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The Construction and Performance of Citizenship in Contemporary China

Carolyn L Hsu, *Colgate University*

Jessica Teets, *Middlebury College*

Reza Hasmath, *University of Alberta*

Jennifer YJ Hsu, *University of New South Wales*

Timothy Hildebrandt, *London School of Economics and Political Science*

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Abstract: Citizenship education has been an explicit part of the state-controlled, universal education system in contemporary China. Using data from an original nationwide survey conducted in late 2018, we test the hypothesis that the longer the intensity of exposure to citizenship education, the more citizens are influenced by authoritarian state-led conception of citizenship; one in which is characterized in China by a passive obedient form, instead of a more active participatory one. We find greater exposure to citizen education is positively correlated with a more active and participatory views of citizenship, despite the fact that this was not the goal of the education curriculum. We further find that citizenship education is effective at lower educational levels, but at higher levels it is not only ineffective, but fosters (or at minimum, does not deter) more active conceptions and performances of citizenship.

Keywords: active and passive citizenship; formal education; authoritarian regimes; China

Introduction

Citizenship is a legal and emotive tie between the state and the citizen (Hendricks 1997). Scholars studying citizenship often focus on the rights and duties afforded to citizens in democracies, via social contract theories, whether in the liberal-individualist, or civic-republican, traditions (Hamilton and Turner 1994). Yet, this conceptualization can aptly be applied in authoritarian regimes (Yousef 2004). Irrespective of political regime type, the primary mechanism through which states construct model citizens is citizenship education. The accompanying attendant expectation is that the longer the exposure, the more citizens are influenced by state-led concepts of citizenship. Thus, states that mandate more citizenship education should experience more success with citizens internalizing their conception of citizenship.

In this article, we test this hypothesis using the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since 2012, part of Xi Jinping's new emphasis on the 'rejuvenation of the nation' includes constructing model citizens and public officials (see Teets and Hasmath 2020). This curriculum is mandated throughout all levels of the education system. In other words, China is a case of an explicit conception of citizenship being taught continuously throughout students' careers. If Chinese citizens vary in their conception of citizenship, or believe in a conception

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counter to the state's vision, this greatly weakens the causal argument of the state using education to construct citizenship.

In fact, citizenship education has been an explicit part of the Chinese state-controlled, universal education system since 1957, when Mao Zedong (2001) declared: 'Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture'. Six decades later, the Communist Party of China (CPC), summoning some of the tactics of the Maoist era, reinforced this stance by stating:

In order to build socialism, both now and in the future, we must cultivate the patriotism of students ... the spirit of patriotism should infuse the entire curriculum, and patriotism education should be promoted in the classroom, in teaching materials, and in hearts and minds (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China 2019).

Contemporary citizenship education in China has offered contradictory messages. On the one hand, it asks citizens to simply obey the CPC, submitting to its will, since it alone knows what is best for the masses and the nation. On the other hand, it also teaches students that they need to become technologically advanced, critical, innovative, and globally competitive citizens in order to serve China well, and help the nation develop. Under Xi Jinping, China is trying to construct and balance a conception of citizenship that accomplishes both of these political objectives. It has utilized the 'China Dream' rhetoric to redefine socialist citizenship and identity in a globalized era (Law 2015). This conception of citizenship is a passive version in that citizens are asked to fully support the CPC's efforts, but not to participate in determining what these efforts will be.

Using data from an original nationwide survey conducted in late 2018, this study examines whether increased years of exposure to Chinese citizenship education make subjects more or less likely to agree with the passive version of citizenship promoted by the national curriculum. We find that respondents who receive a high-school education or less are more likely to identify a passive conception of citizenship with being a good citizen. However, our results suggests that the more years of citizenship education a person receives, the less likely they were to agree with this passive version of citizenship. On average, 38.1 per cent of respondents with a high-school education or less selected that good citizens 'support the Party' as their first option, while only 26 per cent of those with university education or higher did. Twenty-eight per cent of those with higher education selected this as their last option out of 6 choices. Respondents with more than a high-school education selected a more active definition of citizenship as being a good citizen: 30.1 per cent versus 17.8 per cent of those with high-school or less. Seemingly, greater exposure to citizen education is positively correlated with a more active and participatory view of citizenship, despite the fact that this was not the goal of the curriculum. As Anderson (1991) infamously finds, sometimes the process of education undermines the intended lesson. We find that citizenship education is effective at lower educational levels, but at higher levels, this education is not only not effective, but serves to create (or does not deter) more active conceptions of citizenship.

