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EDUCATIONAL MODERNISATION ACROSS THE TAIWAN STRAITS: PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL MORAL EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN THE PRC AND TAIWAN

David C. Schak

Abstract

Chinese education was for millennia been based on memorization of texts and teacher-centered instruction. However, new primary school moral education texts produced in the past decade in both the PRC and Taiwan are based on a radically different pedagogy with students as the focus and as personally involved in their education through research, analysis of findings, and active classroom participation. Moreover, their education extends beyond acquiring knowledge and includes confidence building, social skills and emotional problem solving. The major questions are the extent to which this new pedagogy will be followed and be extended to other subjects and into middle school.

In their six decades as separate societies, Taiwan and the PRC have undergone profound changes, not least in education. This paper examines four sets of primary school moral education text books, a presently used set from each society as well as a 1970 set from Taiwan and a 1988 set from China.¹ It will show that the present-day sets utilize a radically different pedagogy and from the sets used in the past and manifest a profound change in the way children are perceived. Moreover, the new pedagogies and several additions in content are very similar, which is quite remarkable since it is unlikely that there was direct collaboration between the text writers from each society. At the same time the sets retain some differences, reflecting their individual development paths and national ideologies.

For millennia Chinese education has been based on rote memorization of texts and a teacher-centered approach, i.e. teacher teaches, students listen and absorb. However, an examination of primary school textbooks from Taiwan and the PRC reveals a profound change toward a student-centered approach which engages students in the learning process, calling on them to think, draw their own conclusions and form opinions. The presently used texts reflect a changed conception of children from passive vessels into which knowledge is to

1 The 1970 set was little changed until after Taiwan democratized in 1988, so it is comparable in time to the 1988 PRC set.

be poured to possessors of active minds that can process information and come up with innovative thoughts. The texts also reflect a different conception of what knowledge and thinking are, that knowledge is not only sets of facts compiled from a finite corpus but is ever increasing and being recombined to form new ideas, and that thinking is not just recall but creating novel thoughts and ideas. The present-day texts also contain several lessons and messages aimed at developing self-confidence, social skills, maturity and a strong feeling of self-worth in the students.

At present in both the PRC and Taiwan, there are text sets produced by different publishers. There are differences in them in the examples used, the layout, the cartoon style, etc., but they all follow the guidelines of the relevant Education Departments. Both the past and the present-day sets from the PRC are published by the Renmin Education Press, so I have labeled them RMP for the past set and RM for the one presently used. The two Taiwan sets are TWP and TW.² As there are twelve texts in each set, I have labeled them sequentially, e.g. RMP 8 refers to the grade four second semester text. All but TW are aimed specifically at teaching moral character or ethics. TW provides instruction on morality and ethics, but it is not dedicated to it. The educational reforms in the last decade-plus integrated moral education into the entire primary school curriculum and abandoned a dedicated set of such texts. However, according to primary school teachers TW is the closest to a moral education set there is, and it does include moral-ethical instructions very similar to those in RM.³ In addition, individual schools may design their own programs for teaching moral education. One I visited late in 2011 has a matrix listing various Confucian-sounding moral virtues as themes for weekly activities but ‘translates’ these into concrete actions which embody the principle to be taught that week and specifies behavior for children of different grades.⁴

2 The text sets compared are the following: *Life and Ethics* (生活與倫理), ed., 1970 by the National Translation and Editing Office (國立編譯館) [TWP]; *Thought and Moral Character* (思想品德), 1988, People's Education Publishers (人民教育出版社) [RMP]; Zhuang Renfeng (莊人鳳), 2011, *Comprehensive Activities* (綜合活動), Taipei: Hanlin. (台北: 翰林出版社) [TW]; *Moral Character and Life* (品德與生活), *Moral Character and Society* (品德與社會), 2002–2009. People's Education Publishers (人民教育出版社). [RM].

3 In the PRC, nationalism and collectivism are regarded as part of moral character education (Nie 2008, 26), and, especially nationalism, take up many pages of text. Neither are found in TW.

