not connect with or engage students on a personal level.

<sup>83</sup>The subject of moral education during the parents and teachers time at school was not *Morality and the Rule of Law*. As outlined in chapter three, it was still divided into *Character and Life*, *Morality and Society and Ideology and Character*. Several of the participants mentioned this during the interviews.

dents' holistic growth through innovative teaching methods. Such an approach encompasses the use of multisensory aids, narratives, multimedia resources, and participatory lesson plans. Educators adopt an attitude of impartiality and receptiveness in their work, which consequently earns them greater reverence from students. This emphasis on learner-driven lessons and holistic learning boosts student involvement and facilitates personal growth opportunities. Additionally, contemporary moral education curricula prioritize a comprehensive comprehension of educational goals, affording educators the adaptability to formulate their own lesson plans while upholding overarching curriculum standards (TEACHER D). Another teacher underscores the significance of sound time management, careful planning, and comprehending each student's individual circumstances. Additionally, she emphasizes the textbook's role in supplying a methodical advancement of moral education material, ranging from basic to intricate concepts. The textbook establishes a structure for varied teaching techniques and learning objectives. It highlights the significance of teacher initiative in carrying out the curriculum, "a great deal of initiative in implementing the curriculum design" (TEACHER C).<sup>84</sup> Some teachers argue that present textbooks do not align with academic regulation, arguing that textbooks on Morality and the Rule of Law fall short in keeping up with evolving national policies and laws. The sixth-grade teacher referred to it as "lagging behind" and said "especially the Morality and Rule of Law textbook, because it still lags behind with the adjustments and modification of national policies and laws" (TEACHER Z). The discrepancy points to the necessity for factual accuracy and alignment with policy goals, necessitating timely adjustments and modifications.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, it has been noted by certain teachers that modifications have been made to the content. In the past, moral education classes did not cover legal knowledge or the Chinese constitution, indicating the absence of topics related to the rule of law (TEACHER B). This highlights the evolving nature of Morality and the Rule of Law curriculum, now emphasizing real-world connections and incorporating current events into class discussions.<sup>86</sup>

Parents and teachers alike acknowledge the value of incorporating contemporary events into the classroom to increase the significance and applicability of moral education. One parent mentioned that some teachers actively promote students' involvement with news, staying up-to-date with current affairs, and embracing elements from assorted news outlets into eval-

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<sup>84</sup>This aligns with research (e.g. Zhu and Shu, 2017) indicating that teachers who actively participate in curriculum development and lesson planning experience a heightened sense of control and effectiveness in their teaching roles. Active engagement lets teachers shape their professional identities and enhance classroom outcomes. By not only adhering to curriculum goals but also tailoring them to the unique needs of their students, teachers contribute to the establishment of a holistic learning environment. This method promotes a flexible and adjustable learning environment, ultimately benefiting teachers and students alike.

<sup>85</sup>The analysis of textbooks indicated a substantial correspondence between the introduced core competencies and the textbook content. Variations were observed in domains such as international relations and revolutionary tradition, which are highlighted in the curriculum standards but less prevalent in the current textbooks. However, these textbooks were published prior to the implementation of the 2022 curriculum standards, rendering full synchronization uncertain. This misalignment raises concerns regarding the successful integration of the new core competencies into current educational materials and emphasizes the necessity for a comprehensive review and potential revision of the textbooks.

<sup>86</sup>This emphasis can be observed not only in textbooks but also in curriculum standards. Specifically, in the eighth and ninth grades of junior high school, there is a significant focus on legal knowledge, including the Chinese constitution. This indicates a shift from the primary emphasis on morality to a greater emphasis on the rule of law.

uations. The objective goes beyond simply consuming information. It involves analyzing and applying moral and ethical principles derived from the textbook. Still, the parent recognizes that this approach presents practical challenges, “but in reality we never watch it. One is that there is no time, and the other is that it is no longer a strict rule. So the children won’t be particular about that” (PARENT B). Therefore, students may not always prioritize staying up-to-date with present-day happenings. Another parent underpins the integration of Morality and the Rule of Law classes with contemporary politics. Teachers are encouraged to stay informed about current events and share their insights with students. Moreover, parent-teacher meetings offer platforms for educators to discuss successful strategies for teaching politics, underscore the importance of political awareness, and highlight the potential advantages of such an education. These meetings provide valuable opportunities for parents to gain insight into supporting their children’s learning experiences (PARENT A). Parents further reflect on the changing dynamics of classrooms, attributing these shifts to population growth in China and the resulting increase in class sizes. Despite the limited understanding of the rules by a parent’s daughter, the parent advocates for their acceptance. She highlights the significance of upholding order and safety, particularly with the rise in class sizes. Based on her viewpoint, more stringent regulations enhance classroom performance and enhance learning outcomes. Referring to her background in a comparable smaller town setting, she emphasizes the need for strengthening regulations to suit the ever-changing educational environment, rather than loosening them (PARENT B).

Parents and teachers alike stress the significant transformation that modern teaching methods have brought to the field, compared to the less stimulating and restricted approaches of the past. The integration of diverse instructional techniques and strategies has significantly enhanced educational outcomes and quality while nurturing more meaningful connections between educators and students. In the past, education was often described as “rigid” (PARENT A), relying heavily on textbooks and a limited range of educational resources, such as a few television programs. Moreover, the quality of teaching varied widely, producing uneven educational experiences and outcomes for students. Teachers are expected to comply with established standards and strive for continual self-improvement in their teaching practices. Remarkably, a parent recognizes disparities not only between urban and rural education but also within urban settings, leading to varying outcomes due to differences in school structures and resources. (PARENT A). Parents have expressed a favorable opinion of teaching materials, particularly with regards to the implementation of information technology and availability of a variety of instructional videos. There is currently a notable link between online teaching resources and the accessibility of hardware. At a school that one parent’s child attends, lesson preparation groups hold great importance. These groups are responsible for determining class organization and selecting videos and cases for presentation through collaborative discussions. This acknowledgment of progress in teaching resources suggests potential advantages for the educational experience. The parent said that

Perhaps in China today, each Beijing school definitely has excellent conditions with regard to teaching hardware, however teaching materials are in fact also

really good in some remote areas because they emphasize education as part of poverty alleviation; even where other things may be failing, this aspect is indeed good (PARENT A).<sup>87</sup>

One parent's firsthand account of her own schooling experience offers valuable insights into the changing priorities of education over time. Her story showcases the transformation in educational focus and draws attention to the differences between past and present schooling. According to her recollection, she characterizes her earlier schooling experience as having a sense of freedom, although she admits that it is "hard to put it into words". Growing up in a small town with limited educational resources facilitated a greater degree of autonomy in arranging her activities, less parental oversight, and a less structured curriculum. These circumstances created an environment with lower competition, a narrower range of academic subjects, and fewer extracurricular opportunities, which she views as "it is a pity now". Importantly, the parent clarifies that no restrictions are imposed on her child's freedom presently. Instead, she highlights the ample options and opportunities accessible to children nowadays. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the intensified academic load and the probability that hobbies and interests may become obligatory due to increased competition. This dual perspective highlights the complexity of contemporary education, offering increased opportunities for personal growth but also constrained by extended school hours and homework demands. The parent said:

Seen from the outside, it seems that *Reform and Opening*<sup>88</sup> individualizes, so obviously children today must be freer. Seen from the outside, that's how it looks, isn't it?

The school wants children to develop in an all-round way, some children naturally fit well into this, but most don't, and they feel uncomfortable. It's like, even if you have a hobby, many other kids may not, but if everybody does, then I also must have it.

It was meant to be a thing that enriches life, but when you treat it as a compulsory course among others, the children face heavy tasks under the current conditions.

I think in fact more and more success criteria are becoming more and more homogenized now. That's to say, I think there is a contradiction here. On the one hand, we are talking about diversity now, but now that diversity has become a label, isn't that also a kind of homogeneity? (PARENT B)

The discussion revealed the shifting focus towards individuality in education over time. Contemporary educational methods advocate for self-expression among children, but various

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<sup>87</sup>The measurements of the Ministry of Education demonstrate a strong dedication to enhancing education quality. This extends beyond just improving resource allocation, but includes training exceptional teachers and exchanging teaching resources between districts. The goal is to improve the quality of each educational institution and reduce discrepancies in educational quality between them (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2022d).

<sup>88</sup>Emphasis added by author.

external factors have increased stress levels and depression rates among students.<sup>89</sup> The shift in educational priorities has generated inquiries into the ongoing importance of moral education, especially in a society that heavily prioritizes achieving excellence. One parent, whose child has obtained international exposure through a large amount of travel, approaches life from a wider scope. They compare multiple nations with China, and raise essential inquiries about the inequalities they witness. This prompts the parent to seek a deeper understanding of the root causes of these disparities and to facilitate their child's comprehension of these complex issues. Teachers also shared their perspectives on the transformation of moral education. They pointed out the contrast between their earlier experiences, which featured passive, knowledge-centered, and teacher-oriented methods, and the dynamic and interactive nature of contemporary moral education programs. This shift involves a move away from traditional textbooks toward a range of diverse teaching materials, enabling teachers to implement their own personal pedagogical styles and incorporate theoretical knowledge into practical applications. Additionally, the enhanced communication in the classroom promotes interactive discussions and cultivates an atmosphere of mutual respect among students. Ultimately, the comprehensive development of students is of utmost importance in contemporary moral education, in alignment with the changing educational landscape and societal demands.

### 5.3.3 Enhancing moral development: School activities

In modern education, a balanced integration of theoretical and practical approaches reflects students' real-life experiences while promoting their understanding of diverse subjects. This integration transcends the boundaries of traditional classroom settings, furnishing students with a more comprehensive educational journey. Although practical activities may not be directly related to the subject of Morality and the Rule of Law, they make a significant contribution to the wider landscape of moral education. The school's moral education group is responsible for organizing these practical activities, and parents typically have limited direct involvement in the planning process. Parents typically gain insights into student activities through their children's accounts, as noted by one of the parents (PARENT C). Furthermore, each class has a weekly meeting with their teacher, usually on Mondays. These meetings revolve around specific themes from the curriculum standards and focus on various aspects of students' lives, as well as the pivotal role played by the teacher in their development. This recurring interaction offers an extra opportunity for moral education to spread throughout the school setting and bolster the bond among students, teachers, and the curriculum. While teachers emphasize the significance of these weekly meetings, a parent described them as

the child will feel that the weekly class meeting is a good time to write homework. They don't take this as a very serious matter. [...] I can do something else.

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<sup>89</sup>As scholars have pointed out (e.g. Wang and Huang, 2008), self-education plays a pivotal role in the socialization process for students in modern Chinese education. Self-education fosters critical thinking, self-reflection, and exploration of novel subjects. It encourages students to scrutinize their education and contemplate alternate viewpoints, such as the rationale behind particular academic elements. Thus, students potentially become less inclined to conform when they perceive alternative approaches to acquiring knowledge and achieving personal growth. This underscores the intricate interplay between self-directed learning, conventional academic frameworks, and students' evolving perspectives on education.



Because in school, s/he will feel that s/he has more important tasks to complete. And s/he will feel that all this is the teacher preaching. They actually resent that teachers are always preaching at them, especially during puberty (PARENT B).

The middle school under examination employs a structured approach to impart moral values to its students, as evident in its monthly thematic concentration on “big moral education” during the observation phase. Furthermore, the school places extensive attention on celebrating significant festivals such as Labor Day, Mother’s Day, and Class Teacher’s Day. While the school’s administration is responsible for approving these events, the teachers are directly involved in coordinating and executing them. For example, the annual ceremony honoring class teachers serves as a powerful testament to the schools’ commitment to integrating appreciation and admiration of educators into its moral education framework. Another significant ceremony occurs when students turn 14 and transition from the Young Pioneers to the Chinese Communist Youth League. This process includes objective assessments to determine membership eligibility in the Youth League. The ceremony advances patriotic education and symbolizes a moral transition for the students. During the month of May, the school celebrates the “Red Month of May”<sup>90</sup> with various activities, including communal singing. Every grade participates in a collective choral performance, with special recognition awarded to the grade that exhibits exceptional unity and performance. This practice fosters camaraderie among students and aligns with the school’s overarching goals in moral education.

A concerned parent described the limited availability of off-campus activities and infrequent activities, such as visits to museums. The impression conveyed was that there was a lack of school-organized activities, with students taking it upon themselves to arrange activities. Upon further examination, it became apparent that the observations were limited to recent years due to national regulations that restricted practical activities. The school typically arranges one extracurricular activity per term, such as a field trip to rice fields to expose students to manual labor. According to another parent, the activities provide an opportunity for students to leave campus, socialize and bring their own food, but seem lacking in educational value. The activities were viewed as team-building exercises rather than structured learning experiences. The parent questioned the effectiveness of a one-day excursion in providing a comprehensive understanding of manual labor. Instead, the parent suggests that such experiences could inadvertently convey the message that work is enjoyable rather than challenging. Thus, the parent does not perceive these activities to have a profound impact on children’s perspectives, especially considering the overarching focus on exams and academic study in the school environment (PARENT B). On the other hand, a different parent held a more optimistic view regarding the potential benefits of these extracurricular activities. She believed that extracurricular activities could provide valuable knowledge with potential long-term influence on students’ moral development and practical understanding, even if the immediate impact is not apparent (PARENT D).<sup>91</sup> The parent described these activities as the following:

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<sup>90</sup>The Chinese word is 红五月 (*hongwuyue*).

<sup>91</sup>The Social Classroom Project, which aims to promote students’ holistic development, was introduced to encourage students’ involvement in activities designed to enhance moral understanding and raise awareness of

I tend to think that this tiny activity is like a small treat in their lives, among them. I don't know if you get my point. It is like our after-dinner dessert, it is a little treat. As for the children, because the time is very short, everybody goes along and has the experience. What is the happiest for most of them? Not that they grasped some knowledge (PARENT B).

Contrary to the worries regarding extracurricular activities, another parent maintained a distinctly optimistic perspective regarding the school-run activities. This parent regarded such activities as significantly advantageous to a child's overall growth and development. To support her viewpoint, she cited the graduation trip as a notable example, highlighting that it encompassed various aspects of moral education despite not being directly associated with the Morality and Rule of Law course. The trip included three cultural themes, each offering students an opportunity to experience different aspects of China's traditional culture firsthand. These themes comprised cultural exploration in Xi'an, celebrating reform and modernization in Xiamen, and exploring the realm of traditional craftsmanship in Jiangdezhen. Although the parent noted that certain themes might not be particularly stimulating for children, she stressed the trip's significance in promoting peer interaction and relationships. Additionally to cultivating positive habits among students, such as expressing gratitude to their parents by gifting, the teachers promoted attending the Tian'anmen Square flag-raising ceremony as a crucial component of entering junior high school education. The parent provided an elaborate explanation of military training sessions, prevalent in both junior and senior high school, unlike primary school where such training is absent.<sup>92</sup> This three-day training includes an instructor and aims to "temper one's will" and support the rapid maturation of children. The training prepares them for the more demanding educational environments of junior and senior high school, emphasizing discipline, learning, and knowledge acquisition. Additionally, it prepares them for a new stage of education, which is significantly more rigorous and intense than the "happy" primary school, placing greater emphasis on discipline, learning, and knowledge (PARENT A).

The perspectives on practical activities in moral education lack unanimity and exhibit diversity. Discussions with both teachers and parents reveal varying viewpoints. While some teachers advocate practical activities, citing their alignment with students' real-life experiences and the opportunity to engage with students on equal footing, others disagree. On the other hand, while parents generally support practical activities in education, there is no

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real-world situations. It also seeks to facilitate self-education, as noted by Xu and Wang (2015). The Ministry of Education has indicated that these activities also serve to strengthen students' connection with Chinese history and accomplishments (Ministry of Education, 2017d). The efficacy of one-day events remains unclear due to the absence of firsthand involvement of students, which gives rise to valid apprehensions regarding their influence on students' outlook and principles.

<sup>92</sup>Researchers, such as Cui (2023), argue for the importance of military training for primary school students. Military training can aid in maintaining physical and mental health and in cultivating positive behavior patterns, which in turn can contribute to positive social development. Further, the author argues that children must rapidly adapt to new roles when transitioning from kindergarten to primary school and seamlessly integrate themselves into the unfamiliar environment. Military training serves not only to foster political awareness and team consciousness but also promotes a sense of self-discipline and facilitates acclimation to primary school life, ultimately enabling students to promptly assimilate within their communities. These sentiments are reflected in the statements provided by the interviewed parents.

unanimous agreement among them regarding these activities' actual benefits for children. The diversity of perspectives highlights the difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness and significance of practical activities for moral education.