Theoretical Framework

Conception of Citizenship in Authoritarian Regimes

Most of the foundational literature looking at the construction of citizenship in authoritarian regimes extrapolates from post-colonial or post-conflict situations (see Bendix 2017; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). The findings generally focus on the tools utilized by authoritarian regimes to socialize citizens and foster feelings of community identity (Herbst 2002). The autocrat's logic behind citizenship construction projects is mostly functional, in that, creating 'ideal citizens' encourages citizens to act in similar ways that legitimate and support the autocrat's rule (Dagher 2018; Eaton and Hasmath forthcoming; Herbst 2002). However, Jones (2015; 2017) challenges the conception of the autocrat narrowly focused on political survival, and argues that autocrats' personal experiences in the West as young individuals supplied them with stylized ideas about how modern productive peoples ought to act, and how their own cultures underperform.

Regardless of the logic behind these citizenship construction projects, the primary mechanism whereby states construct model citizens is citizenship education. A vast literature exists on the ability of education to shape individuals' beliefs, and we will not review all of that literature here (for a good summary, see Cantoni et al. 2014). This literature posits that that education has a causal influence on individual attitudes and beliefs (Clots-Figuera and Masella, 2013; Friedman et al. 2011; Freire 1970; Lipset 1959; Lott, 1999). One of the favorite examples for political scientists are studies that show how exposure to economics curriculum creates utility-maximizing preferences among students (see Choi et al. 2014).

In authoritarian states, research reveals that citizenship education is successful in teaching individuals to be more supportive and less critical of ruling regimes (Cantoni et al. 2014). For example, university students in mainland China, who are subjected to a more deliberately patriotic and nationalistic citizenship education curriculum, report higher levels of patriotism and nationalism than their Hong Kong counterparts, who receive a more depoliticized version of citizenship education (Fairbrother 2003). Research further reveals that in authoritarian states, more years of education does correlate, to some extent, with higher levels of regime support (Geddes and Zaller 1989; Kennedy 2009). Namely, the more years a person spends in formal schooling, the more citizenship education they receive; thus, increasing their exposure to state messaging.

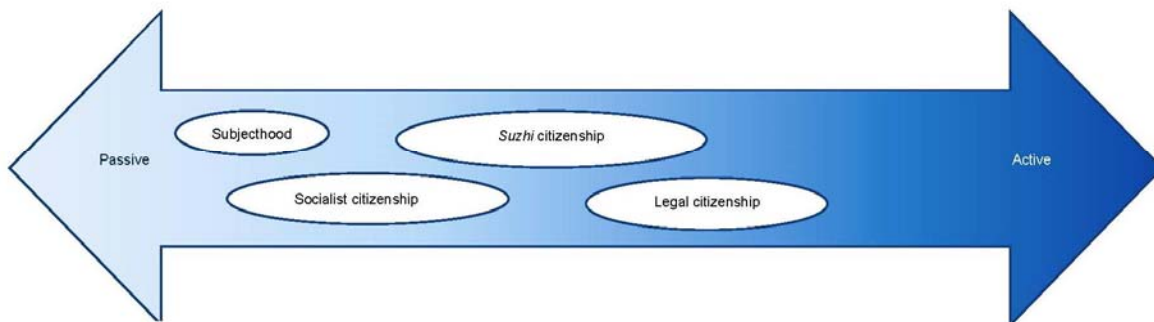
Notwithstanding this overall trend, the effectiveness of citizenship education in practice might be limited at higher levels of education. For example, Zhang and Fagan (2016) found that university students in China were not impressed with the teaching quality of citizenship education courses at the tertiary level, which influenced the effectiveness of the content. Geddes and Zaller (1989), using 1970s data from Brazil, found that the relationship between more years of education and regime support is curvilinear. People with the fewest years of education (less than five) report lower levels of regime support than those who had attended at least some years of middle school or high school; however this support diminishes as education levels increase. Kennedy (2009) found similar results: Chinese citizens who had graduated from middle and high school were more supportive of the state than those with less education. In both studies, those who graduated from university report lower levels of regime support than high school/middle school graduates. These studies suggest, in sum, that the relationship between education and regime support declines, and eventually reverses, with higher levels of education. This might be

due to the fact that at the highest levels of education, individuals, whom are taught to think more critically and are exposed to alternative viewpoints, can counteract/undermine the state's messaging. To wit, recent studies find younger citizens from urban areas are more critical of the state than their older or more rural compatriots (Eaton and Hasmath forthcoming). This may be because this demographic has the highest average level of educational attainment in China, with a disproportionate number of university graduates compared to other age groups (Treiman 2013).