4 This can be found by Googling 臺北市文林國小100學年度第1學期品德教育核心價值及行為準則.

The Texts

The TWP texts, *Ethics and Life*, each consist of eighteen lessons per term, one per week. Each lesson aims to instruct on the particular realm of behavior denoted in the title. Some of these realms are aspects of everyday life such as clothing, dwelling, eating or greeting, but most are Confucian moral precepts, such as filiality, fidelity or perseverance. Lessons are three pages long, two pages of text and illustrations and one of review. The text itself is instructional, with calls for inputs from students, but the review sections, in addition to drills, also have topics to discuss and things to put into practice. In addition, weeks 6, 12 and 18 are reviews of the preceding lessons. Students are frequently instructed to reflect on their own behavior in the reviews.

In addition to the Confucian moral principles, the texts are redolent of the New Life Movement (see Dirlik 1975), itself a Confucianism-inspired effort by the Kuomintang government when it was in power in China and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, to transform China into a modern nation with a disciplined population. Chiang, a military man, wanted to change the Western image of the Chinese as the 'sick man of Asia,' and its population as rude, backward, unkempt and unhygienic into a place and people that the world would admire.

The texts are uninspiring. The stories are instructions on how to behave, and in many of the lessons seem to be lame excuses to dispense rules. They are unimaginative, very adult to child, with little attempt to engage young students or explain in any way why one should act as the stories instruct them to act. The children are depicted as miniature adults in their maturity. Following the Confucian principle that humans by nature are good, those depicted to have erred are immediately repentant on being shown that their actions are incorrect, or they follow, seemingly instinctively, what is right when they see it. For example, a story tells of a fourth grade boy visiting a classmate and going to his room. The visitor comments that the room is very clean and tidy. His host replies, 'That's because the last time I went to your house, your room was that way. I learned from you' (TWP 9, 7-9).

As depicted in the texts, children are earnest, serious, dedicated and disciplined, very much unlike the children I've seen in Taiwan over the past several decades.⁵ The texts depict no fun or frivolity. Portrayals of playgrounds, for

5 In 1987-88, my son did grade three in a Taipei school and became quite critical of the textbooks. When asked why, he explained that the texts said that Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yatsen would hurry home from school so they could help their mother by taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, then they would go do their homework. 'That's not natural,' he said. 'Kids like to play.'

example, are about following the rules of good behavior there rather than of children having a good time (TWP 5, 43–45). The society the texts would create would be one which worked with the precision of the master clock-maker; there would be nothing amiss, nothing out of place, a utopia for automatons or well-drilled soldiers.

The RMP texts have an indefinite number of chapters, their titles reflecting the lesson theme but only rarely are Confucian virtues mentioned, The content instead reflects the socialist morality of Chinese Marxism and includes nationalism, collectivism, materialism and honoring of proletarian figures. They, too, have no areas for student input, and neither do the three to four review questions at the end of each lesson. And like TWP, the students would find few of the figures in the lesson stories easy to identify with as peers. That said, the texts sometimes depict good and bad examples which appear more engaging to children than the stories in TWP.

Most important, although the lessons are also aimed at inculcating moral character into the students, they are much more engaging and lively and probably more appealing to children. For example, there is a story teaching not to litter about Monkey and Pigsy:⁶ Pigsy is thirsty so he buys some watermelon and eats it while walking along the road, inconveniencing others by spitting out the seeds and discarding the peel. Monkey sees this and blows all the seeds and peel back onto Pigsy, who slips and falls. Chastened, Pigsy picks up all his refuse and disposes of it in a bin (RMP 1, 40–41). Compare this to an anti-littering lesson in TWP: a boy and his father go to a park where father sees rubbish on the ground and tells his son to pick it up and put it in a bin. The son complies but complains that the park attendant hadn't done his job. Father replies that not littering is everyone's business (TWP 5, 49–51).