## 5.4 Moral development in context: Considering the role of others

The study of moral development stresses the impact of external factors and the role of individuals in shaping their understanding and behavior towards morality. Analyzing the intricate details of moral development within the broader context of interaction allows to comprehend how students address ethical dilemmas and develop their moral principles over time. The development of individuals is heavily influenced by the guidance and social interactions they receive from different individuals. Therefore, investigating the obscure role of educators in the realm of moral education can enhance comprehension of how their self-perception impacts the moral development of students.

### 5.4.1 Teacher's dilemma: Servant versus guide

When exploring the role of teachers, it is apparent that their impact on students' ethical growth and conduct is a fundamental factor to consider. This section's title, "Servant versus guide", arose from a profound statement made by one of the teachers. While discussing her perspective on her position as a teacher in the Morality and Rule of Law course, she expressed her function and obligations eloquently. She introduced her role stating, "I am a servant", and later closed by saying, "I cannot say I am a leader, but rather a guide" (TEACHER B).<sup>93</sup> The tension between the roles of "servant" and "guide" can be analyzed effectively in the framework of the two distinct forms of social control identified by Xi (2002). These two forms of social control represent pivotal aspects of the educational landscape. The first form involves direct control of education by leadership, often leading to the standardization of educational practices. This approach prioritizes a top-down strategy towards education, in which leadership plays a crucial part in shaping the curriculum, teaching techniques, and educational goals holistically. Its objective is to establish a structured and uniform education system. In contrast, the alternative form of social control emphasizes the vital role of teachers as direct guides for students. Teachers play a crucial role in providing personalized guidance and support to students, enabling them to navigate their academic journey with success. This approach acknowledges the significance of educators in shaping students' ambitions and principles, particularly within the realm of moral education.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup>The exact words the teacher is using for servant, guide and leader are 服务者 (*fuwuzhe*), 引导者 (*yindaozhe*) and 引领 (*yinling*). 引领 may carry a slightly stronger connotation of actively taking the lead or being at the forefront, while 引导 can be used in a broader sense to refer to the act of providing guidance or direction.

<sup>94</sup>As outlined by Capps et al. (2012), a teacher's perception of their role is closely linked to the educational setting. It encompasses more than just transmitting knowledge, as it also involves applying pedagogical skills. This view is consistent with the teacher's self-perception, in which she characterizes her role not only as an instructor but also as a guide who supports students on their educational path. This self-awareness is crucial in defining the kind of teacher she hopes to become, as well as the qualities she connects with her role in the

This dichotomy in perceiving teachers as either “servants” or “guides” has made a lasting impact, highlighting a clear contrast in two different views of their roles. In one view, teachers are primarily seen as servants, dutifully serving various levels of authority, from national governance to school administration. This role entails adherence to strict regulations, policies, and predetermined ideologies established by these authorities. Teachers are frequently seen as individuals who enforce and put into practice established rules and regulations. However, an alternate viewpoint presents them as guides, highlighting their role in aiding students as they navigate the intricate landscape of principles, legal concepts, and ideologies prescribed by these governing bodies.<sup>95</sup> In this capacity, teachers offer crucial assistance for learning, problem-solving, and comprehensive education. They are viewed as guides and facilitators of intellectual development. The interviews did not categorize teachers into exclusive roles. Rather, they propose a nuanced understanding of teachers’ roles that encompass both guiding and serving functions.

The evolving perspective of the teacher regarding her role in the Morality and Rule of Law class warrants examination. At the outset, she explicated the fundamental aims of moral education classes and her function within the domain of moral education. In this phase, she used the term “servant” to describe her role, supporting it with various illustrative instances. In this role, the teacher views every student as similar to her own child, holding identical aspirations for them as she does for her own. Her primary objective is that she “wants him/her to develop a good moral character, represent China at all times and become a very civilized Chinese citizen” (TEACHER B). Specifically, she aims for her students to demonstrate qualities like civility, a strong work ethic, and an unwavering dedication to representing China respectfully on all occasions. Additionally, she endeavors to equip her students with essential skills for effective learning, enabling them to effectively navigate their environment and the vast wealth of knowledge contained therein. Her ultimate goal is for them to approach this knowledge with a critical eye and thoughtfully reflect upon its implications. She prioritizes her students’ physical well-being by emphasizing the importance of commonplace activities in fostering their health. Furthermore, the teacher is committed to instilling in her students a deep comprehension of the societal value of labor and an unwavering admiration for those who participate in it. This comprehensive method of teaching exemplifies the teacher’s dedication to promoting the complete development of her students, comparable to the role of a “guide”. As a teacher, there is a dual responsibility that exists. The first aspect involves serving as an instructor who imparts knowledge and encourages students to adhere to established educational standards mandated by authorities. The second facet involves guiding students to become exemplary individuals themselves. This guiding role emphasizes the development of student abilities, promoting balanced perspectives, and fostering comprehensive growth within the educational system. Importantly, the teacher’s approach is aligned with China’s holistic educational philosophy that aims to shape individuals into future leaders.

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educational process.

<sup>95</sup>This perspective aligns with the Chinese Government’s perspective on the roles of teachers in education. Teachers are seen as having a crucial mission, which includes not only conveying knowledge but also shaping individuals. They are required to remain firmly dedicated to their mission, motivated by the desire to contribute actively to the nation’s progress and rejuvenation (Chinese Government, 2018a).

This alignment highlights the teacher's obligation to serve the overall educational objectives, as demonstrated by the Chinese Government (e.g. Chinese Government, 2018a,b).

While some interview participants indirectly allude to the distinction between the roles of servant and guide, it is not explicitly differentiated. One teacher described herself as a "guide of moral education" with the ultimate goal of "improving the emotional development of students" using diverse educational methods. While explaining her approach, she emphasized the significance of utilizing relevant examples that highlight the importance of understanding China's historical context. She stressed the delivery of well-defined courses, allowing students to grasp the greatness of their country and its historical accomplishments. This aspect of teaching aligns with the role of a servant, as it involves imparting specific knowledge per educational mandates (TEACHER A). Additionally, another teacher provided a comprehensive perspective that implies a more multifaceted role. Although she did not directly mention the term "servant", her description contained implicit connotations. She stated that high school students have acquired a comprehensive grasp of the fundamental socialist principles. The reference to these principles highlights their particular relevance in this period of education where students can be exposed to them for an extended duration.<sup>96</sup> The socialist core values are the values that guide classroom teaching and as a moral education teacher it is

very important to reach our discipline's core literacy. Because what we want to cultivate is the successor of socialism, we should always follow our fundamental educational goal to implement various kinds of education, values and behavioral guidance in the classroom (TEACHER C).

One teacher acknowledged the significance of his role in shaping the moral education class, even though he held reservations about the extent of his impact. He emphasized that the effectiveness of the class is largely contingent on the teacher's design and execution. A well-structured and engaging class tends to capture students' attention and elicit positive engagement, while a less captivating class might lead to distractions or disinterest. Parents, on the other hand, often perceive teachers primarily as knowledge providers who play a pivotal role in ensuring their students' success in exams. From the parents' perspective, teachers serve as guides in the students' journey to acquire knowledge and instill educational principles. It is evident that teachers assume multifaceted roles that cannot be neatly confined to a simplistic categorization as either a servant or guide. Instead, teachers adapt their roles to suit the specific contexts and needs within the school environment.<sup>97</sup> These roles can be linked to the

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<sup>96</sup>Hu (2020) conducted an analysis on the identification with socialist core values. The analysis emphasizes that it is important for students to understand the original meaning of these values in order to connect social values with their own individual values. Merely transmitting knowledge of these values leads to an increased conceptualization of people's thought processes. For students, it is crucial to comprehend the reasons behind such values to truly comprehend and connect with them. Education, therefore, should distance itself from technical rationality that presupposes prior knowledge and confront the neglect of the initial meaning that facilitated the emergence of this knowledge. The *empty form* of the original meaning must be confronted in education to ensure identification on both social and individual levels.

<sup>97</sup>Research, as demonstrated by studies conducted such as Ye and Zhao (2019), underpins the dynamic nature of teachers' identities. These identities are inherently flexible and shaped by various factors, including government policies and the influence of fellow educators. Therefore, a teacher's identity and professionalism are

three levels outlined by Li (2009), highlighting the intricate involvement of teachers in influencing the moral development of students. Teachers as servants aligns with the macro and meso levels of Li's framework. At the macro level, teachers must adhere to national policies and adjust to the constantly changing education landscape. Their responsibilities align with broader societal objectives, as they act as agents to guarantee compliance with authoritative structures and institutional norms. At the meso level, teachers navigate the distinct culture of their schools. The prevailing culture significantly influences the conduct and beliefs of teachers. Successful interactions with school leaders and colleagues become pivotal as they shape the professional identities of teachers within the school's specific context. Conversely, the role of a guide corresponds primarily to the micro level in Li's framework. At this level, teachers' professional identities are shaped by various factors, such as cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and personal values. It is within this micro-level context that teachers assume their roles as guides, promoting students' ethical growth through personalized interactions.

#### 5.4.2 Parental influence: Self versus parents

The process of socialization for students begins within the family unit, with parents assuming a crucial role in molding their children's values and beliefs. One parent expressed her parental role as "set a good example with one's own conduct" (PARENT C).<sup>98</sup> This parent asserts that moral character is primarily developed through parental influence by shaping virtuous behavior, rather than the school-based approach to moral development. This perspective implies skepticism concerning school's efficacy in prioritizing character development over academic achievement. The parent stresses that parents bear the primary responsibility for moral education, while schools should bolster their efforts in this area. She acknowledged that nurturing moral character requires engaging in heart-to-heart conversations with children, providing unwavering support, and promoting the reading of ethical literature. This perspective highlights the different roles that parents and schools play in shaping the moral foundation of students, with parents as the primary moral educators who set an example and impart values through direct interaction. It also implies an expectation for schools to complement parental efforts by adopting comprehensive moral education strategies.<sup>99</sup>

One parent exemplified her approach and beliefs through a specific incident in which her child encountered an unwell individual outside of school. Uncertain, the child struggled with how to respond, but fortunately, a classmate stepped in to offer assistance. This parent places significant emphasis on fostering open communication regarding incidents of this nature,

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not fixed, but instead adaptable and responsive to the unique context and environment in which they operate. This adaptability is crucial for efficient pedagogy and navigating the ever-changing education environment.

<sup>98</sup>This translation derives from the Chinese idiom 以身作则 (*yishen-zuoze*).

<sup>99</sup>The correlation between these findings and Hu and Qin (2012)'s research emphasizes the vital function of the family in moral development. Children frequently imitate their families' conduct and principles, with schools strengthening or reorientating these pre-existing values, instead of beginning anew. It highlights the family's paramount role in developing a child's initial moral framework, with schools acting as supporting influencers that build upon these foundations. This viewpoint contests the belief that schools have exclusive responsibility for students' moral development and emphasizes their supplementary role in sustaining and modifying moral values instilled within the family.

which provides guidance on navigating similar situations in the future, ensuring the child's preparation for any potential reoccurrences. According to the parent, it is not her intention to impart moral lessons explicitly, but rather to aid in understanding the situation, equipping the child with essential tools to handle similar situations in the future. Conversely, another parent perceives her role as that of a guide. She described a recent incident where her child faced difficulties with homework. The parent responded by clarifying the underlying concepts and ultimately providing assistance with the assignment, as the child was struggling to understand the material. Afterwards, the parent contacted the teacher to address the situation. The parent's primary objective is to ensure the accuracy of assignments while also reducing the child's academic workload. These two parental perspectives represent differing approaches to moral education. The first parent prioritizes open dialogue and situational understanding, with the aim of equipping their child with the necessary skills to handle ethical dilemmas autonomously. Conversely, the second parent adopts a more hands-on approach, offering direct assistance to ensure their child's academic success. Both perspectives, while distinct, contribute to the broader conversation on the complex responsibilities that parents undertake in fostering the moral and intellectual development of their children.

Parents often navigate a delicate balance between advocating for their child's needs and fostering effective communication with their child's teacher. This dual role requires them to ensure their child adapts successfully to the school environment while also comprehending the rationale behind educational policies.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, parents must act as intermediaries during conflicts, striving to resolve any issues that may arise between their child and the teacher. One parent explained her perspective on this role, describing it as a preventative measure to reduce conflicts at school. She emphasizes the importance of objectively conveying the teacher's rules and criticisms to the child. This involves presenting the teacher's perspective and disapproval without introducing bias. Additionally, she advocates for empowering the child to engage in open dialogue with the teacher and evaluate the usefulness of their ideas. If needed, the child should be able to communicate with the teacher openly. In this case, the parent offers nuanced guidance instead of enforcing strict obedience to the teacher's authority. She refrains from giving unambiguous orders to blindly obey the teacher, acknowledging that teachers can make mistakes. This approach offers flexibility in adhering to rules, acknowledging that compliance may rely on interpersonal dynamics and societal observations. Within this space, parents aim to foster understanding, open communication, and constructive problem-solving between the child and teacher. The parent says: "I usually do not say you definitely have to listen to the teacher. The teacher is also wrong sometimes" and that "rules can be flexible, depending on the interpersonal relationships. It is possible that you act exactly as others expect it or as you observe others doing it" (PARENT B).

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<sup>100</sup>Collaboration between schools and parents is a crucial factor in contemporary education highlighted by various policy documents (e.g. Beijing Municipal Education Commission, 2017a; Chinese Government, 2018b; Ministry of Education, 2017d). By strengthening this partnership, there is a potential to achieve improved and efficient outcomes in moral education.

### 5.4.3 The power of teachers: Self versus teachers

Understanding the roles of teachers and the dilemma of being a servant or a guide is crucial when it comes to transmitting values. Teachers are responsible for guiding students towards adopting values that align with established moral and ethical frameworks. Nonetheless, they may encounter situations where students express differing viewpoints, which can create a division between what is perceived as *positive/good* or *negative/bad* in terms of ideas and convictions. Navigating the balance between enabling free expression and upholding anticipated ideological values stresses the intricacies of moral education, where teachers must both instruct and defend established principles.

The interviewed teachers shared a perspective on their classroom approach, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balance between established moral principles and an open environment for exploration. They frequently discussed the value of recognizing diverse viewpoints as a critical and prevalent aspect of the learning process and a “common phenomenon”, especially during a student’s formative years. This acknowledgment recognizes the importance of cognitive processes involved in the development of moral values. The teachers’ reflections highlighted a distinct binary perception, distinguishing between thoughts deemed *good* versus *bad*, and *reasonable* versus *unreasonable*. They also underscored their role in guiding students towards what they deemed to be the *correct path* in their ethical and moral reasoning. This approach can be summarized as follows:

#### (1) Encouraging expression

Teachers unanimously stress the significance of allowing students the opportunity and autonomy to express their own ideas, especially when the assigned textbooks or curriculum standards do not offer explicit guidance on intricate or multifaceted ethical dilemmas. This emphasis on student expression highlights educators’ dedication to cultivating independent and critical thinking skills.<sup>101</sup>

#### (2) Facilitating reflection

The teachers acknowledged the importance of granting chances for students to involve themselves in introspective thinking. Rather than offering definitive solutions, they advocated for guiding students through a process of reflection and self-discovery. Such an approach enables students to confront ethical dilemmas and achieve their own outcomes, thus promoting a greater understanding of moral principles.

#### (3) Distinguishing “good” from “bad” thoughts

Many teachers establish a discernible differentiation between what they deem as “positive” and “negative” thoughts. This categorization is integral in the educational setting as it steers students toward morally commendable principles and attitudes. Educators hold a crucial position in reshaping students’ perception of ethical acceptability and unacceptability.

The teachers’ viewpoints illuminate the intricacies of moral education in the classroom.

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<sup>101</sup> As previous research has highlighted, there is an increasing focus on critical thinking in participating nations, including those in Asia, as discussed by Lee (2005). Following this trend, the Morality and Rule of Law course promotes a fusion of learning and critical thinking (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2016b). This complements the vision of an “ideal” Chinese citizen, distinguished by their instinctive capacity of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Therefore, schools play a crucial role in developing these necessary skills.



Their dedication to cultivating autonomous thinking while imparting moral principles highlights the multifaceted nature of their roles as educators and moral guides. This refined approach to moral growth contributes depth to the ongoing conversation regarding the teacher's impact on shaping students' ethical underpinnings. Various teachers have made the following statements:

It is necessary to see whether this view is very extreme, very dangerous and useless. If so, it is important to interrupt the class in a timely manner, to ensure that the class can continue in an orderly manner and that other students are not misled. If it is a very positive and good point of view, I think it is also possible to discuss it (TEACHER D).

We will give them time and opportunity to express their views. And when these views do not match with the view of the teacher, I will give them some ways to understand, or suggest whether they can try to understand more, then we can communicate again (TEACHER E).

I think we should give students time to express themselves in the classroom, and as a teacher, we should listen to the students' opinions and strengthen communication with them. If the student does express a slight deviation in value, we can also use humor or relevant cases to help the student change his mind (TEACHER F).