Conception of Citizenship in China

Authoritarian states practice top-down or more passive conceptions of citizenship (Mann 1987), and this is certainly true of the P.R.C. Since 1949, the CPC-led state has worked deliberately to shape how Chinese people should understand what it means to be a good citizen, and citizenship education continues throughout the tertiary level (Lu 2017). Nevertheless, there is a range of interpretations of what it means to be a good citizen in the P.R.C. across time. These different definitions of good citizenship can be understood along a continuum that extends from completely passive obedience to more active, but constrained, participation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Different Types of Citizenship in China



Starting at the passive obedience end of the spectrum, some Chinese citizens conceive citizenship as *subjecthood*. According to this conception, as representatives of the state, political officials are depicted as powerful and virtuous, while ordinary citizens are subordinate and dominated, dependent on the magnanimity of their betters (Fu and Distelhorst 2017). Of course, the performance of *subjecthood* can be strategic, a tactic used by Chinese citizens in order to persuade political officials to do what they want. Yet, even if the citizen does not actually believe that party-state actors are virtuous or deserve their authority, *subjecthood* still assumes that citizens are at the mercy of state power and must enact subservience.

By contrast, *socialist citizenship* assumes that the state is obligated to provide social rights and collective welfare to its citizens. For citizens, loyalty to the state is conditional, predicated on its ability to fulfill its promises. This version of citizenship assumes a relationship of reciprocity between the state and its citizens. If the state fails to provide for its citizens' needs, or if political officials act greedy and corrupt rather than serving the people, then citizens can threaten to

withdraw their loyalty (C. Hsu 2001; Eaton and Hasmath forthcoming; Gilley 2008; Perry 2015). In contrast to citizenship as *subjecthood*, *socialist citizenship* provides citizens with potential grounds for 'rightful resistance' (O'Brien, 2013; O'Brien and Li 2006). In other words, in this understanding, citizens can legitimately criticize and push back against state power, albeit only under narrowly defined circumstances. Under *socialist citizenship*, people can demand that the state respond to local problems, whether that be to punish a polluter, lower the price of staple foods, or remove an egregiously corrupt official; but they seldom press for wider political and civil rights (O'Brien 2013). There is growing evidence of a significant gap between Chinese citizens' expectations of the state and their assessments of its actual performance, suggesting the potential for increasing moments of 'rightful resistance' (see Hasmath et al. 2020). Ultimately, *socialist citizenship* is passive, in that citizens are only expected to participate if the state does not meet its responsibilities.

Suzhi citizenship, translated as 'quality', is related to *socialist citizenship* in that citizens also believe that they deserve to make certain demands of the state, and if the state fails to hold up its end of the bargain, it loses its political legitimacy. However, instead of the state as a paternalistic provider taking care of basic needs, *suzhi citizenship* expects the state to provide its citizens with ever-improving conditions for self-development (C. Hsu 2017; Lin 2017). *Suzhi* ideology became a dominant narrative in early 21st century China (Anagnost 2004; C. Hsu 2007; Kipnis 2007; Yan 2003). It was first used in propaganda for the now defunct one-child policy in the 1980s, and it became the key operating term for education reform in the late 1990s (*suzhi jiaoyu*) (Law 2013). The discourse of *suzhi* strongly associates 'quality' with education. It argues that people with higher levels of education, particularly connected to science, technology, and high culture, are needed to lead China to become an advanced nation, one that can compete successfully in the global economy. It conflates education with middle class consumerism, urban cosmopolitanism, and culture self-control.