Both sets make extensive use of models, but those used in TWP are classical ancient models, many going back millennia, while those in RMP are mostly revolutionary heroes or prominent figures such as scientists or artists, including non-Chinese, who personify the character trait of the lesson. Only a few stories feature children with whom the students might easily identify. Moreover, many of the traits the RMP texts aim to teach are more about civility than the weighty morality of TWP. For example, stories depict Zhou Enlai as unwilling to be put at the front of the queue; Mao Zedong refusing to take a front seat offered to him at the theatre and insisting, since he arrived later than others, on going to the back (RMP 8, 40–43); and Liu Shaoqi being very generous to his classmates (RMP 3, 10). Lei Feng is mentioned only twice, that he never

6 Both are characters from *Journey to the West* (西游记), a story well-known in China. It was serialized in Japan and shown in many Western countries.

missed or was late for school, regardless of the weather (RMP 1, 52–54), and that he took pleasure in helping people (RMP 10, 13–15). Other sorts of models are: Wu Yu, who in 1979 finished an electronics PhD in Germany in only eight months getting the highest possible mark on her thesis and who returned to China despite very generous offers to stay or to go the United States; and Gu Maolin who, as a boy was fascinated by trains. Noticing that the locomotives were all foreign made, he worked and studied hard to create a Chinese locomotive (RMP 11, 1–7).

Other differences between TWP and RMP are the language and the emphasis on review. The length of the TWP review sections shows the seriousness of the TWP texts. Moreover, addition to knowing the lesson content, students are frequently asked to reflect on their behavior (反省) or even to engage in soul searching (检讨). By contrast, each RMP lesson has only three or four questions, straight from the text. Language in RMP is colloquial, even using dialect words on occasion. Language in TWP is much more formal, perhaps in part owing to the emphasis in the KMT government to standardize Mandarin but also reflecting its cultural reverence for tradition and Confucianism. Some of the ancient model stories have a classical Chinese flavor and use characters that one would rarely see except in historical texts or museums. Character recognition is no problem for Taiwan students as the texts all use phonetic symbols aside each character. On the rare occasion that an unfamiliar character is used in RMP the pronunciation is given in standard *pinyin*.

Pedagogy and the Present-Day Text

The present-day text sets, RM and TW, are quite similar in many ways. They are of better quality, far more colorful, and more engaging. Each has an appealing cartoon style and both present many situations that would be familiar to students – chasing a frog, walking along railroad tracks, wondering how to cross a busy road. The main similarity, however, is the radically different pedagogy both utilize in contrast to the past sets. Whereas there were very limited opportunities for students to take an active classroom role in the past sets, the first lesson for entering grade one students in both sets asks students questions: *How do you feel being at school? How does being at school differ from life before you started?*⁷ Such questions are not aimed at building knowledge but

7 Italicized text denotes paraphrasing from the texts; quotations are set off by inverted commas or indentation.

they set the tone of school by signaling that student participation is welcome and is part of their education. They also provide opportunities for students to learn to express themselves in front of others and to overcome shyness, and they stimulate students to think. Moreover, throughout the first three years in both sets there are many speech balloons that end in an ellipsis so that students can add their own answer. This signals that there is more knowledge than that which the text books provide. In addition the TW texts often ask the question, ‘and what else’ (还有呢)?

The questions asked of the students begin with how students feel about something, but they are designed to get students to provide ideas or knowledge. For example, in consecutive TW lessons:

- The teacher asks the students to introduce themselves to each other, shake hands and write each other’s names then asks them how they feel about getting to know their classmates (TW 1, 6–11).
- The text then shows the various school facilities such as toilets, library, ecology garden, playground, athletic field, the school nurse and asks, ‘What facilities do you use? What do you like most?’ The children in the text give various answers (TW 1, 12–17).
- The focus switches to students in the classroom, ‘When class starts it’s very quiet because ... when class is over the halls are very dangerous because ... and there are lots of people in the toilets because ... Why is the girl in the picture not paying attention? (She needs to go to the toilet). When class begins, what do you need to pay attention to?’ The students answer – not leaving one’s seat, getting textbooks out, listen attentively to the teacher (W 1, 18–22).
- ‘We also need to learn to maintain cleanliness and follow order. Do you know how’ (TW 1, 24–27)?