If the child's viewpoint deviates from the correct viewpoint of the textbook, then we still need to guide the students correctly. Then if it is a matter of principle, if it is not in line with legal provision, then it is necessary to correct in a timely manner (TEACHER Z).

These teachers' statements provide insights into their methods for managing students' unique and unconventional ideas, establishing a link with Li et al. (2004)'s idea of "interactive pedagogy". This pedagogical process urges teachers to provoke students into examining multiple aspects of their education critically. Yang (2022)'s research highlights the significance of enabling students to express themselves and be listened to by their teachers. This is fundamental, as it enables students to develop interpersonal comprehension skills and fosters self-awareness. A teacher describes the values taught in school as "mainstream values", aligned with socialist core values that all individuals are expected to endorse. She posited that these values are crucial for the establishment of a strong moral education foundation. Any divergence from these principles must be addressed immediately to uphold moral education's core (TEACHER C).<sup>102</sup> Conversely, another teacher proposed an opposing perspective, high-

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<sup>102</sup>This teacher perspective aligns with the prescribed framework for action in moral education. The guiding principles for actions are socialist core values, and any action that deviates from alignment with the values should be discouraged. The core values underpin an "ideal" citizen's attributes, which makes it imperative for teachers to adhere to them (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2017b).

lighting that it is critical to “let the students identify<sup>103</sup> by themselves and not forced by the teacher”.<sup>104</sup> Highlighting the achievements of their country through images and stories is a method employed to increase Chinese students’ pride in their heritage and encourage independent identification with these values. By doing so, students are able to identify with their country in a more personal and meaningful manner (TEACHER A). One notable example of this approach is a teacher’s handling of a situation where her values differed from a student’s in junior high school. During a presentation, a student praised a historical figure whom the teacher did not view favorably. Instead of expressing her opinion right away, the teacher recommended that the student carry out more research and collect further knowledge on the subject matter. This approach enabled the student to investigate the topic more extensively. Upon revisiting the topic in senior high school, the student had obtained a more critical outlook through additional reading. The teacher’s approach of prioritizing independent research prior to discussing conflicting perspectives aided the student in developing a more nuanced comprehension (TEACHER E).<sup>105</sup>

The distinction between the servant and guide roles has a significant correlation to how teachers balance the promotion of student expression and provision of moral education. Such a balance implies the interdependent relationship between exploration and guidance, with the boundaries of exploration primarily delimited by established ethical and moral principles. Key terms such as *adjusting*, *dismissing*, or *deviation* contrast with the *open-minded* of *make up your own mind* when it comes to students’ ideas. Teachers bear the responsibility of discerning which ideas are considered *good* and which are deemed *bad* within the context of moral education. This requires making decisions based on legal principles and adhering to textbook orientations. Teachers’ personal values may influence subjective evaluations, which could affect their assessment of *good* or *bad* ideas.<sup>106</sup> The degree to which these values are passed on to students raises significant concerns. For example, one parent reported that her child tends to comply with and adopt the teacher’s viewpoint, regardless of her personal views, to

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<sup>103</sup>There is a particular significance to this translation. The original word used here is 认同 (*rentong*), which has two possible translations with different levels of value. As this term has been used numerous times by both parents and teachers, I conferred with a Chinese colleague to determine the appropriate translation. While parents were more likely to use this term as a way to acknowledge rules or principles without necessarily expressing strong personal alignment, teachers may tend to use it to signify identification rather than mere acknowledgement, actively agreeing with and feeling connected to the rules and potentially implying a higher degree of personal adherence and endorsement.

<sup>104</sup>As stated Xi (2002)’ analysis, teachers’ beliefs and political leanings may consciously or unconsciously affect their teaching. Furthermore, teachers must balance their personal views with conveying the political tendencies imposed by authorities to maintain unity. One way to achieve this is by displaying photos and videos of historical achievements, which can lead to automatic identification of students with their motherland. However, the manner in which instructors convey knowledge, select examples, and choose language all play a role in identifying students. It is crucial to weigh the balance between self-determination and heteronomy, which will be further discussed in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>105</sup>This aligns with Veugelers (2000)’s findings which suggest that teachers frequently experience value conflicts stemming from differing views, as illustrated by this interviewed teacher. In navigating these conflicts while adhering to teaching profession norms, the teacher utilized critical thinking to avoid imposing personal beliefs on students. Rather, she focused on improving her students’ critical thinking abilities, empowering them to form their own opinions.

<sup>106</sup>Xi (2002) emphasized the crucial role of teachers in the socialization of students. He emphasized the importance of teachers being mindful of upholding national unity through their actions and words, taking into account the influence of external factors on this aspect of education.

secure high exam scores (PARENT B). This indicates that students may prioritize academic achievement over their personal beliefs or alignment with particular values. A second parent provided an example demonstrating how a teacher's attitudes and preferences can profoundly impact students. Specifically, the teacher favored calm and reserved behavior, frequently commending students who displayed these characteristics. However, the daughter of this parent had a natural tendency towards outgoing and energetic behavior. The daughter felt compelled to suppress her inherent tendencies to avoid incurring the teacher's disapproval. This instance highlights how students modify their behavior in reaction to diverse teacher personalities, requiring them to negotiate varying influences and shape their own outlooks and expressions. Ultimately, the servant versus guide framework exerts a substantial impact on the dynamics of moral education in Chinese schools. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding their students' moral development. Their influence is shaped by their values and pedagogical approaches, which intersect with the adaptations and success strategies of their students within the educational system. These complex interactions highlight the multifaceted nature of moral education in modern-day China.

## 5.5 Equipping teachers: Training for effective Moral Education

Teacher training is a key component in shaping the educational system and promoting high-quality teaching. Efforts have focused on enhancing teachers' competence and knowledge, with a clear emphasis on raising their professional status. This commitment extends not only at the national level, but also through coordinated initiatives across provinces, cities, districts, and urban and rural regions. This approach aims to maintain a dynamic educational environment through collaborative efforts and mutual support that strive to improve the quality of educators consistently.

One teacher with only one year of experience at the school participated in district-sanctioned *new teacher training* (新教师培训). The teacher explained that this program provides a complete course to equip new educators with necessary skills and knowledge. It is designed to cover all aspects of teaching in a comprehensive manner. The training program began with a rigorous two-week online module, laying the foundation for further in-depth analysis. Through the course of the program, teachers were exposed to a wide range of topics. Respected district educators, recognized for their proficiency, added their valuable insights to the training, specifically in the area of teacher-student interaction. A community based on shared interests in ideology and politics was developed among new teachers, resulting in about eight collaborative meetings. These meetings had a dual function of sharing personal experiences and conducting critical evaluations of lessons, effectively promoting collective growth. This community ultimately transformed into a more structured workshop, consisting of six pivotal sessions. Within this workshop framework, educators explored various aspects of pedagogy, including in-depth examination of curriculum standards and close examination of unit teaching plans. They also had the opportunity to observe and engage with the designs of exemplary educators, as well as showcase their own teaching designs, paving the way for constructive feedback, lesson observation, and a vibrant exchange of insights (TEACHER D).

Another teacher, associated with a different school and in his second year of teaching, offered further perspectives on the new teacher training program. The teacher emphasized the importance of competitions within the training, perceiving those as a driving force for refining teachers' professionalism. Such competitive elements infused the training protocol with a sense of strictness and self-improvement, ultimately fostering the overall growth of novice teachers (TEACHER Z).

Another teacher expressed appreciation for the content selection in the new teacher training program. The training placed emphasis on students, prioritizing their needs and development. The theme centered around cultivating a culture of respect for students and unleashing their full potential. The training's central objectives aimed to promote quality development, facilitate professional exchange, and strengthen pedagogical practices among teachers. The new teacher training program's impact extended beyond its initial phase. As one teacher noted, the training program remains an ongoing endeavor marked by continuous engagement and learning. She said that "we still receive the whole large-scale activities of the school and districts by the teaching and research group every week, every month, and every semester, which should belong to the re-learning" (TEACHER B). These updates aim to facilitate ongoing learning and development, highlighting the dynamic nature of professional growth for teachers. Additionally, the program provides various project-based learning opportunities for teachers to choose from, which are in alignment with their personal interests and ambitions. This adaptability not only addresses the different needs of teachers but also instills a feeling of possession and influence in their professional growth.<sup>107</sup> Another remarkable component of teacher development at the school is the mentorship program. The second-year teacher is receiving guidance from an experienced mentor. The mentorship began at the teacher's profession entry and involved collaborating on lesson plans. Eventually, the mentor's role expanded to include classroom observations focused on identifying areas for improvement, designing more effective instruction, and providing targeted guidance (TEACHER Z). This mentoring program showcases the school's dedication to fostering and supporting the development of its teachers.

Teacher training programs, especially those designed for new teachers, are "formal, very formal" (TEACHER C) and structured. This quality is often attributed to the inexperience of these teachers when addressing diverse audiences. However, the training continuum extends far beyond the initial stages and includes continuous pedagogical development. Following the implementation of updated textbooks several years ago, teachers attended extended national-level training sessions. The training was intended to focus on these new teaching materials. Subsequently, they engaged in district-level training sessions created to refresh their knowledge of the materials. The schools demonstrate its dedication to teacher development by offering weekly group study sessions, where educators come together to collaborate and engage in professional discourse. The teaching staff views these training opportunities favorably, with

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<sup>107</sup>Research has shown (e.g. Biesta et al., 2015) that teacher agency is critical in shaping working conditions in the education system. Therefore, offering training opportunities that address teachers' diverse interests and needs can enhance their overall agency and contribute to improving the quality of education. This approach acknowledges that teachers' autonomy and decision-making abilities can significantly impact the educational landscape.

one teacher highlighting their inherent worth, stating, “but actually, for us teachers, it’s all very good training. Including the kind of open classes that our teachers do, the interactive communication and discussion within our group, such a process. In fact, these contents are all a process of training and re-learning for teachers” (TEACHER C). These experiences are a form of continual improvement, as they constitute a valuable type of invisible training. Over the years, the teacher’s comprehension of the textbook content has evolved and enhanced through ongoing training. This dynamic process has led to improved classroom performance. The school’s training program for 2023 includes three competitions that one teacher considers highly effective (TEACHER Z). This demonstrates the school’s dedication to cultivating a culture of excellence and ongoing development among its teachers. Teacher training programs, despite their structured and formal nature, receive positive evaluations from teaching staff. They result in significant improvements in teachers’ performance when applied in their classrooms. Additionally, these initiatives promote cooperation among educators, allowing them to share insights, exchange ideas, and improve their teaching methods, leading to a favorable perception of these programs.

## 5.6 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, the study’s findings on the multifaceted landscape of moral education implementation in school environments, which was conducted in Beijing, were presented. The study employed a triangulated research methodology that included textbook analysis, direct observations, and interviews with teachers, parents, and students. These techniques helped reveal a nuanced array of perspectives and practices relating to the subject of *Morality and the Rule of Law* and the core of moral education. This study offered valuable insights into important educational factors at various levels. It highlighted the significant impact of academic settings on moral development and the effectiveness of varied instruction approaches. The chapter examined the detailed roles of both teachers and families in instilling ethical values, emphasizing their importance within the moral education process. The research revealed a crucial requirement for comprehensive teacher training to successfully instill moral values. This chapter provided a comprehensive summary of the study’s findings, giving a holistic view of the state of moral education in Beijing’s school systems.

This study performed a thorough examination of the course materials for *Morality and the Rule of Law* in the first and last stage of compulsory education to clarify their content and instructional approaches. As a result, it revealed the core values and principles supporting the formal curriculum and yielded insights into the structural framework of moral education within the broader educational system. The analysis revealed a discernible pattern: during the early years of primary school, educators favor playful and stimulating methods to arouse the curiosity of young students towards moral and character formation. This methodology successfully steers clear from blatant political indoctrination while subtly incorporating it as an underlying component. Its implementation facilitates a more seamless conformity of students to the prevailing political ideology. However, a significant shift takes place as students advance to the later stages of compulsory education. Playful teaching approaches gradually

give way to a greater emphasis on knowledge attainment. At this point, the educational focus leans more towards political education, along with reinforced national identity. These results emphasize the evolving emphases and pedagogical strategies utilized in moral education across different educational phases. They consider the developmental stages of students and are aligned with wider societal goals.

This study employed a multifaceted approach by conducting research within school campuses and individual classrooms in schools selected as *de facto* demonstration models. The primary objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of school organization, with a specific focus on the diverse teaching methodologies employed by teachers in their classrooms. Observations on the school campus were carried out to examine the foundational elements that make up the educational environment. These elements encompass the integration of advanced technologies, the creation of collaborative learning spaces, the attainment of educational goals, and the implementation of highly effective teaching strategies. In-depth classroom observations provided a deep insight into the active involvement of students in the sharing of knowledge, a dynamic process that becomes an integral part of the teaching process. The organization of lessons reflects the autonomy of teachers, leading to increased student engagement and interaction. These findings emphasize the broad spectrum of pedagogical techniques and learning methods used in Beijing schools. They underscore the vital role that such diverse instructional approaches play in shaping the dynamics between teachers and students in the Chinese educational system.

The interviews conducted with teachers and parents yielded diverse opinions and perspectives on moral education. Teachers generally recognize the significance of moral education in the educational system, but parents often have difficulty understanding its precise objectives and implications. Furthermore, educators can clearly define their roles within the educational system, but some may encounter occasional ambiguity in determining whether they should act as *guides* or *servants* in their teaching approach. Conversely, parents voice apprehensions regarding the enduring impact of moral education in schools, particularly with the preponderance of standardized testing, memorization, and competition prevailing in the Chinese educational system. This study illuminated various perspectives, challenges, and discussions related to moral education in Chinese schools. Teachers understand their responsibility to interpret educational policies and translate them into practical teaching methods. Moreover, certain teachers actively integrate these policies into their instructional strategies. Furthermore, educators regularly stressed the importance of fostering qualities such as openness, autonomous thinking, and critical thinking in their students. This perspective highlights a fundamental duality, which has been brought to light in interviews with teachers who carry the responsibility of *servicing* CPC ideology while also *guiding* students towards their development.

The interviews revealed diverse parental attitudes towards school activities. Some parents exhibit great enthusiasm about their children's participation, as they believe such experiences will have a long-term positive effect. However, some parents express skepticism towards the effectiveness of such initiatives, viewing one-day trips as possibly short-lived and only

offering temporary respite from the ongoing academic stressors placed on their children. This variety of perspectives among parents highlights the intricate nature of their expectations and attitudes towards their children's education. While some parents view these activities as imperative for their child's academic growth and personal development, others see them as temporary interruptions from the ongoing academic requirements.

The analysis of teacher training practices in the Chinese education system revealed a well-organized system that functions at every level. This scrutinization highlights the way that teacher training includes both formal and informal structures, providing sustained support over the course of a teacher's career. The representation of in-service training for teachers highlights the lasting importance of cultivating professional development in the Chinese education system. The standardized structure of these training programs achieves two goals: guaranteeing uniform teacher qualifications and accommodating the dynamic progress of teacher growth over time. The Chinese education system acknowledges the multi-dimensional aspects of teacher development by accommodating both formal, structured programs and informal, experiential learning opportunities. The prominence of competition in teacher training illuminates a crucial facet of the larger, competitive Chinese education system.

This study examined the diverse aspects of moral education in schools located in Beijing, and the conflicting viewpoints held by educators and parents. The concluding section will discuss how these perspectives can be reconciled within the offered sociological and ideological framework of Chinese society, and their implications for the ways in which teachers and students perceive and construct *reality*.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

This analysis proceeded in two stages: first, uncovering the existing ideological guiding principles and norms that define the “ideal” characteristics of a Chinese citizen, and second, examining their application in the contemporary educational context related to moral education. This prompts a critical inquiry: Do students rely solely on pre-established values entrenched in tradition, or are they motivated to actively participate in shaping these values? The impact of the CPC’s guiding principles is evident in the development of moral education curricula, the adoption of approaches to inculcate values and behavior, as well as teachers’ roles in the classroom that extend beyond imparting knowledge and information. This study has analyzed the intricate relationship between constructed realities and the ideological framework in the context of moral education in China. The varied responsibilities undertaken by those involved in moral education illuminate its dynamic nature, necessitating continual adaptation to evolving educational mandates prescribed by governing entities. This research underscores the significant impact of teachers on molding the moral development of students. However, their creative pedagogical methods are frequently restricted and controlled by an entrenched ideology that impacts multiple aspects of the educational system, both overtly and subtly.