Suzhi citizenship permits citizens to be relatively apolitical, focusing primarily on their own development into capitalistic workers and consumer. However, it also opens the door for citizens to have a more active role as well; to engage in some forms of 'rightful resistance' and to make social entrepreneurship possible (C. Hsu 2017). According to *suzhi citizenship*, a government that provides ever-improving conditions for development is one that is legitimate, while a government that fails to do so loses its legitimacy. Citizens who bring low-quality conditions to the attention of political leaders are doing the state a favour. Citizens who call out corrupt cadres serve the regime by preventing more quality-lowering harm. Citizens who organize to solve social problems on their own are also doing a good by contributing to the overall improvement of the nation; thus, justifying many forms of citizen organization and mobilization.

Like *socialist* and *suzhi citizenship*, *legal citizenship* insists that the Chinese party-state answers to a set of moral principles above it. Instead of the reciprocal logic of *socialist* and *suzhi citizenship*, *legal citizenship* claims that both political officials and citizens are equal under the law. As a result, citizens have the right to chastise and criticize state actors if they violate legal policies; it is a form of 'rightful resistance'. *Legal citizenship* became a more important component of citizenship education after 2001, when textbooks were revised to teach students to know the law, protect their rights, and to take legal action when encountering violations (Tse 2011). Under Xi Jinping, the official emphasis on the 'the rule of law' (*yifa zhiguo*) and top-down policy centralization has only intensified (An 2018; Teets et al. 2017). This discourse has empowered citizens to invoke the law when they want to hold the state or state actors accountable, whether via formal complaints, petitions, protests, or direct lawsuits. These

strategies have become more accessible and popular for Chinese citizens since the turn of the century (Stern 2016; Woo 2011; 2017).

All of these versions of good citizens are emphasized at different historical times, and have points of overlap. Citizenship education pulls from these conceptions to promote the appropriate relationship between the citizen and state. As we profile in the next section, citizenship education teaches a passive form of citizenship where good citizens obey the law and the Party, and in taking any community action, serve to further the goals of outlined by the Party. This participation should be Party mobilized and not dissent from Party goals. As a case in point, there are exemplar campaigns in public spaces, such as those in subways, that emphasize sacrificing individual desires for the benefit of the community (as defined by the Party) (see Goldman and Perry 2009).

Citizenship Education in China

Unlike existing literature, our study does not look at regime support per se (see for example Hasmath et al. 2020; MacDonald and Hasmath 2018), but instead we asked whether exposure to citizenship education in China makes citizens more likely to conceive of citizenship as a passive, obedient form versus a more active, participatory one. Since the 1950s, citizenship education in China has gone by a number of titles, including 'moral education', 'moral character education', 'patriotic education', and 'citizenship education' (Law 2013, 608). Although the curriculum has undergone revisions over the years, alternating between an egalitarian and elitist strategy (see Hasmath 2011; Pepper 1980) it has always taught students throughout mainland China that good citizenship equals submission to the CPC.

In 1958, political education was added as a separate subject for secondary school students, although political content was still woven into many courses (Law 2013). The curriculum taught students that good citizens love China, which meant loving the Communist Party, the government, political leaders, and the army. Good citizens serve the people and help to construct a socialist China. The implicit message was that those who serve China the best were the cadres of the Party-state, who are both devoted to the regime and skilled in expertise. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), skills and expertise were neglected, and devotion to the Party was both amplified and refocused into a personality cult of Mao. The education bureaucracy lost control over political education as fanatical young people took over schools and attacked teachers and administrators.

In the post-Mao, post-market reform era (1978 onwards), Deng Xiaoping reinstated citizenship education, which became more comprehensive and intentional throughout the 1980s. Over the next few decades, citizenship education underwent a number of curricular revisions. Nonetheless, in each iteration, students have been taught to submit to the CPC's leadership, as the vanguard of the people. Pedagogically, the Party is positioned as China's savior, the heart of the nation, the source of all wisdom, and the only entity that can ensure China's current security and future prosperity. The curriculum teaches students that patriotic love of China is inextricably linked to loving, supporting and defending the Party, as well as obeying its directives (Fairbrother 2003; Law 2006; 2013; Tse 2011).

For instance, beginning in 1979, the Ministry of Education has issued student codes of conduct that are usually posted on the walls at schools. Although these have been revised over the years, the first code has always implored students to 'love ardently the nation, the people, and the Chinese Communist Party' (Law 2006, 609). The connection between patriotism and

submission to the Party was reiterated as recently as November 2019, when the Central Committee of the CPC promulgated the 'Outline for the Implementation of Patriotism Education in the New Era'. It declared in China today,

the essence of patriotism is to love the country, to love the Party, and also to love socialism ... The only guaranteed way to realize the country's prosperity and power is to uphold the Party's leadership and adhere to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics with strong faith and sincere emotions.