The texts frequently call on the students to do research. This starts in grade two in both Taiwan and the PRC. RM has a unit which asks students to research autumn and write how they feel about it using books, computers and the telephone (to ‘interview’ others), thus demonstrating these tools’ utility in research (RM 3, 18–23). TW has a unit on personal and school treasures and has students learning about the latter wandering around the school grounds and interviewing personnel such as the school grounds keeper and the gate guard (TW 3, 29–33). The research projects become more complex as students progress through primary school. Taiwan students learn more sophisticated research methods and sources and investigate the environment, community

facilities and old village customs, moreover, they are asked to explain their research directions and choice of information sources (TW 11, 17–24). PRC students learn about sources and tools while studying China's provinces and changes in work as China industrializes (RM 8, 46–48).

There are also questions posed in the texts which require students to use their imaginations. A lesson on colors asks what students think of when they think of a particular color and what the world would be like if there were no colors: 'How would you feel,' and more importantly, 'WHY would you feel that way' (TW 2, 10–13). An RM lesson presents two dilemmas and asks students to write how they end. In one, a man returns from a business trip with a toy car and a toy airplane, gifts for his son and nephew. The nephew receives the car but is disappointed that he didn't get the airplane. In the other, a mother is cutting pieces of cake for children at a birthday party; a girl is silently upset because her piece is not as big as that given to another child (RM 2, 16–17).

Students are also called on to use their analytical abilities and imaginations to solve problems. In one lesson they have to move a hula hoop around a ring of students passing through each person's body without letting go of the hands. Upon completion they discuss how they can do it more quickly. They do it again and then again discuss how to improve: 'What problems did you encounter? How did you overcome the problems? Are you all agreed? How will you resolve differences' (TW 7, 10–11)?

Finally, in the present-day sets, students are taught by their 'peers.' Rather than the text or a teacher imparting information or instructions on how to behave properly, the teaching comes from the peers in the texts, i.e. student characters of the same age as the students or, occasionally, by older school-mates. Cartoon drawings do much to soften instructions, e.g. in a lesson of food groups, there is a series of slightly comical drawings of a boy who refuses to eat vegetables, is sitting on the toilet with a stomach ache, and is told by a doctor that he needs to eat fruit and vegetables to avoid constipation (RM 1, 40–41). Or there are two contrasting pictures on a page, one of classmates happily jumping rope and another of two students grabbing each other and fighting, one wielding a knife, the other a brick, while two other students try to restrain them; the page is labeled, 'prevent schoolyard violence' (RM 12, ii). Pictures such as these elicit values from the students rather than telling them what they should value.

Students in the texts also teach students in the classroom, e.g. a girl gesturing to a classmate not to make noise in the library or student characters in the texts helping each other out, apologizing for accidentally bumping someone's desk, or cooperating in a group discussion of a project. The classroom students thus

learn from their textbook peers. The teacher is rarely seen in the texts and when present is friendly, playing with or reading to the students, taking them on outings, or introducing herself to the class to prepare the students to introduce themselves to each other; she is not seen instructing the students. In addition, both text sets also use cartoon characters to ask questions in a dialogue box, a bunny in RM, a variety of fairy-like figures, a padlock, or a clip in TW. Thus, in contrast to the past sets, in which the teacher or the text instructs, in the present-day sets, students learn from non-authority sources.

Self-Development

A reading of the present-day texts demonstrates that their compilers tacitly recognize that for the students to develop good moral and civil character they need a healthy level of self-confidence and self-respect. Both RM and TW devote a lot of space to helping them achieve just that, and they are probably effective because the texts are very student-centered. In the past sets most of the lessons featured adults or persons from the past, often the very distant past, people far removed from the students in the classrooms reading the texts. The lessons in RM and TW feature students just like the ones in the classroom reading the lesson. Many of them take place in the classroom, school or family. Lessons about other topics involve the students, a lesson about summer, for example, has the students experiencing summer; one about the state of the environment has students out in nature, seeing the impact of human activities on it first hand. This brings the students into much greater personal involvement with the texts.