Moral education in China involves various dimensions that influence individuals’ moral and social values, as well as broader implications. This study explored the multifaceted purpose and content of moral education in the Chinese context, intertwined with predominant ideological directives. One central aspect of this analysis is a critical debate on whether moral education should prioritize the development of critical thinking and ethical reasoning, or primarily convey predetermined values. This discussion occurs within the context of an underlying ideology that shapes these disparate views. The effectiveness of moral education in cultivating moral awareness among students is significantly influenced by teachers, as revealed in this study. This thesis also uncovered the fundamental factors and determinants that shape students’ constructions of reality in contrast to the pre-established social realities established by the Communist Party of China. This final chapter provides insights into how students and teachers navigate the intersection of theory and practice in the realm of moral education. It explores how teachers utilize didactic guidelines and their roles within this context, as well as how students construct their realities at the end of this cycle. Examining moral education through the lenses of its purpose, the transition from theoretical constructs to practical application in education, and the notion of “successful education” in moral development can contribute to a deeper understanding of the fundamental components of an ideal knowledge foundation for morally educated individuals. This includes analyzing the potential synergy between deep-rooted virtues and modern ethical frameworks.



## 6.1 Re-considering the purpose of moral education in China

This study offers a framework for comprehending the origins and unique features of moral education in the Chinese educational context. The examination of teachers' and parents' perspectives, especially regarding the subject of *Morality and the Rule of Law*, has generated valuable insights into present practices in moral education. Given China's rapidly changing educational environment characterized by modernization, globalization, and evolving ideological directives, it is essential to reexamine the fundamental goals of moral education.

### 6.1.1 An education towards morality?

This study has investigated the interaction between moral education and the ideology of the Communist Party of China. This examination is highly relevant, considering China's rich historical and socio-political backdrop, where the CPC's ideology significantly shapes social values and conduct. The inclusion of moral education in school curricula serves the dual purpose of being an educational instrument for conveying these values and ideology while also representing the state ideology within the education system.

China's education system operates within a CPC centered framework characterized by authoritarian control that extends across all educational facets. This top-down control<sup>1</sup>, exerted by the Communist Party of China, transcends pedagogy and encompasses areas such as teacher training, textbooks, curricula, and classroom content. In this context, teachers hold a multifaceted role that goes beyond imparting knowledge; they are also expected to *serve* as channels for Party principles, promote political alignment, and contribute to the broader ideological objectives of the CPC, which seems to go hand in hand with the assumptions presented by Lu and Gao (2004a), as this could be interpreted as a means of controlling children to conform to the moral standards of the nation. Central to this approach is an unwavering focus on ensuring ideological consistency, with the CPC closely monitoring educational content and narratives to ensure alignment with its principles and values. The underlying goal of this authoritative framework is to establish a connection between education in China and the political objectives and regulations set by the CPC. It seems reasonable that Liu and Zhu (2001) suggest moving away from standardized education and a one-size-fits-all approach, towards enhancing individual needs and applying life-theoretical concepts. The current approach may not adequately meet the diverse needs of students. The Communist Party of China meticulously designs China's education system to achieve specific aims, including the creation of citizens who are in harmony with the Party's vision for the nation. A primary objective is the cultivation of staunch loyalty to the Party. Moral education plays a pivotal role in this process by emphasizing the central role of the Party in China's development and governance. Furthermore, the Communist Party of China aims to bolster social cohesion by promoting values that encourage collective well-being, social responsibility, and moral conduct, ultimately

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<sup>1</sup>This should not be confused with the Beijing Municipality's simultaneous use of both top-down administrative coordination and bottom-up approach. Instead, it aligns more closely with the framework proposed by Xi (2002) for a top-down strategy towards education, emphasizing the critical role of party leadership in establishing a structured and uniform system.

contributing to stability and harmony within Chinese society.

China's need for moral education is within this view closely linked to the broader goal of cultivating a harmonious society and advancing the objectives of the Communist Party of China. Several key aspects highlight the relationship between moral education and these overarching aims: First, moral education serves to promote social cohesion by advocating values such as collectivism and social responsibility, which are deemed crucial for the attainment of a stable and harmonious society. Second, adherence to the Communist Party of China and its leadership is seen as a means to enhance political stability and effective governance. Moral education plays a significant role in fostering a strong sense of national identity and patriotism, encouraging citizens to take pride in their cultural heritage and contribute to the unity and progress of the Chinese nation. Third, moral education aims to promote ethical behavior and encourage civic engagement within a just and equitable society. Lastly, in alignment with the CPC's vision for a "new era", moral education strives to cultivate individuals capable of contributing to China's development as a modern, socialist, and harmonious nation (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2005, 2017d; CPC Central Committee, 2019b). The historical trajectory of China, marked by shifts from political turmoil to economic prosperity, has significantly influenced the concept of the "ideal" citizen within the framework of CPC ideology. This evolving vision centers on individuals who uphold the Party's ideology, actively contribute to the economy, exhibit social responsibility, and engage on the global stage. This forward-looking ideology underscores innovation, development, and global leadership as key elements in shaping China's future. The subject of *Morality and the Rule of Law* in the education system aims to realize moral education objectives by integrating moral values with legal principles, emphasizing ethical conduct within a legal framework. The ultimate goal is to nurture individuals who possess a deep understanding of the law and conduct themselves ethically and responsibly in society. The Ministry of Education bears the responsibility for implementing policies that promote the seamless integration of moral education into school curricula. This entails formulating directives, monitoring textbook content, and overseeing teacher training programs. The Ministry of Education is committed to the natural integration of moral education into curricula, focusing on ethical values and social responsibility alongside academic subjects. Rigorous evaluations are conducted to assess the effectiveness of moral education implementation and ensure the desired outcomes. This collaborative effort between the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Education seeks to establish a balanced educational system that prioritizes both academic excellence and the cultivation of moral values.

Central elements of the Communist Party of China's ideology intersect with moral education and revolve around fundamental principles deeply rooted in the Party's doctrine. These principles involve the adaptation of Marxist ideology to the specific circumstances of China<sup>2</sup>, the framing of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the guidance of General Secretary Xi Jinping, and the recognition of the indispensable role played by the Communist Party in guiding the nation's destiny. Moral education operates within the framework of CPC ideology, and its success hinges on the alignment between individuals' perceptions and these

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<sup>2</sup>Like the transition from Marxism to "Chinese Marxism" as outlined by Harris and Wöfl (1970).

ideological principles. In the pursuit of moral education, educators play a pivotal role in navigating a complex terrain where instructional directives alone often fall short of capturing the real-life experiences of students. Throughout this thesis, it is clear that teachers have a critical role in students' moral education. The conducted interviews support the notion that teachers are highly respected, as already highlighted by Ding and Sun (2007), and that teachers are seen as moral authorities, as mentioned by Liu and Zhu (2001) and Reed (1995). Furthermore, stringent curriculum guidelines can restrict educators' professional flexibility in the classroom, making the task of aligning individually constructed perceptions with the guiding CPC ideology a demanding and intricate one. Marxism, as understood within the Chinese context, places a strong emphasis on collectivism, social justice, and the establishment of a classless society. These principles exert a distinct influence on moral education, shaping perspectives on social justice, equality, and individual responsibilities within the leadership of the CPC. The overarching aim is to promote social stability and effective governance. Socialism with Chinese characteristics, coupled with a commitment to Marxism-Leninism, stands as a cornerstone of the CPC's ideology. This approach underscores China's unique development path, which integrates elements of socialism with market-oriented reforms. The ideology emphasizes the critical role of moral education in shaping citizens who align with the nation's objectives and uphold ethical conduct. It underscores the importance of instilling discipline, loyalty to the Party, and adherence to Party directives among students.

Guiding norms, as promoted by the ideology, wield a discernible influence on the daily lives and understanding of individuals. They mold social norms, values, and ethical perceptions, shaping the decision-making processes and personal interactions of people. The educational system serves as a conduit for transmitting and reinforcing ideal types, which emanate from the prevailing ideology and guiding norms. Concurrently, political leaders employ these ideal types in their discourse and propaganda efforts to shape national identity and garner support, permeating various aspects of daily life and the collective consciousness. Within the context of China, curriculum standards are intentionally crafted to mirror CPC ideology and the associated ideal types. The guiding principles outlined in each curriculum standard prominently emphasize aligning educational objectives with the principles of the Party. In the case of the curriculum standards for the Morality and the Rule of Law course, there is an emphasis on aspects like national identity, revolutionary tradition, and cultural heritage. Textbooks play a pivotal role in implementing these curriculum guidelines, with their primary purpose being the transmission of Party principles and values. They regularly feature accounts of model figures who exemplify the Party's ideals, reinforcing values such as loyalty, ethics, and socialist virtues. Textbooks function as instruments for shaping students' perspectives and aspirations. Striking a balance between academic excellence and moral education is a significant concern in China, necessitating collaboration between policymakers and educators. The Communist Party of China positions moral education as integral to academic achievements. However, based on parental feedback gathered during interviews and the exemplified characteristics of the ideal types, the highly competitive educational environment and emphasis on standardized tests may occasionally hinder the effective delivery of value-based moral education. The

pursuit of material success sometimes comes into conflict with moral values. According to interviewed parents, the Morality and the Rule of Law course often holds limited influence on their children and is regarded as *no more than* a subject or *no more than* a set of activities. Whether students concur or disagree with specific views or perspectives, excelling in high-test scores takes precedence in their educational pursuits. Therefore, it is imperative for educators and policymakers to strike a harmonious balance between academic rigor and moral education, ensuring that both aspects reinforce each other effectively.

The study's findings<sup>3</sup> reveal that primary schools employ a wide array of teaching resources to enhance early moral education, offering several advantages for students' moral development. For instance, students have the opportunity to engage in activities aligned with their interests, such as animal rearing or planting, which instills a stronger sense of responsibility and empathy and further promotes the *five education* by incorporating diverse facets in their growth, like *labor* during seed-planting. The two visited schools effectively incorporate policy objectives and employ diverse teaching methods that go beyond conventional textbook learning, encouraging active and creative student participation in discussions. A critical question arises regarding the evolution of education from a predominant focus on knowledge and political awareness to the cultivation of individual perspectives and values among students, in line with the recommendations of Qi and Tang (2004) and the shift from a mechanistic approach to a life-theoretical approach as proposed by Liu and Zhu (2001). While there have been advancements in teaching methods, improved teacher quality, and efforts to reduce student workload (such as the double-reduction policy), analyzing only two "demonstration" models may not provide a comprehensive understanding. It is evident that well-equipped schools with highly qualified teachers are more inclined to fully implement educational directives and policy objectives, as they possess the necessary resources and operate under close Party monitoring. The development of education in China, including moral education, has transitioned from a strict emphasis on knowledge acquisition and political alignment. Historically, Chinese education primarily aimed at imparting knowledge and ensuring ideological conformity, relying heavily on memorization and political indoctrination. In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the importance of promoting individuality (as thoroughly examined by Yan (2009)) and incorporating diverse perspectives among students. This shift has led to a move away from one-sided, teacher-centered teaching methods towards adopting a diverse range of student-centered approaches (Shu, 2021). However, a key question remains: has education transitioned towards a model of "regulated individualism" to balance personal autonomy and socialist collectivism, as suggested by Cheung and Pan (2006)?

The challenge posed by the use of outdated textbooks in China's educational system is substantial, as revealed in interviews indicating that both students and teachers lack the necessary and updated information. This situation places teachers in a difficult position, as they must navigate the disconnect between existing educational policies and the content provided by these outdated resources. This disparity adds complexity to teachers' roles, as they are compelled to instruct content that may no longer align effectively with evolving educational

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<sup>3</sup>A quick reminder that the study's observations and interviews took place in high-quality *de facto* "demonstration" model schools that align with current policy objectives.

objectives. However, the analysis of textbooks demonstrated an increasing prevalence of critical and reflective inquiries that encourage students to explore diverse perspectives and scrutinize the viewpoints presented in the books. Interviews further reveal a growing trend among teachers to prompt students to express their own ideas and collaborate with their peers. These trends are substantiated by classroom observations, which indicate that students engage in critical inquiry by asking each other thoughtful questions and articulating their perspectives. This shift reflects the evolving values of society and the recognition that education should not merely serve as a vessel for knowledge transmission, but also as a means of nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking and making positive contributions to society. The multifaceted implications of the discrepancy between educational materials and current policies within the Chinese education system warrant consideration. Firstly, incongruity can present significant challenges in implementing effective educational policies, leading to inconsistencies in classroom practices. Secondly, outdated content may hinder students' ability to relate to and engage with the material, potentially diminishing the overall effectiveness and relevance of their education. Finally, this misalignment underscores a persistent challenge in China's education system: the need to bridge the gap between educational theory and practice (e.g. Banks, 2004; Shu, 2021).

### **6.1.2 The balance between guide and servant**

Teachers shoulder the demanding responsibility of *guiding* students toward an understanding of Party principles, moral values, and their development into responsible citizens. They encounter a multitude of challenges and obstacles in fulfilling their obligations, yet they persist through the complications, making noteworthy contributions to the moral development of the upcoming generation of Chinese citizens. A critical element of teachers' roles is to *serve* as ideological instructors in moral education. Ideology significantly influence curricula, determining the content and priorities of educational materials in line with CPC principles. Teaching methods mirror the Party's ideological focus on conformity and loyalty. Teachers are expected to employ pedagogical methods that uphold CPC ideology. This includes didactic teaching, the use of authoritative texts, and the promotion of collective values. Educational objectives are closely intertwined with CPC ideology, with a focus on nurturing students who exhibit academic proficiency, moral integrity, social responsibility, and alignment with the Party's vision for the nation. Teachers take on a range of roles within the educational context, validating the "four guides", "three disseminators", and "three shapers" roles as proposed by Tang (2023). This diversity of roles underscores the multifaceted nature of a teacher's work, involving various aspects of teaching both within and outside the classroom.

Teacher training programs play a critical role in preparing educators to effectively convey CPC ideology and ideals, emphasizing their commitment to the People's Republic of China, as highlighted in official government documents (e.g. Chinese Government, 2018a). These programs equip teachers with pedagogical approaches that align with Party ideology, stressing the significance of fostering collective identity, social responsibility, and allegiance to the Party. Armed with the tools to integrate moral education into their teaching methods, teach-

ers become effective ambassadors of CPC ideology. The incorporation of moral education into the Chinese school curriculum encounters challenges when it comes to aligning individuals' constructed realities with the prevailing ideological framework. These challenges arise due to the tension between the idealized constructs presented in curricula and the real-life experiences of individuals. While curricula are designed to communicate specific ideological messages, their implementation in classrooms may differ because of varied interpretations by educators and the complex situations faced by students outside of school. This discrepancy can result in disparities between the Party-prescribed constructs and individuals' actual experiences. Additionally, political regulations and Party loyalty significantly influence teacher training and recruitment, further solidifying the CPC's authority in the education sector. These factors also complicate the task of aligning individuals' perspectives with the prevailing ideology, as teachers are often compelled to prioritize political conformity over independent thought. As demonstrated in the literature, there can be a mismatch between the desired outcomes depicted in curricula and their practical execution in educational settings. While curricula may strive to convey specific ideological propositions, their implementation in classrooms can deviate based on individual teachers' interpretations and approaches. Theoretical and practical knowledge may not always align (Banks, 2004), and ideal objectives may sometimes overshadow students' practical needs (Liu and Zhu, 2001; Zhang and Du, 2023).

Teachers bear the responsibility in fostering critical discussion and establishing a safe and all-encompassing environment where students can express their opinions and engage in constructive dialogue. These discussions aim to impart a comprehensive understanding of moral complexities, ethical reasoning, and the importance of making moral decisions in real-life situations. While teachers are instrumental in shaping students' values and beliefs, they also encounter numerous challenges and pressures in fulfilling their roles. In the dynamic educational context of China, teachers take on multifaceted roles that go beyond traditional pedagogy. Their responsibilities encompass *guiding* and *servicing*, enforcing policies to ensure compliance with official guidelines and directives, while facilitating interactive discussions to accommodate diverse student perspectives. Teachers are also expected to *serve* as role models, demonstrating loyalty to their political party, ethical conduct, and a commitment to setting a positive example for their students. Research suggests that participating in curriculum development can enhance teachers' ability to align moral education with policies (Zhu and Shu, 2017). Interviews have confirmed that teachers often feel obliged to implement policies, regardless of whether the current materials align with them, as they are the ones who must bear the consequences.

Teachers' roles as *servants* and the integration of political regulations into teacher training are integral parts of a comprehensive system that underscores the influence of the Communist Party of China in the education sector. Research indicated that teacher training's effectiveness remains uncertain due to potential negative impacts from a lack of motivation (Xu, 2022) and insufficient practical content (Guo and Feng, 2021). The interviews reveal that training session competitions can have a positive impact, reflecting certain "ideal" citizen traits outlined in chapter four, such as discipline and work ethic. The process begins with the re-

cruitment of state-employed teachers, who undergo rigorous examinations and assessments where their political alignment with the CPC is a significant consideration. Upon recruitment, teachers receive training that encompasses political regulations, CPC ideology, and pedagogical methods consistent with Party principles. This seems to go in hand with Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002)'s outline of a four-step model of teacher training, where the initial stage involves government-led training, which influences the subsequent stages, highlighting the significant influence of government authorities on teacher roles and identities. The interviews further have shown that new teachers undergo a comprehensive onboarding process, which involves preparing lessons, observing lessons taught by other exemplary teachers - who most likely align with the party's ideology to an exemplary extent - and presenting their own lessons. The far-reaching influence of the CPC is evident in its establishment of Party committees within academic institutions. These committees are responsible for overseeing and directing ideological education. One of their primary goals is to ensure that teachers adhere to Party ideology, and that curricula effectively convey political regulations, moral values, and loyalty to the Party. This comprehensive approach underscores the extent to which the Communist Party of China shapes the field of education in the country. It highlights the influence of the Party on the education's content and educators' behavior. This encompasses external factors, like supervision from educational authorities, school executives, parents, and the wider community.