This language ultimately promotes *subjecthood citizenship*, where submission to the powerful and virtuous Party-state leaders is the essence of good citizenship. The relationship between the citizen and the ruling regime is one of adoration, devotion, and obedience. Students are taught that the CPC is to be revered, and that Party-state leaders have served the nation well in the past and are guiding it to a more glorious future. The underlying theme is that these political leaders deserve their status and power since their contributions to China are more substantial than that of ordinary people (C. Hsu 2007). It is a passive citizenship, rather than one where the citizen is encouraged to participate in individually determined ways or even to push back against the state. Nonetheless, the Party-state sought to develop citizenship consciousness. At the 17th National Congress of the CPC in 2007, the national task of 'strengthening citizen consciousness education and establishing ideas of democracy, rule of law, freedom, equality as well as justice' was deemed important.

However, China's citizenship education curriculum also contains certain themes that could be interpreted to support more active versions of citizenship, although they are not as prevalent or as dominant. For example, the curriculum has always claimed that the CPC has a pivotal role in developing China's economy, and leading the nation to socialism. Socialism is understood to be a stage of economic development where all Chinese citizens will experience prosperity in a fair and just society (Tse 2011). Although different versions of Chinese citizenship education curriculum offer different levels of criticism against capitalism, they always claim what the Party will provide for China will eventually be better than what capitalist nations experienced. This type of language can be used to advocate for *socialist citizenship*. If the Party-state fails to provide for its citizens and make progress toward socialism, perhaps it deserves to be subject to censure from its citizens. Even so, the idea that regime legitimacy is predicated upon delivering a certain materialist standard of living (see Eaton and Hasmath forthcoming), much less that citizens can withdraw their loyalty to the Party-state if they judge that its performance is subpar, is not directly stated in the curriculum.

Another theme which has become more prevalent in citizens' education is the link between education and "good" citizenship. Beginning in the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping, the goal of education became to create citizens who had the skills and knowledge to implement the new market reforms and compete on the global economy. To that end, citizenship education began to teach that good citizens were those who could compete well in international competition, and that education was the key to this success (Law 2006). This theme became more explicit in the education reforms of the late 1990s. These reforms were known as *suzhi jiaoyu* or 'quality education', since they promoted the idea that students needed to raise their level of *suzhi*, or quality to serve China well. In 2001, an additional set of educational reforms emphasized the link between good citizenship and education, promoting not just foreign language and technological skills, but 'active participation in practice, critical thinking, collaborative exploration, searching

for and processing information, and acquiring new knowledge, problem solving, communicating, and collaborating' (Law 2013). These themes promote certain elements of *suzhi citizenship*. However, Chinese citizenship education never taught students that good citizens organize on their own (independently of the Party-state) to solve social problems or transform society; much less that they use contentious politics to 'rightfully resist' and criticize Party-state officials.

Some language conducive to *legal citizenship* also emerges, although not until after the turn of the twenty-first century (Fairbrother 2003). Chinese citizen education has always taught students to obey the law, but in a passive, uncritical way. Textbooks published in 2003-2005, inform students that they have rights under the law, including the right to protect themselves from law-violators. Good citizens, according to this curriculum, do not just abide by the law, they should utilize the law in the service of the nation; for example, by making suggestions to the state and monitoring the behaviour of others (Tse 2011). Although language about the rule of law has increased in more recent iterations of citizenship education, the curriculum still emphasizes obedience rather than 'rightful resistance'.

Between 2004 and 2010, a new curriculum (the '8th Curriculum Reform') was introduced to high school students with new sections on political participation. This included discussions on how political decision-making reflects the will of the people, explaining the processes of democratic elections in villages and urban resident committees, and describing the channels through which people can voice their opinions (Cantoni et al. 2014). Again, these conceptions of citizenship focus on obeying the Party, who represents the will of the people, with participation limited to Party-created mechanisms such as local elections. As the 2004 State Council's memo of 'Strengthening the Ideological and Moral Construction of the Youth' makes clear:

School is the primary channel for transmitting ideological and moral education to young people. We must follow the party's education policy, and prioritize ideological and moral education among all general education goals, and throughout all aspects of education and teaching activities. We should place extremely high importance on the cultivation of a national spirit, incorporating this throughout the primary and secondary education experience. (Cantoni et al. 2014, appendix 3).