To build self-confidence, the texts begin by building basic competencies with lessons on essential classroom behavior such as going to the classroom and to one's seat when the bell rings, raising one's hand when one wants to say something, and going to the toilet during recess breaks. These are followed by lessons on taking care of oneself at home – dressing oneself, cleaning one's body, washing hands before eating, brushing teeth afterwards, keeping one's room and desk tidy and clean, packing one's school bag for the next day, and going to bed and getting up on time so one can get to school on time (RM 1, 8–11, 33–37; TW 1, 18–22, 24–37). The texts treat these as laudable competencies of which students can feel proud, and they reinforce this message. At the end of the semester the TW text reminds students of what they have accomplished over the term (TW 1, 56–63), and they are reminded again early in the next semester (TW 2, 6–9). The RM text shows children proud of what they can do

on their own (RM 2, 10). At the beginning of year two they review what they learned in grade one and write down in a space provided what each wants to learn in the coming school year. 'We'll make a lot of progress this year. We'll make a "growing up bag" and fill it with the things we learn. At the end of the year we'll see the evidence of our growth' (RM 3, 2-3).

In later lessons, students are taught to manage their time. RM introduces a friend, 'Big Sister Clock,' who hovers over a student as he wakes, eats breakfast, goes to school, and does his homework. Following is a matrix for a week of these actions in which the student fills in the time and a parent signs (RM 1, 30-33). TW shows students how to draw a pie and a bar chart to show how they spend time in the course of a day (TW 4, 34-35).

There are also lessons in both texts on managing money. A grade two TW lesson asks students how they use money, if they save any, and what they do if they want to buy something that costs more than they have (TW 4, 40-43). A more sophisticated grade four RM unit asks students how their families earn and spend their money, how they should spend it, and whether it is important to differentiate between things they want to buy and what they can afford. Finally, the text suggests that students develop good money habits, draw up a budget and learn frugality (RM 7, 44-53). This is followed by lessons on being a consumer, the various ways to buy goods, including over the internet, and being a knowledgeable consumer who knows how to read labels and what her/his rights as a consumer are; the text also supplies the consumer association web site url (RM 7, 54-62).

This instruction on money represents a change from when I first did field research in Taipei in 1969-70. At that time I found that even many young teens did not know what their parents' jobs were, much less anything about what they earned or what their budget was. There was a children's world and an adult world in which children studied and adults worked to support the family. Adult matters were of no concern to children, and children were kept in a state of dependency. As this lesson and the ones on developing competencies show, there are efforts to change this way of thinking in both Taiwan and the PRC.

The Taiwan texts bring children into the wider social world by encouraging them to participate in community organizations. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Taiwan government began a community establishment movement to encourage and provide grants for people to research their community history, its famous people and its customs, characteristics, products and foods. Residents could organize community committees which could sponsor enhancement activities or hold exhibitions, craft fairs, festivals or social activities such as karaoke parties. The government's aims were to create communities in a very

mobile and urbanized society and to strengthen a Taiwan identity to offset the pre-democratisation KMT efforts to ‘Sinicise’ the Taiwanese. In the texts students are encouraged to join a community organization and participate in its activities, not only to be good community citizens but also to gain experience in how adult groups operate (TW 7, 6–13; 41–56).

Aside from building competencies, RM takes a very direct approach to nurturing self-confidence. A grade two lesson is entitled, ‘I’m fantastic; you’re fantastic, too’ (我了不起; 你也了不起). A girl hiking with her mother says, ‘the stars wink at me.’ A girl feeding chickens says, ‘Grandfather praises me as a good helper in the family.’ A girl sitting at her desk states, ‘the teacher says I am a good student who likes to study.’ Yet another girl declares, ‘I’ve always had lots of strengths. I’m really fantastic.’ *Write down your good points and read them to the persons next to you. Tell us about the good points of one of your classmates and let us guess who it is. Write down a good point you’ve discovered in a classmate on a piece of paper and give it to her/him. Take a good point a classmate has found in you home to show to your parents. Learn from your classmates to do the things that they do well* (RM 3, 38–43).

Both text sets also have lessons and messages on developing social and emotional skills, a recognizing the strengths and good points of others, and self-improvement, all of which are probably more easily developed if one has a positive and healthy outlook and a positive self-image. Social skills are self-explanatory, e.g. trying to get along with people, not butting in while others are talking, being respectful, recognizing that we are not all the same and accepting others for what and who they are. An RM lesson is titled, ‘We’re different from each other.’