In China's education system, teachers face a challenging task of striking a balance between indoctrination (*servicing*) and interactive (*guiding*) teaching. This challenge revolves around the need to expose students to official values and Party ideology while also encouraging independent inquiry. Li et al. (2004) introduced the concept of "interactive pedagogy", where teachers promote critical thinking without necessarily expecting a predetermined correct response. To address this challenge, teachers are expected to transition from authoritarian to didactic approaches. As characterized by Ban (2002), implementing four key changes that prioritize humanization and place students at the center can create a better learning environment. This teaching approach places great importance on respecting individual personalities. The curriculum standards for Morality and the Rule of Law (2022 edition) explicitly promote an approach of "taking the people at the center" (Ministry of Education, 2022b). However, despite acknowledging student needs, it seems that the current process may not actively involve them. It remains uncertain if students truly benefit from a "robotic instruction" approach to achieve all-around development. For instance, simply "being told" about socialist core values and memorizing them without fully comprehending them may lead students to merely understand and follow these values.<sup>4</sup> During moral education, it is essential for teachers to *guide* students in the pursuit of shared values, encouraging active participation and a deeper understanding of the process. Teachers should also aim to cultivate students' ability to reach a common and agreed-upon understanding of these values.

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<sup>4</sup>According to the textbook analysis, socialist core values are referenced but not explained in detail during the initial and final stages of compulsory education. Interviews with teachers indicate that the comprehension and application of these values are essential components of an education. However, it is uncertain when, where, and how these values are communicated to students despite their substantial impact on Chinese society.

Teachers in China face a significant challenge when it comes to presenting subjective viewpoints, especially if their personal convictions conflict with official doctrine. This challenge is particularly notable when teachers' own beliefs differ from the official values, as discussed by Veugelers (2000). Striking a balance between personal beliefs and compliance with official policies can be a complex and demanding task for educators. Furthermore, teachers must navigate the diverse perspectives of their students while fostering legitimate viewpoints and aligning with policy objectives. This dual role requires them to act as both *guides* and *servers* of party ideology. According to interviews, teachers are expected to determine which critical thoughts are considered acceptable, all while aligning their personal views with official values. In the Chinese educational context, the implementation of educational methods is a multifaceted process. Teachers must simultaneously ensure compliance with policies, nurture critical thinking skills, and encourage student engagement.

## **6.2 From theoretical constructs to educational realities**

Theoretical constructs are found to originate from underlying ideological directives, permeating every aspect of Chinese society. These constructs are rooted in the collective consciousness of the nation, grounded in concrete realities rather than abstract concepts. The reinforcement of ideals and guiding norms serve as a blueprint for achieving an “ideal” Chinese society, dictating the expected traits for students upon completing compulsory education. This section shifts the focus towards the practical implications of these theoretical foundations. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these constructs influence students and ultimately shape their adherence to social standards. Examining the transition from theoretical claims to concrete educational implementations sheds light on the complex educational journey undertaken by both students and teachers. Finally, this section explores the application of moral education as a *staged instructional method* and evaluates the impact of implementing ideological constructs into the school curriculum.

### **6.2.1 Framing education through ideal lenses**

Two central themes emerge, shedding light on the interplay between educational guidelines and ideological influences within the Chinese moral education system. First, the focus is directed towards the challenges and adaptations that arise when lofty ideals encounter real-world pragmatism. This theme explores the resulting ambivalence in implementing educational policies, highlighting the tension between theoretical concepts and practical applications. It underscores the complexities involved in translating ideological directives into effective educational strategies. Second, the examination centers on the influence of idealized representations on teaching practices, aiming to comprehend how these concepts shape students' experiences. Through an analysis of their practical applications, a deeper understanding of their impact on the moral education sector becomes apparent.

The interplay between ideals and realities in China's education system reflects a nuanced dynamic shaped by an overarching ideology. This dynamic can give rise to conflicts between



the ideals, guided by ideology, and the practical outcomes in the real world. Such conflicts often stem from differing perspectives between policy-makers who establish ambitious goals and those responsible for the on-the-ground implementation, who must deal with complex issues at the local level. Achieving these lofty ideals becomes more challenging when confronted with practical constraints, such as limited resources and outdated materials. It is common for policies to undergo modifications as they are disseminated from the top-level directives to local authorities and educators, who then tailor them to fit specific contexts. For instance, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education plays a role in implementing policies at the local level and provides guidelines for managing schools to ensure the equitable distribution of resources (The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, 2023). Moreover, as research indicated, teacher identity significantly influences the approaches used by educators (e.g. Hao, 2011; Li, 2022). This factor contributes to the complex challenges surrounding the implementation of policy objectives established by the CPC under the guidance of national and local authorities. The conflict at the core of this issue revolves around the fundamental tension between desirable ideals and the achievable realities. The interplay between ideals and realities in the Chinese education system is closely linked to the concept of Chinese *suzhi*. *Suzhi* embodies the traits and qualities of an exemplary citizen as envisioned by the government and society. The ideals of *suzhi*, driven by the overarching ideology, represent a grand vision of education that aligns with the goals of the Communist Party of China. Achieving *suzhi* ideals in the diverse landscape of the Chinese education system poses challenges, including practical limitations, regional discrepancies, and policy implementation complications. Nonetheless, translating these ambitious goals into practical outcomes remains a priority. Thus, these ideals, often rooted in ideological frameworks, embody an ambitious vision for education, aiming to advance the CPC's objectives, which include promoting Party loyalty, fostering social harmony, and enhancing global competence. However, these ideals may not always align seamlessly with the pragmatic realities of education in China.

As interviews in this study have indicated, teachers typically have a strong grasp of the objectives and significance of moral education policies. In contrast, parents may express reservations regarding their effectiveness and long-term impact. These policies indeed offer tangible benefits by promoting social values such as ethics, responsibility, and good citizenship. They equip individuals for active participation in society and contribute to overall societal harmony and stability by fostering social cohesion through collective values and shared responsibility. Moral education also plays a pivotal role in shaping character, nurturing qualities like integrity, empathy, and compassion. Moreover, it provides students with essential skills to make ethical decisions that can have a lasting impact. The Ministry of Education's proposal to involve parents in the moral education process aligns with the importance of family-centered strategies (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2017d). Initiatives like open school days and family visits can serve as bridges between home and school, allowing parents to witness firsthand the positive effects of moral education on their children, as demonstrated by Hu and Qin (2012). These endeavors encourage collaboration between schools and families, reinforcing the principles and values taught in moral education. They highlight the transition from individual-

ism to a collective mindset and acknowledge shared values, as outlined in school textbooks. Policy-makers have a range of approaches at their disposal to enhance these efforts. Research indicates that these initiatives could benefit from transparent curriculum design and content, proactive clarification of goals and outcomes through effective communication strategies (Biesta et al., 2015; Priestley, 2011), sharing successful examples and stories, involving parents, and providing students with resources that emphasize the importance of moral education and its alignment with broader societal goals. However, there is still room for improvement in fully integrating and realizing these objectives in the classroom according to stakeholders involved in student socialization processes.

Bridging the gap between ideological directives and students' daily experiences represents a critical task and an opportunity within the Chinese education system. Educational policies emphasize the teaching of Party ideology and values, but educators also need to consider the diversity of student viewpoints. The Ministry of Education promotes a balanced approach that combines learning with critical thinking (Ministry of Education, 2016b), aligning with the vision of an "ideal" citizen outlined in chapter four. The implementation of innovative moral education practices could yield significant outcomes, although evaluating their effectiveness can be challenging due to the multifaceted nature of education and its long-term impacts. Potential impacts of educational policies in China include a greater adherence to Party ideology, the promotion of social harmony, and the enhancement of global proficiency. To assess these impacts, it is crucial to measure students' understanding of Party principles, community norms, and their involvement in global affairs. Chinese educational policies have a dual objective of fostering individual growth and reinforcing collective solidarity, ultimately aiming to nurture citizens who can contribute to China while adhering to Party leadership. There is a growing perception that contemporary educational policies in China may limit students' opportunities to develop their own values and perspectives. This perception is rooted in the prioritization of ideological conformity and the promotion of official values, which might emphasize the ideal needs of society over the practical needs of individual students. While some students may feel constrained in expressing differing views or exploring alternative perspectives (as expressed by a parent during the interview), it is important to acknowledge that the educational system offers opportunities for critical thinking and the development of individual perspectives (as seen in observations as well as textbook tasks). Educators with expertise can encourage students to think critically while adhering to policy guidelines, and extracurricular activities can provide forums for students to explore diverse viewpoints.

China's education system is constructed to align with the ideology of the Communist Party of China, enforcing this framework through policies and practices that explicitly and implicitly influence school management and student development. The study's observations regarding the ideological impact on shifting thinking over immediate actions are consistent with findings by Schurmann (1966), suggesting that direct effects might not be immediately apparent but become noticeable in future actions. The policies implemented in China aim to transform students' thinking by emphasizing alignment with Party ideology. While there is minimal emphasis on altering students' behavior, the primary goal is to impart ideological

values and principles that are consistent with Party ideals to *guide* their actions. This cognitive transformation could potentially affect students' behavior over time, highlighting the connection between thinking and action within the system. However, the personal realities of individual students may not always be clear, as they are closely related to the social reality constructed by the CPC. Students' personal beliefs and perspectives are influenced by and often aligned with the prevailing ideology. The interplay of conceptual ideal types and guiding norms in China presents a compelling narrative. It underscores the fusion of abstract concepts with tangible realities. Although these ideal types may not consistently match practical realities, they lead to important inquiries and reflections. This raises a critical question: Can these conceptual ideal types effectively withstand the dynamic complexities inherent in China's social and ideological landscape? Central to this investigation is the acknowledgment that China's ideological foundation inherently portrays an aspirational "ideal" image. It could be argued that if these ideal types are smoothly integrated into the ideology's fabric, then it is plausible to propose that they are achievable, not in pure forms, but in mixed representations. China's ideological foundation truly depicts ambitious ideals. Over time, these ideal models may shift from mere conceptual constructs to more achievable and attainable practices when they are integrated into its ideology and translated into practical policies. The Chinese government is proactively implementing these ideals through education, social programs, and propaganda campaigns with the goal of making them tangible aspects of daily life. Guiding norms and CPC ideology fundamentally shape moral education in China. Translating abstract concepts into observable phenomena in individuals' and society's lives is challenging. The government intentionally cultivates a framework that fuses deep-rooted and modern elements to reflect the characteristics outlined by their ideological foundation.

### **6.2.2 Staged education? Didactic practice and ideological goals**

A pivotal question is addressed: Are the lessons observed in Chinese education the result of deliberate planning or spontaneous reactions to anticipated lesson observations? This inquiry gives rise to two major themes in the study. The first theme revolves around the construction of ideological concepts and how they are integrated into the didactic framework of the educational system. The second theme delves into the notion of *staged education* and its simultaneous integration with ideological objectives. The examination seeks to understand the intricate process by which ideological constructs become woven into the educational experience, all within the context of how these themes manifest in moral education classes.

#### **Ideological construction and its integration into the didactics of the educational system in China**

The multifaceted educational approach serves to align educational practices with the ideological objectives of the Communist Party of China. Didactic strategies are employed to convey ideological messages while maintaining interactivity. Educators use authoritative teaching, questioning, and discourse to ensure that students grasp clear messages regarding Party values. The concept of the "ideal" Chinese citizen is a recurring focal point in education policy

and is articulated through official documents, statements, and directives. The Ministry of Education plays a pivotal role in disseminating these ideals to educational institutions and the public. Specific expressions of these ideals are typically found in official policy documents and guidelines, outlining the desired attributes, values, and behaviors expected of citizens. The Chinese government perceives education as a means of instilling patriotism and loyalty to the nation. Policymakers emphasize the cultivation of a sense of national pride and identity among students by highlighting the “ideal” Chinese citizen. The primary goal of education in China is to nurture citizens who not only represent but also contribute to the nation’s development and the realization of the “great rejuvenation of the nation” (伟大复兴) (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2022b).

The educational system in China has a foundational mission that centers on both intellectual and ethical development. It is recognized that students are expected to not only acquire knowledge but also to internalize and put into practice essential societal values. Therefore, the integration of guiding norms into education is not merely a matter of rhetoric but a deliberate and meaningful pursuit. The aim is to cultivate individuals who possess both intellectual abilities and a steadfast commitment to essential social values. Curricula in China often adopt an idealistic approach to moral education, placing emphasis on values, principles, and behaviors endorsed by the Party, as evident in the *guiding thinking* (指导思想) embedded in every curriculum standard. However, the challenge lies in the translation of these ideological ideals into tangible classroom experiences. The complexity of implementing a curriculum that molds students into “ideal” citizens becomes apparent when confronted with the dynamic and multifaceted nature of real-world education. Several factors contribute to this complexity. First, practical constraints faced by teachers, such as limited classroom time, resources, and student diversity, can hinder the realization of idealistic curricular goals. Second, educators themselves may have different interpretations regarding how to express and execute these ideal concepts. Some may prioritize strict adherence to Party values, while others may focus on critical thinking and debate, leading to variations in classroom approaches. Third, students’ reactions to moral education can vary, reflecting their diverse personal beliefs and attitudes. This diversity poses challenges when it comes to aligning students’ perspectives with the ideal concepts presented in curricula. Additionally, external social and cultural factors can influence the extent to which idealistic notions are put into practice in the classroom.

Scholars emphasize (e.g. Liu and Zhu, 2001) that moral education should be natural, practical, and reflective of students’ real-life experiences. In the context of China, these principles are acknowledged, but they are often interpreted and implemented through an ideological lens. Teachers in China use ideological specifications as guidance for moral education, and these specifications frequently align with the values and principles of the Communist Party of China. Moral education in China is designed to instill Party-endorsed values in students through practical pedagogical techniques. These techniques encompass both didactic and interactive approaches. Didactic teaching methods are employed to convey specific ideological content and values to students. This is done through authoritative lectures and presentations by teachers, ensuring that students receive a clear message about the endorsed values. On the

other hand, interactive techniques, guided by the Party's ideological framework, encourage critical thinking and active engagement. They prompt students to contemplate how moral values can be applied in various contexts. The use of real-life examples helps students relate this ideological content to practical situations, bridging the gap between theory and practice and making it more applicable to their lives.

### **Reflection on the staging and integration of ideological goals in the Chinese education system**

The staging of Chinese education is a deliberate process initiated by the highest authorities, primarily the Communist Party of China. It involves defining the fundamental characteristics, norms, and values for Chinese society, which are then integrated into educational institutions. These influences extend to the design of curricula, textbooks, and teacher training. Educators play a pivotal role in transmitting these values to students and aligning the education system with CPC ideology. The Chinese Communist Party meticulously constructs a narrative within the educational environment to create the impression that students willingly embrace it as their own.<sup>5</sup> This system is built on interdependent components that establish and sustain an ongoing social context aligned with the two forms of socialization outlined by Hu and Qin (2012): individual socialization and social individualization. These two forms are interrelated and work to align personal beliefs and distinct personalities with the needs of society. Early indoctrination begins at a young age, as CPC ideology becomes a normalized part of students' educational experiences. Over time, these values may become internalized, shaping their perceptions as if they genuinely accept them. This aligns with the proposal made by Yue (2004) for effective socialization, where individual aspirations align with social expectations. Similarly, social conformity also plays a significant role. Chinese society places a strong emphasis on social conformity, reinforcing the idea that aligning with CPC ideology is not only commonplace but also socially accepted. This social pressure contributes to the outward appearance of willing acceptance. Additionally, adhering to CPC ideology offers incentives and opportunities, which serve as powerful motivators. The educational system provides various incentives, such as academic achievements (as displayed in the school observations) and future career prospects, which motivate students to embrace the presented values. To promote conformity with the prevailing ideology, the educational system selectively controls exposure to alternative viewpoints, thereby reducing the likelihood of students questioning or challenging the accepted beliefs. The convergence of these factors constructs a narrative in which it appears that students willingly and personally adopt CPC ideology, while the Party's influence permeates the education system, shaping the convictions and behavior of successive generations in China.