Under Xi Jinping, citizenship education has promoted loyalty to the nation, and the Party as the vanguard of the people and savior of the nation (Zhong and Zhang 2015). In a campaign called "Loving the Party, Country, and Socialism", the Ministry of Education promoted the 'Sinicization' of Marxism; followed by a speech by Xi Jinping in 2016 where he stressed that China had a unique history, a unique culture and unique national conditions that were decisive factors in enabling it to develop its higher education sector successfully. In March 2017, the Chinese Association of Higher Education held a symposium on learning and the application of Xi Jinping's thought and discourse, where several leaders stressed that teachers must strengthen ideological and political education in the face of the influence of globalization and the tendency towards Western thought and religious beliefs that could 'disorient' students (Baisotti 2019, 157). Again, this conception of citizenship ties into national glory with the Party as the savior of the nation, and the duty of citizens is to support the Party in achieving this national glory.

In sum, the construction and performance of citizenship education in China suggests a more passive form of citizenship, where citizens follow the lead of the Communist Party without critique, and with absolute devotion and obedience. Nevertheless, there is language in the

curriculum that can be interpreted to justify more active versions of citizenship and 'rightful resistance', however it does require some high-level extrapolation to reach such conclusions.

Empirical Strategy

In this study, we test the hypothesis that the longer the intensity of exposure to citizenship education, the more citizens are influenced by the authoritarian state-led conception of citizenship. Thus, states that mandate more citizenship education should experience more success with citizens internalizing and subsequently, performing an authoritarian state-led conception of citizenship. We test this hypothesis using the case of China.

Since part of Xi Jinping's emphasis on the 'rejuvenation of the nation' includes constructing model citizens and officials, and this curriculum is mandated throughout all levels of the education system, we have a case of explicit conceptions of passive citizenship being taught continuously. Thus, we expect that China should confirm our hypothesis. If citizens vary in their conception and performance of citizenship, or believe in a conception counter to the authoritarian state's vision, this weakens the notion that the authoritarian state can construct an idealized citizen who can perform a state-led conception of citizenship.

Survey Design and Measurement

The individual-level data for this study was collected from a nation-wide survey conducted online by an in-country survey organization. Recent research finds that web-based surveys can be as reliable as face-to-face surveys (Simmons and Bobo 2015), and the research team involved in this study has significant experience conducting surveys of this type in the P.R.C. The survey was conducted in October 2018. Participants, across all thirty-two provinces (including municipalities, autonomous regions, and special administrative regions), were solicited online through *Weibo* and *WeChat*, and were offered up to 30 RMB (~4.23 USD) for successfully completing a survey questionnaire. The survey was administered in Mandarin Chinese and included a total of 38 questions.

The survey questions primarily focused on volunteerism, charitable giving and civic engagement. Most of the questions focused on the subject's attitudes towards and experiences with volunteering in charitable giving (state-led and citizen-initiated). The survey also asked one question about the respondents' understanding of what it means to be a 'good citizen'. The survey's focus on volunteerism and charitable giving may have affected the responses to the question about citizenship. However, as we shall see, very few respondents chose 'volunteer service and participation in charities' as an important component of citizenship. It is also possible that the subjects' answers were affected by the fact that they lived in an authoritarian state and they have felt pressure to provide 'politically correct' responses. However, the survey did not address particularly sensitive political topics, and falls well within the range of surveys that have been conducted in China (e.g. Eaton and Hasmath forthcoming).

The survey involved both multiple choice and ranking questions. Individual demographic information gathered by the survey includes age, gender, number of children, city, and Communist Party membership. Socio-economic information collected in the survey included level of education, occupation, and household income. Some questions asked respondents to choose all answers that were true: for example, asking respondents to choose all types of volunteering that they have participated in. Others asked respondents to rank answer choices:

such as the appropriate type of organization to solve social problems. For ranking questions, respondents would rank the choices from one to six in order of most important to least important.