Draw yourself pointing out what is different, special about you. We are all different. We have different likes and dislikes, abilities, viewpoints, ways of thinking. This adds variety and interest to life. Through people’s different abilities, we can get things done. See things from others’ perspectives; respect others’ differences. Don’t reject others because they are different from you. Be thoughtful of others whose circumstances are different from yours. Be gracious, not jealous and petty. (RM 6, 22–31)

A later lesson states, ‘Learn to get along harmoniously. Learn the rules of sociability. Don’t force others to do what they don’t want to do. Don’t cut in when others are talking. Think about unpleasant interactions with others; tell us how you felt. Think about getting along with others harmoniously; learn to see things from someone else’s perspective; confront conflicts properly’ (RM12, 14–18).

Both text sets encourage working in classroom groups to increase capabili-

ties in cooperation, negotiation, articulation and acceptance of, if not others' ideas, at least their right to hold different views. In Taiwan, classes are broken into groups in which members carry out research or other projects together, make presentations to the rest of the class and plan activities (TW 7, 38–45). Project groups also make group compacts in which the members set the rules as to how the group will operate (TW 8, 13–17).⁸ PRC students are put into small groups (小组) early in their primary school years and take turns doing classroom cleanup duty, competing to see which group does the best job (RM 3, 10–13). They also form informal groups to discuss various topics and explore problems. The lesson also emphasizes group activities and participation as well as doing things for the public good (recycling paper, fixing a sign, planting a tree, releasing small fish into the water (RM 5, 70–71), and finding hazards in the school, home and community (RM 7, 22–24).

In both text sets there are many occasions when groups or the entire class work closely with each other and also when students are asked to share their feelings, even sensitive feelings, with each other. Several lessons emphasize group life and friends, placing the student in the context of the classroom. The student's happiness, anger, sorrow and joy, growth and progress are all the concern of the other students. There is no student who stands as an individual. The intent is to teach the students to be participants, to learn from each other, to help each other in a very interactive atmosphere (RM 3, 48–51; TW I, 44–47; II, 6–12).

Emotional skills teach acting rationally, with the head rather than the heart. A TW grade two unit explores treasures, treasures of the school but mostly individual treasures, and it gives students a task requiring both social and emotional skills: *If a student wants to use another's treasure, how should s/he go about asking or negotiating with the owner? Act out how you would do this and explain how you feel about it. Consider how you would feel and act if the person refuses and the kinds of situations that can arise in so doing* (TW 3, 12–13).

Other lessons warn students that not everything in life goes smoothly, that they need to be prepared for frustrations and learn to overcome them and be patient and level-headed in the process. A grade three lesson tells students to 'be your own study master; overcome frustration when encountering difficulties such as a character you don't recognize or a math problem you find difficult. Don't give up. Find a way to overcome it. Be self-reliant' (RM 5, 34–39).

A grade five lesson asks what happiness is: *Fill in the matrix – are you happy, sometimes happy, not happy? How can we become happy? What should we do when*

8 In several panels on this one sees only the students; no teacher is present, giving the impression that the students are allowed to do this on their own.

troubles strike, how we should deal with frustrations such as feeling left out, a care-less remark, a misunderstanding, an unhappy home. Be introspective. Ask yourself why you have become angry; find the reason for your troubles, and overcome them yourself or with the aid of others. When you are troubled by conflicts with parents or friends take a different perspective, look at it from happier angle (RM 10, 1–14). A story about Stephen Hawking follows. Taste the flavor of bitterness. Life is full of sweetness and bitterness. Ask adults about adversities they faced when they were children. How did they handle them (RM 10, 15–25)?