The existing research underscores the importance of shifting from a purely indoctrinative

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<sup>5</sup>Didactic reality in educational settings often aims to embody the ideals of educational policies and align with the principles and values espoused by educational authorities, such as the Communist Party of China. This representation can be viewed as a form of showcase work or "Vorzeigarbeit" wherein the educational system prioritizes visible adherence to policy directives, occasionally at the expense of more profound, critical engagement.

approach to a more comprehensive educational strategy, as discussed in studies like Qi and Tang (2004) and Tse (2011). This shift acknowledges the need to strike a balance between providing ideological guidance and fostering personal development, critical thinking, and individuality among students. Self-education, as pointed out by Hu and Qin (2012), emerges as a critical element in fostering personal growth. Active engagement in school activities plays a role in promoting personal development by encouraging discussions, stimulating critical thinking, and reinforcing ideological concepts. In the current context of Chinese education, there may be efforts to adapt the educational approach, presenting the ideological framework in a more sophisticated or acceptable manner. This adaptation could be seen as a response to changing global expectations. In the context of the Communist Party of China's constructed realities, *educational ideological conditioning* refers to the deliberate implementation of a process within the country's education system. This process aims to instill specific ideological values and principles in students. It involves *shaping* individuals to embody qualities and attributes consistent with the "ideal" citizen envisioned by the CPC and educational institutions, which includes demonstrating loyalty to the Party and a commitment to China's progress and development, as shown in chapter four of this study. Moreover, this highlights the role of education in preparing individuals to actively contribute to China's national objectives, such as the "Chinese dream" of national revitalization. The key difference between *indoctrination* and *educational ideological conditioning* lies in the methods and intent. *Indoctrination* implies a rigid and one-sided approach in which students are expected to unquestioningly adopt prescribed beliefs with limited critical examination or consideration of alternative viewpoints while dissent is suppressed. On the other hand, *educational ideological conditioning* represents a systematic and intentional process that shapes students' constructed realities within an ideological framework. It allows for more room for critical thinking and discussion within the bounds of the prescribed ideology. *Educational ideological conditioning* encourages critical engagement and personal reflection while nurturing values and beliefs. The importance of shaping students' perspectives is acknowledged, and this can be accomplished through a multifaceted and proactive pedagogical approach within the constructed reality of the Communist Party of China.

The term *conditioning* accurately describes the systematic and intentional nature of China's educational process aimed at shaping the beliefs, values, and behaviors of students in conformity with the ideology of the Communist Party of China. This comprehensive approach is evident across multiple dimensions of the education system, such as the curricula, textbooks, classroom interactions, extracurricular activities, and events. The structured nature of textbooks, as revealed in the analysis, underscores a logical organization of topics, reinforcing certain subjects' recurrent appearance. Although there is a deliberate conditioning element evident in the core competencies, the underlying concept emphasizes the intricate nature of the subject matter and the transition from superficial to in-depth analysis. Students become accustomed to this predefined framework, and deviating from it might seem unwarranted. The assumption is that students will embrace it voluntarily, as it is not imposed upon them. Certain cognitive tasks may indicate a receptiveness to critical discourse, but in such in-

stances, the confines of the established framework are usually respected. Throughout China's educational system, there is a prevailing emphasis on national objectives, highlighting the importance of aligning personal development with the broader goals of the nation and the CPC. One key objective of *educational ideological conditioning* is to reinforce cultural identity, instilling a sense of belonging and pride in China's history, culture, and values.<sup>6</sup> Role models, typically featured in educational materials, embody qualities that students are encouraged to adopt, reflecting universal values and the common good which aligns with research conducted by Liu and Zhu (2001) or Reed (1995). This effort serves to enhance social cohesion and unity by aligning Chinese citizens with a common set of beliefs and principles, ultimately striving to establish a shared sense of purpose and direction among the population. The education system aims to ensure that citizens actively contribute to the ongoing development and prosperity of China as a cohesive and harmonious society. As observed by Schurmann (1966), ideologies have the unique ability to influence behavior, both directly and indirectly, often without complete recognition by all members of society. Students may not be fully aware of the methods used to shape their alignment with the prevailing ideology. Conflicting beliefs may be replaced with new viewpoints (Buczowski and Klawiter, 1986) or dismissed with what appear to be reasonable excuses (Liu and Zhu, 2001). Although interactive pedagogy has been mentioned (Li et al., 2004), its extent within controlled boundaries remains unclear. This underscores the nuanced nature of the cognitive shift brought about by ideological conditioning, which gradually molds the thoughts and actions of individuals to align with societal objectives, often without their direct awareness.

A vital aspect of the process of *educational ideological conditioning* in China involves the students' perception of autonomy, as seen in the discussions about the concept of "regulated individualism" (Cheung and Pan, 2006), where individuals experience controlled personal autonomy within the context of socialist collectivism. It is imperative that students perceive themselves as independent thinkers who are broadening their horizons. This perception of autonomy is crucial to the efficacy of the conditioning process. However, in reality, students may believe they are thinking independently while being *guided* by the existing ideological framework. The educational system aims to influence students' beliefs and values while allowing them a degree of agency in shaping their constructed realities. This process is intentionally nuanced and impartial, promoting a well-rounded educational approach. Students are encouraged to develop their perspectives through critical thinking and exploration, fostering a sense of ownership over their beliefs and values. However, it is important to note that students operate within a framework firmly grounded in the ideology and guiding norms established by the Communist Party of China and educational authorities. Curricula, textbooks, and classroom discussions are all influenced by these ideology, which establishes the boundaries within which students construct their realities. The delicate balance between perceived autonomy and ideological guidance is a critical element in *educational ideological conditioning* in China. This phenomenon can be seen as a staging of Chinese education, where students

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<sup>6</sup>As already outlined in the 2001 *Outline of Basic Curriculum Revision (Trial)*: "to educate students in patriotism, collectivism and socialism; to strengthen education in the traditions of the Chinese nation, revolutionary traditions and national defense" (Ministry of Education, 2001c).

absorb what is considered ideal social norms and values. While students may consider this an appealing outcome, they are, in actuality, being motivated towards compliance with Chinese ideological principles.

### **6.3 The successful education in the sense of moral education**

The concept of successful education in the realm of moral education helps to understand what constitutes *success* in the Chinese context. *Success* goes beyond academic accomplishments; it also involves achieving the status of an “ideal” citizen. Teachers have a significant role in imparting what is deemed as “ideal” knowledge to students. Exploring how teachers fulfill this essential role and examining the intricate connection between the social construction of reality and the moral education of Chinese students is of great importance. This analysis provides valuable insights into how social norms and values impact the development of moral character. The aim is to shed light on the nuanced complexities associated with defining success, the responsibilities of educators, and the factors influencing moral education for Chinese students.

#### **6.3.1 The role of “ideal” knowledge in moral education**

Defining the concept of “ideal” knowledge is a complex challenge. Drawing from Berger and Luckmann (1967)’s perspective on knowledge<sup>7</sup>, “ideal” knowledge can be understood as the creation of valid claims within a specific social context. This validation process relies on legitimation, where recognized and endorsed sources of knowledge are utilized. Educational systems are crucial knowledge sources that contribute significantly to this legitimation process. They play a pivotal role in imparting and reinforcing specific knowledge and values, thereby shaping a collective understanding of what constitutes valid and “ideal” knowledge within a particular society or culture. In the Chinese education system, the notion of “ideal” knowledge encompasses carefully selected content and values that align with the ideology of the Communist Party of China. This knowledge is designed to mold citizens who comprehend Party principles and can contribute to the nation’s objectives. The process reinforces the CPC ideology as the epitome of “ideal” knowledge in Chinese society, and its prevalence in the broader social framework further solidifies this recognition. Therefore, “ideal” knowledge essentially becomes equivalent to the knowledge endorsed by the governing ideology. The validation of knowledge in this context is primarily supported by the authoritative endorsement of educational institutions controlled and guided by the CPC.

The concept that knowledge is socially constructed has significant implications, fundamentally reshaping our view and comprehension of knowledge. It challenges the traditional notion that knowledge is an objective and absolute truth, revealing instead that it is intricately interwoven with social values, norms, and viewpoints. From this perspective, knowledge is a dynamic entity that changes in response to the social context it exists within. This vari-

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<sup>7</sup>Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann do not provide a definition of “ideal” knowledge, but their discussion of legitimation offers some insight into their perspective on the social construction of knowledge.



ability is a result of the influence of ideologies and beliefs that define each particular context. Knowledge is not a fixed or universally applicable concept; it is an ever-evolving entity closely connected to the socio-cultural context of human existence. Recognizing the diversity of knowledge systems across different societies and cultures is crucial, as it implies acknowledging the legitimacy of various ways of perceiving the world. This underscores the richness of human perspectives but can also lead to conflicts when conflicting ideologies or knowledge systems collide. To resolve such conflicts, it often requires complex dialogues and mutual understanding. In the realm of education, understanding that knowledge is socially constructed can significantly impact the development of curricula and teaching strategies.

Schütz (1967c)'s theory of common knowledge, which relates to widely accepted standards and principles governing social interactions and behavior, has proven to offer valuable insights into its significance in the Chinese education system. In China, students acquire knowledge from diverse sources, with socialization playing a crucial role as they internalize these norms and values within their families, schools, and communities. Teachers, being influential figures in the lives of their students, have a significant role in transmitting these values, doing so in alignment with the ideological framework and guiding norms set by the Communist Party of China. The educational system in China contributes to reinforcing a shared knowledge base by thoughtfully selecting curricula and textbooks. These educational materials serve as a means to shape the common knowledge that students accumulate throughout their academic journey. One can argue that in China, common knowledge is ultimately influenced by the ideology and guiding principles of the CPC. The Party's influence permeates the education system, and the values and behaviors it promotes become integrated into the general stock of knowledge that students are expected to internalize. Although George H. Mead does not explicitly define "ideal" knowledge, his perspective on social interaction suggests that such knowledge may arise as a result of collective social processes. Mead's view implies that "ideal" knowledge can be an outcome of shared understanding and consensus resulting from social interactions and communication. He emphasizes that knowledge is not static; rather, it is continually shaped by social processes, interactions, and collective experiences. In the Chinese context, this viewpoint highlights that "ideal" knowledge is not solely the product of individual cognition or authoritative decree. Instead, it is closely tied to the dynamic social environment in which it exists. "Ideal" knowledge in China reflects the collective understanding, values, and interactions within Chinese society. Mead's perspective encourages the acknowledgment of the ever-evolving nature of "ideal" knowledge, stressing the significance of social influences and the role of individuals in shaping and reshaping this knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

"Ideal" knowledge is an ongoing process of development, adaptation, and reinterpretation

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<sup>8</sup>Interestingly, when considering the role of individuals in shaping and reshaping knowledge, one may reflect on how teachers influence and refine the knowledge conveyed in moral education lessons. As discussed earlier, teachers serve as conveyors of the CPC ideology, which means that the shaping and reshaping of knowledge happens within a defined framework. Individuals play a role in shaping knowledge, but the extent of their influence is limited by the prevailing ideology. Knowledge that deviates from these guidelines is typically disregarded or justified in a way that aligns with the established norms. This leads to a question: Who holds the primary authority in shaping and reshaping knowledge - individuals and their social interactions, or the party leadership with its comprehensive control over the knowledge within society?

within the intricate and diverse fabric of Chinese culture and society, ultimately framed within the boundaries of the Communist Party of China. In the context of China's education system, the concept of knowledge legitimacy carries significant importance. It pertains to the validation and endorsement of knowledge and values that are in line with the ideology of the Communist Party of China and the deep-rooted values upheld by the state. Knowledge legitimacy signifies that educational materials adhere to the CPC's ideology and the state's endorsed values, positioning them as the prevailing and favored worldview within Chinese society. This concept extends beyond mere compliance, signifying a deliberate and systematic endeavor to bolster particular knowledge and values across the educational trajectory of Chinese students. Determinations of what is considered right or wrong are rooted in the comprehension of CPC, and the content of textbooks illustrates that, while China's positive accomplishments are emphasized, negative events and challenges throughout history are either excluded or portrayed in a positive light to align with Chinese interpretations. This further strengthens knowledge legitimacy and the role of education in shaping not only *what* individuals learn but also *how* they perceive the world. It serves as a mechanism to ensure that future generations of Chinese citizens are not just well-informed but also deeply rooted in the ideology and values that the CPC deems essential for the progress of the nation.

### **Combining theory and practice**

Personal values develop alongside social values through socialization, a process influenced by various factors such as family, peers, education, and culture. Individuals adapt their values to align with social changes, including technological advancements and cultural shifts. This mutual interaction fosters a sense of belonging, cooperation, and stability within society, underscoring the dynamic nature of human values within a social context. Moral education plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between personal and social values. Its significance lies in facilitating the alignment of personal principles with broader cultural standards, thereby nurturing a sense of moral responsibility and community cohesion among individuals. Furthermore, moral education connects personal growth and development with the identity of a responsible and ethical citizen, highlighting individuals' contributions to their communities and society. Values are deeply rooted in historical contexts and are more than abstract principles. They often carry the influences of past events, cultural traditions, and social conflicts. Understanding values comprehensively requires considering their historical context. When teaching values, particularly in moral education, integrating historical context enables students to gain a more profound understanding of why certain values are significant. It fosters a profound respect for the ethical underpinnings of their culture and heritage.

Socialist core values are promoted in China as foundational principles for constructing a harmonious and prosperous society, and they hold a central place in the educational system. However, students' experiences and interpretations of these values can significantly differ. While teachers stress the importance of "mainstream values"<sup>9</sup> as integral, students may en-

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<sup>9</sup>As outlined in chapter five, one teacher during the interviews referenced socialist core values as mainstream values that all students ought to comprehend and apply.

counter difficulties in grasping their significance or applying them in their daily lives. These values are often conveyed through educational materials and textbooks, which may present them at a superficial level without delving into their historical context or original meaning, as can be seen from this study's textbook analysis. As a result, students might tend to passively adhere to these values, demonstrating awareness but lacking a deep internalization or genuine belief in them. The disparities between the promotion of socialist core values and their practical implementation underscore the complex process of transmitting values within the Chinese education system. This illustrates the challenge of reconciling ideological ideals with the personal experiences and perspectives of students. Wang Yangming's philosophy proposes that genuine knowledge is demonstrated by actions consistent with one's moral beliefs. This perspective parallels the promotion of socialist core values in the Chinese educational system, and fostering students to acquire and implement this knowledge supports his theory. However, the execution of this principle encounters significant challenges. It is crucial to move beyond rote memorization and foster a genuine understanding and acceptance of these principles, particularly when students may perceive a gap between these aspirational tenets and their real-life experiences.<sup>10</sup>

An incomplete understanding of values, often rooted in the perception of values as fixed and unchanging facts, can hinder their effective application. This perspective tends to overlook the crucial aspect of creating authentic knowledge. When students regard values as abstract and conceptual rather than guiding principles for their actions, it can lead to a lack of genuine commitment to these values. Therefore, a contextual understanding of values is essential to ensure their internalization and meaningful integration into one's moral framework. According to Schütz, knowledge is constructed by individuals through their subjective interpretations, categorizing their experiences based on common attributes and meanings. In the realm of moral education, this perspective suggests that individuals assign personal interpretations and understandings to abstract values, essentially giving substance to these values. Schütz's assertion that meaning serves as a guide for action further underscores the importance of values as meaningful guides for ethical behavior, ultimately influencing individuals' actions. In essence, individuals translate their understanding of values into practical principles that direct their actions and decisions. This viewpoint underscores the significance of fostering a deep and personal connection to values in moral education. It empowers students not only to recognize but also to internalize and implement these values in their daily lives

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<sup>10</sup>The "knowledge-action linkage" introduced in Beijing in 2022 seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, upon closer analysis, it is apparent that this connection primarily centers on tangible actions, including speeches given by influential figures like role models and heroes, aimed at bringing these exemplary individuals closer to students. Students typically play a passive role in these activities, primarily as listeners rather than active participants. This approach represents a strategy employed by the Communist Party of China to connect theoretical knowledge with the practical application of its ideology. It is presented within the CPC's framework, where the interpretation of knowledge-action is aligned with the party's context. The program is proposed as an initiative to "Adhere to the knowledge and action linkage approach" and aims to collaborate in promoting the theoretical and practical integration of ideological and political courses in primary and secondary schools and universities. Furthermore, it utilizes the impact of notable figures and their commendable deeds to enhance a sense of purpose and obligation within educational institutions and instructors to educate individuals for the betterment of the Party and the country (Ministry of Education, 2022c).

(e.g. Schütz, 2004). Schütz's perspective on subjective interpretation and shared meanings is relevant in the context of moral education and its relationship to the ideology of the Communist Party of China as it emphasizes the need for a deeper and more personal engagement with moral values, surpassing mere repetition and technical rationality. Students are encouraged to interpret values within the context of their own lives and understand how these values influence their decision-making. In the context of CPC ideology, moral education serves as a means for transmitting and reinforcing values that align with the Party's principles and goals. CPC ideology forms the basis for moral education, highlighting particular values deemed essential for fostering social harmony and collective progress.

Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of conveying these values to their students. However, the materials available may not always offer the comprehensive knowledge needed for not only understanding the theoretical aspects of these values but also their origin and practical application. The transmission of institutional roles and social norms is a critical yet complex aspect of the educational process. These norms, embedded within the shared body of knowledge, are often imparted to students without an extensive explanation of their origins. Instead, they are conveyed through a combination of expected norms, socialization, and the educational system. Students may initially encounter these norms as somewhat abstract or lacking a clear historical or cultural context. They might perceive them as "empty forms", as indicated by Hu (2020). However, over time, these "empty forms" acquire meaning as students engage with the academic community, participate in educational experiences, and receive guidance from educators. In essence, the transmission of institutional roles and social norms in China involves a subtle and continuous infusion of these values into the consciousness of students. While students may not always have a full understanding of the origins of these norms, they become integral to their comprehension of social roles and behaviors. This ultimately contributes to the development of citizens who align with the prevailing values and expectations of Chinese society.

The commitment of the state and Party leadership to deep-rooted values serves as a method not only for shaping the cultural and moral landscape of the country but also for preserving social cohesion and political stability. These values are integrated into the ideological narrative to cultivate a collective sense of identity and purpose among Chinese citizens, aligning them with the Party's vision for the future of China. The deliberate inclusion of historically ingrained values in Chinese education is a multifaceted process that reflects the interconnectedness of the nation's cultural heritage and contemporary ideological goals. This integration is evident in various aspects of the education system and contributes to the development of a new generation of citizens who uphold both CPC principles and long-standing moral values. The educational curriculum plays a vital role in the transmission of values within the system. Courses such as Morality and the Rule of Law aim to promote CPC principles while emphasizing the importance of traditional moral values. However, the textbook analysis revealed that the current curriculum standards prioritize theoretical objectives over practical implementation in the classroom, given the materials currently available to teachers. Through such courses, students encounter a comprehensive framework that merges political loyalty with

ethical behavior. Students are exposed to living examples of how these values have influenced Chinese society throughout history. As ideological guides, teachers shape students' understanding of historically ingrained values and encourage their integration into daily life. This integration into education in China represents a harmonious blend of the past and present, demonstrating the country's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage while pursuing modernization.

Wang Yangming's educational philosophy has proven to provide valuable insights into the effective integration of theory and practice in moral education, particularly in the context of CPC ideology and guiding principles in China. His approach recognizes the necessity of bridging the gap between abstract values and real-life experiences, enabling students to connect with and apply these values in their daily lives (e.g. Pan et al., 2016). By incorporating moral principles into practical situations, moral education in China can enhance its relevance and resonance with students, thus resolving the problem of those who act without understanding and those who understand but do not act.<sup>11</sup> This approach aligns with the goal of making CPC ideology and guiding principles more accessible and relatable for the younger generation. It encourages students to recognize the tangible implementation of these values in their interactions with others and their contributions to Chinese society, fostering a deeper understanding of their role as responsible citizens. Additionally, Wang Yangming's focus on expanding the sense of community from an individual to a collective aligns with the concept of the unity of knowledge and action. It underscores the importance of not only developing one's personal moral values but also cultivating a sense of collective responsibility. This sense of collective responsibility motivates students to actively engage in advancing the well-being of their communities and contributing to the achievement of national objectives, as outlined by CPC ideology. Furthermore, Mead's concept of the *self* and *generalized other* (Mead, 1962) can be applied to the moral development of students. Wang Yangming's philosophy facilitates the development of a moral *self* that aligns with the *generalized other* – the collective moral values advocated by CPC ideology. This philosophy encourages students to recognize the practical implementation of moral values in their interactions and contributions to society.

The misalignment between education policies and the cognitive development of students in China is a significant concern with implications for the quality and effectiveness of education. Historically, the Ministry of Education has placed a strong emphasis on pedagogical approaches like rote memorization and standardized testing. However, research indicates that students progress through stages that require a broader range of teaching methods. This misalignment highlights a disconnect between educational policies and the evolving cognitive abilities of students, posing a significant challenge when policies do not consider these developmental stages. While the educational system prioritizes achieving high scores on exams and retaining course content, it is crucial to recognize the significance of encouraging the development of critical thinking skills and a more comprehensive understanding of the

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<sup>11</sup>Schütz's concept of "intersubjectivity" further examines how individuals comprehend each other's subjective experiences. Wang Yangming's method, which links abstract values with practical experiences, enhances students' ability to comprehend and empathize with the moral experiences of others. This facilitates the creation of a more coherent moral community within schools.

subject matter. Chapter four highlighted that becoming an “ideal” citizen demands both academic excellence and critical thinking abilities. While academic excellence can be achieved through theoretical knowledge, critical thinking necessitates practical application. Hence, it is essential to narrow the divide between theory and practice to actualize the theoretical *concepts* of an “ideal” citizen, as proposed by the state, and make them achievable attributes for every student. Neglecting this misalignment can lead to students who excel in examinations but struggle to apply their knowledge effectively in real-life situations.

### 6.3.2 How students shape constructed realities

The goal now is to complete the cycle of understanding *what* students learn in moral education and *how* they internalize this knowledge into their conscious minds. Drawing inspiration from the concept of the social construction of reality as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1967), this concept has the potential to resonate within China, given its diverse cultural tapestry and distinct social structures. The examination focuses on how cultural differences impact the formation and understanding of reality, dimensions that were initially absent from Berger and Luckmann’s framework. A central emphasis is placed on the crucial process of *externalization, objectivation, and internalization*, providing insights into how individuals actively create meaning and establish social order through their interactions within the educational sphere. As the dimensions are explored, it serves as a reminder of previous conclusions, especially the recognition that certain aspects of knowledge may appear abstract and elusive to students. This recognition prompts to consider that China’s education system operates within the overarching framework of CPC ideology, where the construction of reality is intricately intertwined with the broader CPC constructed reality of Chinese society.

#### Externalization: Shared meaning and moral education

Externalization is the initial phase in constructing a social reality. It involves the process of aligning personal experiences, ideas, and beliefs with the predefined ideological norms set by the Communist Party of China. In the context of Chinese moral education, there is a notable tension between personal experiences and the predefined ideological norms. While individuals may have their unique subjective experiences and ideas, the emphasis is on aligning them with the well-defined Party values. Personal experiences are typically molded to conform to the CPC’s ideological framework, with the Party’s principles serving as the guiding force. Externalization unfolds through various channels within the Chinese education system, such as the design of curricula, the development of textbooks, and the pivotal role played by educators. The CPC exercises control over all these components to ensure strict adherence to Party principles. The ultimate objective is to transform personal experiences and ideas into knowledge systems that faithfully reflect and bolster CPC ideology. In this context, teachers *serve* as not only educators but also vital social agents responsible for facilitating the assimilation of Party values into students’ knowledge systems. They *guide* students in shaping their understanding and acceptance of the Party’s prescribed beliefs and behaviors. Moral education, in particular, acts as a powerful mechanism for socializing individuals into the values and

expectations of the CPC. It aims to instill specific values and principles within the framework of Party ideology, with the expectation that students comprehend and exhibit these values in their daily conduct, both within the classroom and the broader community. Externalization within Chinese moral education has profound implications, extending beyond the individual. By externalizing CPC ideology's knowledge and cultural practices, these values become integral to China's shared social reality. They significantly influence individuals' perception and interactions with the world. While externalization primarily focuses on transmitting theoretical values, it is imperative for students to internalize and apply these principles in practical, real-life scenarios. This aligns with the broader goal of moral education in China, which is to cultivate citizens who not only comprehend CPC ideology but also actively practice it in their daily lives.

### **Objectivation: Moral norms and institutionalization**

Objectivation is the process through which individual subjective experiences and meanings are transformed into integral components of broader social structures and educational systems. In the context of Chinese moral education, objectivation becomes evident as students' subjective moral values and experiences gradually evolve into shared and institutionalized forms. This transformation unfolds through various educational processes, interactions, and communication channels. One of the primary objectives of objectivation is to standardize knowledge and values across diverse educational settings, ensuring that students receive consistent and uniform messages on values. The meanings derived from objectivation are closely tied to external elements within the education system, including curricula, textbooks, classroom practices, and institutions. Guided by the influence of the Communist Party of China, these components systematically instill Party principles and values in students. Teachers play a crucial role in the objectivation process. They act as intermediaries between the external structures of education and students, facilitating the development of a systematic and comprehensible moral education curriculum. Within the classroom, teachers explain and reinforce CPC values, norms, and practices (*servicing*), promoting their objectivation within students' cognitive frameworks. Objectifying moral education goes beyond conveying knowledge; it involves stimulating students to internalize and implement guiding norms in their daily lives. This approach fosters both a theoretical understanding of ethics and the cultivation of virtuous habits and personality. By incorporating Wang Yangming's notion of the unity of knowledge and action into the framework of objectifying moral education, Chinese educators aim to cultivate (*guide*) students who possess moral knowledge and exhibit moral integrity in their interactions with others and contributions to society.

### **Internalization: Ethical identity and moral agency**

The internalization process in Chinese moral education plays a pivotal role in shaping the collective understanding and values of the nation. This process involves the incorporation of externalized and objectified norms, meanings, and values into the personal consciousness of individuals, where the CPC ideology and guiding norms serve as the foundation, while

the “ideal” characteristics enhance this foundation by including desirable traits that students require and can attain. Socialization is the primary means through which this critical stage occurs, as individuals acquire shared cultural understandings that become integral to their beliefs and behaviors. Essentially, internalization serves as the bridge that connects the externalized and objectified values of Chinese moral education to an individual’s inner world. Students integrate external moral teachings, norms, and values into their personal beliefs and behaviors through various socialization processes. Classroom activities, discussions, and exercises aimed at encouraging critical thinking actively promote this integration. However, it is important to recognize that the framework for critical thinking in China is influenced by the ruling ideology of the Communist Party of China and the guidelines set by educational authorities. This influence may place certain boundaries on the range of acceptable critical perspectives, ensuring that critical thinking remains within the parameters defined by CPC ideology. The internalization process within Chinese moral education significantly contributes to the formation of individual knowledge. By internalizing social beliefs and values, students simultaneously engage with various social groups and the education system. This reinforcement is enhanced through diverse channels employed by the education system, such as flag-raising ceremonies, membership in the Young Pioneers, and frequent displays of national symbols and prominent figures. These experiences reinforce their understanding of moral values and shape their individual knowledge in alignment with the Party’s principles. Internalization contributes to the reproduction of social structures within the Chinese education system. In an “ideal” Chinese society, individual behavior is guided by predefined values. Adherence to cultural customs and aligning oneself with the objectives of the Communist Party of China to nurture citizens who uphold Party principles is considered the standard. The internalization process plays a crucial role in realizing the CPC’s vision of a harmonious and cohesive society, where predefined values are deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of citizens.

Connecting students’ subjective moral experiences with objective ethical principles plays a significant role in their moral development and serves multiple functions. At its core, this process aims to create significance and consistency in students’ moral education by bridging the gap between their personal moral understanding and the impartial ethical principles established by the state. In the context of China, achieving this goal goes beyond mere memorization and repetition. It requires students to develop a profound understanding of the foundational values and principles that underpin Chinese society. It is essential that they not only grasp the importance of these principles but also internalize them to guide their actions and behaviors. The concepts explored in this thesis align with this objective. Wang Yangming’s philosophy emphasizes the unity of knowledge and action, suggesting that the comprehension of moral principles should translate into actions and behaviors consistent with those principles. In the context of moral education, this implies that students should not only acquire knowledge of ethical principles but also actively apply them in their lives. Connecting moral education with practical application ensures that students do not just possess theoretical knowledge but also put it into practice in their daily lives. Alfred Schütz’s perspective highlights the role of meaning in guiding action. This concept implies that ethi-



cal principles and values should not remain abstract concepts but should be integrated into students' actions and behaviors to guide them toward ethical decision-making. The process of connecting students' subjective moral experiences with objective ethical principles is essential for establishing meaning and coherence in moral education and development. This is especially crucial in the context of China, where students must understand and exemplify the ethical principles and values that are integral to Chinese society and CPC ideology in order to become responsible and ethical citizens.

Re-considering the function of ideology and especially the function of CPC ideology in China, it might be more appropriate to consider it in a hierarchical structure rather than making a clear distinction between its theoretical and practical components. A closer examination of the relationship between knowledge and action revealed their interdependence. At the foundational level, there is the theoretical or ideological framework that supplies the overarching principles, values, and objectives while also *directing* practical action. As cited by Schurmann (1966), it is not an immediate change in behavior, rather a change in thought; therefore, this "pure ideology", as he terms it, already integrates facets of practical ideology in terms of *guiding* action and *how* to implement it.<sup>12</sup> The ideological theory of the Communist Party of China informs policies, practices, and decision-making processes of the Party and government, while practical actions contribute to the ongoing development and adaptation of the theory itself. Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and other supplements are all grounded in Marxism-Leninism. While practical application is emphasized, these principles are also grounded in theoretical principles that extend beyond Marxism-Leninism, effectively merging theory (knowledge) and practice (action). Viewing ideology from this perspective renders the distinction between pure and practical insufficient, as already criticized by Bauer (1980). Distinguishing *lilun* as theory and *sixiang* as thought can exclude any elements of action because the ongoing interaction between theory and practice can refine or adjust the theoretical framework in response to practical experiences and real-world challenges. This dynamic interplay allows for the constant pertinence and responsiveness of ideology in changing circumstances, ultimately linking action and knowledge through an existential unity, as proposed by Wang Yangming and seen in the work of Alfred Schütz. In this context, Berger and Luckmann (1967)'s theory on the social construction of reality is applicable. It posits that reality is not an objective, fixed entity, but rather a result of human social interaction. This aligns with the interplay between theory and practice within CPC ideology and its extensions, highlighting the close relationship between knowledge and action in shaping reality. When examining CPC ideology and its practical applications, the social construction of reality becomes a relevant factor. These ideas influence the way individuals perceive and interact with the world, impacting both their theoretical understandings and practical actions within

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<sup>12</sup>Especially in contemporary China, Marxism-Leninism is not the exclusive origin of all theoretical and practical concepts and has advanced over time. The Communist Party of China has adapted and developed its own ideological framework to address China's unique historical, cultural, and economic conditions. This adaptation gave birth to "socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era", which incorporates elements of market-oriented economic policies and distinct political governance, different from those of orthodox Marxism. Furthermore, while Marxism-Leninism may serve as a foundational ideology, the CPC has implemented pragmatic measures and policies that are not solely based on Marxist-Leninist theory. To meet China's evolving requirements, the country has embraced economic reforms, globalization, and other practical policies.

society. The connection between theory and lived experiences (practice) aligns with the core concepts of Berger and Luckmann. The CPC ideology features a hierarchical structure of principles and an interplay between theory and practice that can be viewed as contributing to the social construction of reality. This perspective suggests that human knowledge and action shape their understanding of the world and, in turn, the world itself. This perspective provides valuable insights for analyzing the correlation between ideology and human experience within the context of Chinese political thought and its practical implications.

## 6.4 Summary of thesis, innovative contributions, and further research

In this study, I examined the role and function of moral education in Beijing schools, China, under the influence of CPC ideological framing. The study adopted a theoretical framework with two key components. Firstly, it situated the study within a sociological context, exploring ideology, the sociology of knowledge, and the acquisition and application of knowledge. Secondly, it shed light on the emergence of moral education in China, highlighting its unique features in the field of education. This study aimed to analyze the perceptions and challenges associated with moral education as experienced by teachers and parents. The study specifically investigated the subject of *Morality and the Rule of Law* (道德与法治).

The objective of this study was to establish a relationship between the current theoretical and empirical literature on moral education in China, with a focus on educational policies and curriculum standards. The theoretical literature provided valuable insights into the dynamic evolution of moral education in China, as well as the development of teaching methods that highlights the significance of offering high-quality education to students. On the one hand, the empirical literature addresses essential actions, outcomes, and strategies for achieving high-quality education. On the other hand, the predominantly theoretical literature does not comprehensively explore the viewpoints of educators and students, nor provide in-depth explanations of the effectiveness of moral education in China. This discrepancy reveals a gap between theoretical and empirical insights.

Based on identified research gaps, I have formulated the following research question: “Why does the integration of moral education into the school curriculum pose challenges in aligning individuals’ constructed realities with the prevailing ideological framework in China?” Additionally, I have posited one hypothesis: Teachers of moral education are challenged in aligning individuals’ constructed realities with the prevailing ideological framework in China because didactic guidelines fall short of the students’ actual experiences, while rigid normative curriculum directives restrict the teachers’ professional flexibility in the classroom.