Table 1: Gender, Age and Education Distribution

		<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	532	42.09
	Female	732	57.91
Age	18-22	445	35.21
	23-29	568	44.94
	30-39	251	19.86
Education	Low: Middle School or less	151	11.95
	Mid: High School	259	20.49
	High: University	854	67.56
Total		1264	100.00

Table 2: Demographics Based on Level of Educational Attainment

Level of Educational Attainment	Number of Respondents (Total)	Gender		Age Group		
		Male	Female	18-22	23-29	30-39
Low: Middle School or less	151 (11.95%)	54 (10.15%)	97 (13.25%)	47 (10.56%)	60 (10.56%)	44 (17.53%)
Mid: High School	259 (20.49%)	111 (20.86%)	148 (20.22%)	112 (25.17%)	90 (15.85%)	57 (22.71%)
High: University	854 (67.56%)	367 (68.98%)	487 (66.53%)	286 (64.27%)	418 (73.59%)	150 (59.76%)
Subtotals		532 (42.09%)	732 (57.91%)	445 (35.21%)	568 (44.94%)	251 (19.86%)
TOTAL	1264					

Note: Percentages are within group; for example, 54 of 532 or 10.15% of male respondents had low educational attainment.

The survey obtained 2,022 respondents, of which 1,402 were determined to be valid responses. Validity was determined based on completeness, meaning that invalid surveys left one or more required questions incomplete. IP addresses served as unique identifiers so that the survey company knew that the same person was not taking the survey more than once. For the purposes of this article, respondents the age of forty and up were removed from the analysis for two reasons. First, the Cultural Revolution interrupted citizenship education in China for many years, and the regular curriculum was not reinstated until the 1980s. Due to the uneven implementation of education during this time period, and since many individuals from that age

group at their schooling delayed, it is not clear what kind of citizenship education these respondents received. Second, our sample from that age group was very small, with only 8 persons in the lowest educational group.

The remaining respondents numbered a total of 1,264 people, and were divided into three groups by level of education. The low education group received lower middle school education attainment or less. In previous studies, scholars assigned only those with a primary school education or less to the lowest education category. However, in China, primary and middle school education is compulsory, and the nation has become increasingly successful at preventing students dropping out during those years. In our sample, only thirty-two individuals (1.82 per cent of the sample) reported not completing middle school. The middle education group had graduated from high school, but had not attended a four-year university, and the high education group had attended (or was currently attending) university. Tables 1 and 2 provide the basic demographic breakdown of our sample, including the level of educational attainment.

Analytical Strategy

As outlined in our hypotheses below, if citizenship education was as effective as the Chinese Party-state wants it to be, we would expect the longer the intensity of exposure to citizenship education to correlate with more passive versions of citizenship, specifically *subjecthood*. However, if the curvilinear model holds, we would predict that support for *subjecthood* versions of citizenship would increase with years of education up through secondary school, but decline for those with more years of tertiary education. Those with the lowest and highest levels of education would be more likely to support more active versions of citizenship, contrary to the message of China's citizenship education curriculum. If this thesis holds, as citizens become better educated, they become more participatory and engage in critical thinking. Finally, the null hypothesis would provide evidence that education does not influence conceptions of citizenship.

Hypothesis 1a: increasing exposure as measured by education attainment is correlated with passive conceptions of citizenship (measured by responses #1, 5, and 6)

Hypothesis 1b: less exposure is correlated with more active conceptions of citizenship (measured by responses #2, 3, and 4)

Hypothesis 2: education attainment is correlated to conceptions of citizenship in a curvilinear relationship, where low and high levels of education attainment correlate with active conceptions of citizenship, and mid-levels of education correlate with passive conceptions

Hypothesis 3: education attainment is correlated with more active conceptions of citizenship
In order to test these hypotheses, survey respondents were asked to rank order six options with the following question:

What type of citizen serves China the most? Please sort them from the category that contributes the most to the one that contributes the least. The option that you think is the most important should be ranked 1 and the least important option ranked 6.