The Taiwan texts have similar themes. A grade six unit deals with feeling pressure, pressure from social relations or because they are not doing as well in school as they or their parents want or expect them to do. Students are advised to analyze the pressures they feel: make a table listing the sources of pressure; what specifically causes it; how do you feel about it; how strong is it; do you think you can handle it? Get advice from classmates. What works and what doesn't? When you have a conflict with your parents, discuss and negotiate; don't become angry or pout. The unit finishes with the story of Xiao Jianhua, who overcame a tragic childhood, had to drop out of school early, finally finished university at 36, was then struck with gradual paralysis, and suffered a house fire and the death of the sister who looked after him. Still, he did not give up (TW 11, 16–36; 77–80).

Finally, the texts urge continuous self-improvement. A grade three RM lesson says that everyone is learning and shows people at various stages of life learning new things: a young woman learning English, another learning to be a hairdresser, farmers learning new growing techniques Grandma practicing calligraphy, and Grandpa, baffled about dialing a public telephone and wondering about separating rubbish (RM 5, 40–42).

A grade six TW lesson is more direct in its challenge to the students. It first states that study is not just about school. *Some learn because of family circumstances – they have help out in the family shop, or their parents work late so they have to prepare dinner for their younger siblings. There are also interesting things to learn not taught in school such as learning to swim. Make a plan, set goals, explain how you intend to reach them, and, after a period, assess your progress (TW 11, 13–16). The following semester text asks if students have met their goals. How can you improve? Write out a study progress plan utilizing what you have learned about good learning practice. Have you put this plan into practice? What problems have you encountered? How did you overcome them? Assess yourself. Where do you still need to improve (TW 12, 34–44)?*

Discussion

The main question regarding the change in pedagogy is its implementation, the most formidable barrier to which being the function of the education system is seen to be preparing students for the university entrance examination. In both Taiwan and the PRC examination performance has been based largely on memorization. In the PRC, that is still the case. In Taiwan, the combination of a large increase in the level of university places in the 1980s and 1990s and falling fertility mean that almost anyone who wants to go to university can do so. This has greatly reduced the pressure on students and makes implementing the new pedagogy much easier. Examination results are also mitigated by letters of recommendation, an autobiography, a study plan, social experience or an oral interview. The remainder of the discussion will thus focus on the PRC, where its implementation is much more problematic.

The new pedagogy is the embodiment of what is called 'quality education' (素质教育) in China. This includes changing the education regime to reduce the emphasis on rote learning and examinations, to teach students how to learn on their own rather than teaching them what to learn, and to nurture the whole person (树人) to create well-adjusted future adults rather than simply filling (灌输) students with knowledge. It also emphasizes creativity and civic responsibility (Murphy 2004, 4). Although it appears new, its history goes back to the 1920s and 1930s when Dewey's progressive education and its seven principles⁹ were influential in China. However, with the establishment of the People's Republic, Dewey's ideas were criticized, and the government adopted the Soviet model and instituted a proletariat-focused system in which small numbers succeeded in completing middle school or continuing to university while the large majority were sent back down to the farms. In the Cultural Revolution education became a tool to criticize government officials, what Yang called the antithesis of education (2010, 35). With the Reform and Opening Up, economic development became the primary goal. In 1985 the government declared that education was to serve the establishment of socialism, which depended on education.

Then, in 2003, the government declared that education should be people-centered (以人为本). This was refined in 2007, when the 17th Party Congress announced its intention to 'thoroughly carry out the Party's educational direction,' which included moral education, quality education, and nurturing

9 These are health; citizen rights and duties; make valued use of leisure time, be an effective family member, master basic education, gain moral character, and occupational training. Only the last of these is missing from the texts, not surprising since they are for primary school.

morality, intelligence, physical health and aesthetics 'to provide rounded development for the successors in the establishment of socialism and to educate people to make them happy' (Yang 2010, 35–36).

As demonstrated above, the present-day text sets manifest this radically different pedagogy. The texts treat the students as not only capable of acquiring knowledge from their teachers and reading materials but also as able to create knowledge through their imaginations and analytical abilities. Teaching according to the texts transforms passive reception to an interactive process between the students and their teachers, their learning materials, each other and their own minds. The texts nurture student belief in their abilities to be self-directed, confident and able to analyze the knowledge they acquire. If this new pedagogy were widely implemented it would generate a cohort of students who would have a distinctly different learning experience from that of previous cohorts and in all likelihood would also have higher levels of belief in themselves and what they know. Government would have to adjust.