For this study, I collected data during a research visit to Beijing from October 2022 to June 2023. I visited two schools and observed lessons, conducted interviews with teachers, students, and parents. These data complemented official descriptions of moral education, as well as narratives from educators, students, and parents, and my own observations regarding the implementation and outcomes of this type of education. To support the findings, a textbook

analysis of four textbooks used in grades one and two, as well as six textbooks used in grades seven through nine, has been conducted.

In this study, an analytical framework was employed to establish a connection between a sociological orientation and the theoretical perspective of moral education. The primary aim was to elucidate the functioning of the ideological framework within the Chinese education system, their influence on moral education, and their role in shaping students' constructed realities. Additionally, the study examined the challenges that teachers encounter when aligning their teaching with the overarching ideology of the Communist Party of China. Firstly, I have elaborated on Karl Mannheim's ideology concept, which lays the foundation for additional insights on CPC ideology. Secondly, I have analyzed the functioning of knowledge acquisition through the exploration of Alfred Schütz's conception of everyday knowledge and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality. Thirdly, this investigation was reinforced by an examination of general socialization processes, utilizing George H. Mead's social behaviorism, with a particular emphasis on Chinese socialization. Fourthly, in this study I utilized an approach that merges classical sociological theories with Chinese philosophical concepts that emphasize the unity of knowledge and action in Chinese society. Subsequently, a thorough analysis of moral education in China was conducted, examining its emergence, objectives, and content, to develop a comprehensive comprehension of the functionality and operation of education within Chinese society. From this theoretical foundation, I first outlined the role of ideology in China and its specific contents. Secondly, I established ideal types and guiding norms that shape moral values in Chinese society and guide actions. Finally, based on current literature, I elaborated on ideal types in moral education and the "ideal" characteristics that Chinese citizens are expected to achieve in their moral education.

The study's findings show that moral education in modern-day China has undergone substantial changes. These changes include the integration of historical traditions with contemporary achievements and a shift away from indoctrination techniques that emphasized strict obedience, one-sided teaching approaches, and one-sided viewpoints. Instead, there is now a diverse set of teaching methods, interactive classes, and diverse viewpoints that are being employed. However, upon closer examination of these changes, it is evident that they occur under the premises of CPC ideology. Action within Chinese society is shaped by the influence of party leadership, which is ultimately in control of the country's overall direction.

First, this study examined the translation of theoretical concepts into practical applications in education, specifically highlighting the complex relationship between Chinese education and ideological principles that shape educational goals. The study also addressed ongoing concerns regarding the efficacy of current moral education practices, echoing opinions expressed by interviewees. There is ambiguity regarding whether current educational policies primarily aim to foster societal transformation or are implemented with some ambivalence, often serving state interests. The inquiry explored whether students have opportunities for holistic development within this ideological framework, potentially challenging the inherent formative ideology. It further examined whether the current framework impedes or assists in

comprehensive personal development. Additionally, this study illustrated how the theoretical notions of the ideal type are integrated into the Chinese education system. This incorporation is based on the belief that China aims to mold its citizens in accordance with these ideal types by employing ideological structures. However, it is unclear to what degree these ideal types manifest in actuality and if they encompass a mixed combination of diverse ideal types.

Second, the Chinese Ministry of Education has put forth tactical plans to address the obstacles posed by changing educational paradigms. The Ministry of Education's teaching methods revolve around a structure that stresses imparting official values and Party ideology, with educators acting as knowledge transmitters. Although their methods may involve lectures and authoritative instruction, they also incorporate interactive elements to encourage critical thinking and inquiry. The Ministry of Education prioritizes teacher professional development through training programs that underscore pedagogical methods aligned with policy objectives and incorporate interactive teaching techniques that cultivate critical thinking skills among students. Additionally, the Ministry of Education places a significant emphasis on seamlessly integrating moral education and ideological content into educational materials through curricular integration. This approach aims to promote both the instilling of official values and student engagement simultaneously. Finally, the Ministry of Education issues policy guidance that delineates the teacher expectations to align with Party ideology. These guidelines comprise educational goals and content, providing educators with a detailed framework for their teaching efforts. These proposals reflect the Ministry of Education's effort to align policies with the goal of promoting active student participation and cultivating critical thinking skills in the Chinese education system.

Third, translating educational policies into practical classroom implementation is a complex challenge in China's education system. Several factors contribute to this problem, including the top-down nature of policy implementation. Directives from central authorities to local schools may lead to variations in policy interpretation and implementation at the local level. Resource limitations such as outdated textbooks and restricted access to updated teaching materials present considerable obstacles to the effective implementation of policies. Moreover, teacher independence in delivering instruction allows for divergences in classroom practices, which may deviate from policy objectives. Lastly, bureaucratic obstacles and administrative complexities can hinder the implementation of policies into practical classroom actions. Local educational authorities may face difficulties in executing policy directives in full. Addressing these challenges necessitates collaborative effort to close the divide between policy design and execution on the field, guaranteeing that pedagogical policies are both thoughtfully conceptualized and proficiently implemented in the classroom for the betterment of learners and instructors alike.

Building on theoretical findings, I investigated the role of moral education in modern-day China, exploring how teachers and parents perceive their own role in educating their children. While teachers recognize the significance of moral education in school, parents seem to lack understanding in this area. The study discussed the challenges of the complex role of teachers, which involves either acting as a *guide* or a *servant* in navigating the moral development of

students. The findings highlighted the difficulties that teachers face in aligning the prevailing ideological framework with the reality construction of individuals.

First, observations and interviews reveal that teachers and parents hold divergent views on the content and meaning of moral education in the Chinese educational setting. This highlights merits and limitations of the current system and presents approaches to promote students' holistic growth. These approaches involve strengthening moral reasoning, critical thinking, and decision-making skills. Furthermore, this study analyzed the complex role of teachers and the intricate dynamic between *guide* and *servant*, as well as the position of students in this relationship. The findings indicate that teachers have the dual responsibility of *servicing* the state by embodying moral values and *guiding* students in aligning their views and beliefs within the broader framework of CPC ideology. Viewpoints that do not fit within this framework are dismissed or rejected with reasonable excuses in order to create citizens who not only represent CPC ideology, but also fulfill the objectives set by the CPC.

Second, I conducted an in-depth analysis of how the Chinese education system resembles staged education that operates under the assumption of perpetual control. I examined whether the observed lessons aim to embody a social ideal and considered whether they represent an authentic teaching-learning interaction that also serves as a demonstration of the social ideal. I assume that Chinese moral education shifts from *ideological indoctrination* to *educational ideological conditioning*. It is presumed that the desired ideal is no longer directly indoctrinated, but rather conditioned. This creates the illusion that students possess greater autonomy. Nevertheless, this advancement transpires within a predetermined framework of action that students unconsciously internalize. This indicates that the government allows for a perceived expansion in personal liberty and independence, yet continues to maintain complete control over the formation of individual experiences.

Third, upon examining the sociological aspects of transmitting and internalizing socialist core values in Chinese moral education, multiple crucial themes and insights arise. It is apparent that values should be grounded in their historical context instead of being presented as abstract concepts to students. Inadequate contextualization may cause students to passively adopt values without comprehending their roots. One major hurdle in education is the lack of clearly defined and justified values being taught within schools as explored in the textbook analysis. This ambiguity hinders students' emotional involvement with these values, an integral aspect of learning. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that these values are not solely inherited; students must take personal responsibility and comprehension of them. Revisiting the origins of these values is crucial in linking adherence and internalization. One lingering inquiry pertains to whether Chinese values are timeless objective realities or subject to the impact of social dynamics. Different interpretations emerge across time, regions, and social groups, demonstrating their susceptibility to shifting contexts. Finally, this study raised apprehensions about the effectiveness of practical activities in instilling moral education. While these activities intend to reinforce values, their impact often seems superficial and their ability to achieve their intended purpose remains uncertain.

The intersection of ideological conditioning in education and constructed realities raises

significant questions about agency, autonomy, and critical thinking skills. To what extent do learners subconsciously assimilate these constructed realities, and how much can they assess and challenge the ideologies that they come across? What steps can academic institutions take to promote a sense of social coherence through shared values while still nurturing independent thought? These inquiries highlight the complexities in merging educational ideologies with their corresponding realities. Analyzing the interplay between educational ideological conditioning and constructed realities illuminates the intricate dynamics that shape individuals and societies. Researchers and educators can gain insights into the mechanisms that contribute to the formation of worldviews, beliefs, and behaviors. As educational systems evolve, it is crucial to grasp the influence of ideological conditioning on constructing reality. This knowledge is vital for nurturing globally competent and critical citizens amidst a complex landscape. The results show the need for a comprehensive inquiry into moral education - from its theoretical foundations to its practical implementation. This necessitates a thorough analysis of the impact of such theoretical frameworks on critical stakeholders in the education system, such as teachers, school principals, and students. Additionally, it is essential to evaluate the practical effects of these approaches.

This analysis offers contributions in various ways. First, future research in the field of moral education could concentrate on students' perceptions instead of teacher-centric evaluations to gain insights into how they perceive the educational setting. As students are the focal point of education, my research provides the groundwork for investigating diverse perspectives while taking into account the theoretical framework of moral education. Furthermore, this analysis extensively examined the newly revised 2022 curriculum standards of Morality and the Rule of Law, which has garnered significant attention among PRC scholars but not among non-PRC scholars. Additionally, the alignment of these standards with currently available textbooks provides insights into the implementation of educational policies in China based on theoretical foundations with only partial consideration of practical implementations using available resources. This analysis can provide a basis for additional research, particularly when the Ministry of Education introduces updated textbooks that may better align with current curriculum standards.

However, this study's findings also indicate the need for more extensive and additional research. With this analysis I emphasize the need to distinguish between urban and rural regions, as well as different cities within China for future research. Although education policies aim to bridge the gap between these areas, resource allocation is still heavily dependent on the school system. Reforms predominantly favor elite schools, which enjoy superior facilities and educational standards. The practical implementation of the approach to equally distribute resources remains uncertain, despite the intended objective. The literature in this field often prioritizes theoretical interpretations over practical analysis, resulting in comparatively limited findings. It does, however, acknowledge the evolving nature of didactic techniques, yet fails to adequately support this trend with current research. Given the recent revisions to the curriculum, closely monitoring ongoing advancements is becoming increasingly critical. Therefore, conducting on-site studies to examine the student population and evaluate the

implicit effects on learners would be highly beneficial. It still remains unclear whether the impact of education reform has positive or negative effects on students. An area of interest for further research is to examine the influence of the ideological framework on the design of school activities, curricula, teacher education, and related fields. Analyzing the progress and transformation of the student body within this extensive framework and comparing it to previous conditions is especially significant. After analyzing data from two schools, this study presents a thorough depiction of an “ideal” education centered on students and designed to meet their perceived necessities. Despite the meticulous planning and exemplary presentation, the ultimate influence on students is uncertain. This poses a formal challenge to an insightful research endeavor aimed at exploring students’ perceptions, impressions, and emotional responses to moral education. This raises the question of how students comprehend certain ideals. Specifically, what are the ideals in question, and to what extent are students pursuing them knowingly? Is agency or external influence most responsible for shaping students’ reality? And might subscribing to said ideals result in a lack of agency, reducing students to subordinate positions without autonomy over their own beliefs and behaviors? By investigating the gap between theory and practice, researchers may gain insight into these and other questions. A thorough exploration of the intricate interplay between pedagogical practices, ideological norms, and individual perspectives can clarify the complex dynamics that shape moral education within the distinctive cultural context of China. The long-term impact of moral education on Chinese students is a crucial matter. Only the future will determine whether the imparted ideals have a genuine effect or remain theoretical. The thorough indoctrination of students with prescribed ideals and the complete integration of ideological principles into teaching raise questions about how much Chinese society is influenced by these values. Idealizing Chinese society and its implementation is a complex issue that warrants consideration of potential outbreaks and their manifestations, despite similarities in educational policies, ideologies, and practices.

Notwithstanding, this research has revealed that studying moral education in China can provide valuable insights into the intricacies of Chinese society and how Chinese students are influenced to align with Party ideals. This educational approach is relatively unique compared to practices in other countries, adding to the significance of this research. Moral education provides insights into how students construct their understanding of reality and how future generations are shaped under the influence of the Communist Party of China. It forms a solid basis for analyzing how citizens adhere to ethical and legal principles.

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## Appendix A

### Appendix

#### Tables of interviews

role	school	grade	gender	age in years	additional information
Teacher A	school A	10th grade	female	25-30	one year in profession
Teacher B	school A	8th grade	female	40-45	head of 8th grade backbone teacher
Teacher C	school A	8th grade	female	35-40	subject leader
Teacher D	school A	8th grade	female	25-30	-
Teacher E	school A	7th grade	female	30-35	-
Teacher F	school A	11th grade	female	25-30	-
Teacher Z	school B	6th grade	male	25-30	two years in profession
Parent A	-	child in senior high school	female	40-50	child's school is of "higher" quality
Parent B	-	child in 8th grade	female	40-50	child's school is affiliated to university
Parent C	-	child in primary school	female	40-50	-
Parent D	-	child in junior high school	female	40-50	-
Student	-	8th grade	female	14	school is affiliated to university

Note: The interviews were conducted in Chinese language. They were held in a meeting room at school A (primary, junior and senior high school) and in a classroom at school B (primary school) immediately following the observations. The interviews with the parents occurred at their respective offices. All interviewees present provided their approval for recording the interviews, which were later transcribed.

#### Exemplary interview questions

(1) 您在教哪个年级?

Which grade are you teaching?

(2) 您能告诉我您的职业面临最大挑战是什么?

Can you tell me the biggest challenges that come with your profession?

(3) 您为什么选择教道德与法治?

Why did you choose to teach Morality and the Rule of Law?

(4) 您觉得德育的主要目的是什么?

What do you think is the main purpose of moral education?

(5) 作为老师, 您如何看待自己在德育中扮演的角色?

How would you describe your role as a teacher of this subject?

(6) 德育包括校内和校外的积极参与, 例如班会以及入团。

Moral education includes active participation, within school and outside school, in form of for example class meetings but also by joining the Youth League.

(6.1.) 您在班级会开设这样的活动吗? 您如何描述这样的活动?

Can you see such activities within your class and how do you describe them?

(7) 教学的课程和指导方针是确定的, 老师们需要遵循。在您看来, 您对课程的设计有影响?

The curriculum and guidelines for teaching are defined and teachers need to follow them. What is your feeling, do you have an impact on the design of your classes?

(8) 请回想一下, 您在学生时代经历过的思政课程是怎样的? 您的体验如何?

If you think back to your time as a student in a class of moral education, how did you experience these classes?

(8.1) 您能分享一些您学生时代思政课?

Can you tell me a little about the teacher-student-interaction during your time as a student?

(8.2) 您是否看到学科、课程和一般情况的变化吗?

Do you see changes within the subject, the classes and in general?

(9) 您认为您的班级愿意谈论这种问题吗?

Do you think your class is open to talk about problems?

(10) 当学生的观点与教科书的总体观点不符, 或者对某些主题有不同的看法, 会发生什么?

What happens when students have opinions that don't match the general outlook of the textbook, or have a different mind to certain topics?

(11) 您如何描述您在课程上与学生的互动?

How would you describe your interaction with your students during class?

(11.1) 您如何描述您在课外与学生的互动?

How would you describe your interaction with your students outside of class?

(12) 您能描述一下本次培训的内容和方法?

Can you describe the content and methods of the teachers training you receive?<sup>1</sup>

### **Textbooks used for analysis**

All textbooks are printed by the *People's Education Press* and are available for purchase at *xinhua shudian* (xinhua bookstore).

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<sup>1</sup>These questions are of exemplary nature. During the interviews, new questions emerged while some were dismissed. A strict guideline was not followed while talking to parents as the conversations had a more casual nature. Therefore, the questions presented here are examples of the questions posed to the teachers.

(1) Compulsory Education Textbook Morality and the Rule of Law (义务教育教科书道德与法治), first grade (一年级)

first book (上册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2016 edition (版次)

second book (下册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2016 edition (版次)

(2) Compulsory Education Textbook Morality and the Rule of Law (义务教育教科书道德与法治), second grade (二年级)

first book (上册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2017, 2017 edition (版次)

second book (下册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2016 edition (版次)

(3) Compulsory Education Textbook Morality and the Rule of Law (义务教育教科书道德与法治), seventh grade (七年级)

first book (上册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2016 edition (版次)

second book (下册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2016 edition (版次)

(4) Compulsory Education Textbook Morality and the Rule of Law (义务教育教科书道德与法治), eighth grade (八年级)

first book (上册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2017, 2017 edition (版次)

second book (下册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2016, 2018 edition (2nd version) (版次)

(5) Compulsory Education Textbook Morality and the Rule of Law (义务教育教科书道德与法治), ninth grade (九年级)

first book (上册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2018, 2021 edition (2nd version) (版次)

second book (下册): approved by the Ministry of Education in 2018, 2018 edition (版次)

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