Again, the issue is implementation. Will teachers in moral education classes teach according to the pedagogy in the texts? Can that pedagogy be extended to other subjects in which much of what students learn is factual information, e.g. meanings of English words or Chinese characters or $2+2=4$, rather than moral education discussion of values and interpretations? Will that pedagogy be extended to middle school, when preparation for examinations that are largely based on memorization takes center stage?

In the PRC, teacher mastery of the new pedagogy should, according to a primary school teacher in Xiamen, be aided by a six months training course that is supposed to accompany changes of this magnitude in the curriculum. If carried out, this should help teachers used to the teacher-centered education of the past to adjust to the student-centered education called for in the reforms that initiated the new texts. However, teachers from elsewhere said that, because of shortage of funds or personnel, this sort of teacher retraining is rarely carried out. Moreover, while lip service is paid to moral education in Ministry documents, it is not a core subject, and teachers are not trained specifically in it. Those who teach it do so in addition to teaching duties in their area of specialization. For example a grade four student at a school in Xiamen said that his Chinese teacher taught the moral education classes but spent half of the allotted time reviewing the Chinese lessons. Others said that some schools skip the moral education lessons entirely in order to allocate more time to examination subjects. However a Wuhan grade seven teacher says that her students are now more mischievous than before, which she attributes to the freer thinking that the new pedagogy encourages.

The second question is extending the new pedagogy into other primary school subjects. This cannot be done by making objective knowledge subjective, but to some extent it is done through learning projects in which students do research on various topics and analyze the results. This often involves group work, division of labor, and collaboration in preparing and presenting the results for discussion by the class.

The third question, extending the new pedagogy to middle school, is probably the knottiest. Middle school, especially the last three years, is when students prepare for the university entrance exams and where anything apart from this is dropped (Nie 2008, 53, 55). Failure in those exams means entering the workforce, doing a vocational course at a technical institute or, for the well-off minority, going abroad. Although the job prospects and at least the starting income are better than for many university graduates, doing a technical course, is very clearly a second choice for most (Kipnis 2011, 82–85). Moreover, the pursuit of examination success isn't just for students; teachers are rewarded by how their students do on the national exam, as are schools in being able to attract more and better students (Kipnis 2011, 43, 153–53; Nie 2008, 91).

Many aspects of the exam focus counteract the qualities that the new pedagogy was designed to instill. First, it means 'teaching and learning for the sole purpose of passing exams, ... only studying what is to be tested, [relying] on memorization as opposed to analytical reasoning, excessive amounts of homework, drilling and reviews, and the evaluation of students ... solely in terms of standardized examinations' (Kipnis 2001, 11). This standardization standardizes knowledge – what is important to learn and what isn't. There is no credit in creative thinking if the conclusion differs from what the 'correct' answer is to a test question (Kipnis 2011, 93–94; Gao 2012) Very long school days and assigned work during holidays give students little time to think.

Kipnis writes of efforts to implement quality education in middle schools in his study area in Shandong – 'creativity' classes in schools, questions without definitive answers, a more rounded curriculum that included subjects not crucial to entrance exams, reducing the amount of homework and the length of the school day to give students more free time. But he is dubious about the outcome. When Shandong tried to reduce homework and class time, outlaw vacation and weekend classes or school-based study periods, countermeasures were found with these practices being privatized (Kipnis 2011, 68–69, 77–81). Teachers and education researchers I've spoken with concur.

Does this mean that the new pedagogy will fail? Certainly there will be resistance from various quarters, but while there are many students and parents willing to continue the present regime, there is also great dissatisfaction with

it, as the increasing number of families who send their children abroad for middle school attests. Another tactic is home schooling; although it is illegal to withdraw students from school to teach them at home, a teacher in Wuhan who has a nine-year-old son said that she knows many who are home schooling their children (see also Channelnewsasia). The increasing levels of income and exposure to foreign cultural influences and ideas should also affect how parents and, as the new texts show, many educators, think about education. The government is also anxious to increase creativity and innovative thinking. These all portend change over the coming decades.

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