1. Citizens who support the Communist Party

2. *Citizens who develop their economy through business growth and/or entrepreneurship*
3. *Citizens who contribute to the country through education, expertise and high quality skills*
4. *Citizens who contribute to society through volunteer service and participation in charities*
5. *Citizens who serve in government departments and actively understand the situation.*
6. *Citizens who abide by laws, rules and regulations*

As noted above, citizenship education in China strongly promotes *subjecthood citizenship*. Students are taught Party-state cadres contribute more to Chinese society than other citizens, and therefore these leaders deserve respect and obedience. This perspective is expressed directly in choice number 5 ('Citizens who serve in government departments and actively understand the situation' are the citizens who serve China the best). Those who ascribe to *subjecthood citizenship* would also be expected to rank choice number 1 highly ('Citizens who support the Communist Party'). Choice number 1 ('Citizens who support the Communist Party') would be a top choice for those who support *socialist citizenship*. Those who hold a *suzhi citizenship* view should choose to rank number 3 ('Citizens who contribute to the country through education, expertise...' or perhaps number 4 ('Citizens who contribute to society through volunteer service...') more highly. *Legal citizenship* is more difficult to operationalize. A person who chooses number 6 as their first choice may be advocating *legal citizenship*, or they may be simply signaling a passive citizenship where citizens must be obedient. If number 2 were their second choice, the former seems to be a reasonable conclusion, while those who select numbers 6 and 5 as their top choices are more likely to be supporters of *subjecthood citizenship*.

To explore the relationship between education and perceptions of citizenship, we first set up the appropriate variables. The control variable of age was coded as a binary variable for respondents under forty or forty and over, and as mentioned, all those over forty were removed from the sample. Educational attainment was divided into three groups as indicated above: middle school or less, high school, and university. Finally, perceptions of citizenship were already rank-ordered one through six, with one representing the most important or best option, and six the least important.

A chi-square test of association was then used to confirm that there was a statistically significant relationship between these variables in the sample. Additionally, principal component analysis was used to check other demographic variables that may have been strongly correlated with either age or education, including gender, geographic region, Communist Party membership, and household income. The principal component analysis confirmed that composite variables would not be better suited to explaining the data than the original age and education variables in this sample. Finally, multinomial regression models were used to determine the probability of respondents selecting different choices. Much of the recent literature on constructing citizenship uses difference-in-difference analysis; however, we use t-tests and difference in means tests as recommended by Collier et al. (2010) since we do not have panel data.

Results

Given the survey design, our question about citizenship allowed participants to rank order their preferred answers, thus we not only know their first-choice response, but also their second choice. Table 3 shows which options respondents chose as their top two options. The most popular top pick was choice number 1 ('Citizens who support the Communist Party'), followed

very closely by choice number 6 ('Citizens who abide by laws') and choice number 3 ('Citizens with contribute through education and expertise'). They were also the most popular options when we examined the second choices, although the order is reversed. Responses #1 and 6 measure the passive conceptions of citizenship promoted by citizenship education, and we observe that this education does exert some influence without yet accounting for the education levels of the respondents.

Table 3: Top Two Choices for Definitions of Good Citizenship

Response Option	1: Support Communist Party	2: Business and Entrepreneurship	3: Education and Expertise	4: Volunteer Service/ Charity	5: Serve in Government	6: Abide by Laws	Total N
Top choice	357 (28.2%)	90 (7.1%)	332 (26.2%)	45 (3.6%)	98 (7.8%)	342 (27.1%)	1264
Second choice	157 (12.4%)	270 (12.3%)	346 (27.4%)	149 (11.8%)	143 (11.3%)	199 (15.7%)	1264
Total top 2 choices	514 (40.7%)	360 (28.5%)	678 (53.6%)	195 (15.4%)	241 (19.1%)	541 (42.8%)	

Table 4: Odds Ratios for Definitions of Good Citizenship

Response Option	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Std. Error	Prob.	95% Confidence Interval	
1: Support the Communist Party	1.4031	0.3387	0.1013	0.000	1.218	1.6163
2: Business and entrepreneurship	0.9129	-0.0911	0.0657	0.206	0.7928	1.0512
3: Education and expertise	0.6677	-0.4039	0.0484	0.000	0.5793	0.7696
4: Volunteer service and charity	1.0499	0.0487	0.0758	0.500	0.9114	1.2094
5: Serve in government	0.8679	-0.1417	0.0624	0.049	0.7538	0.9993
6: Abide by laws and regulations	1.0384	0.0377	0.0741	0.598	0.9028	1.1944

As stated above, choice number 5 ('Citizens who serve in government departments and actively understand the situation') best expresses the logic of *subjecthood citizenship* promoted by Chinese citizenship education. Interestingly enough, this was one of the least popular choices. Of the 1,264 respondents, only 98 people picked it as their first choice, fewer than eight per cent. Indeed, the only option that was less popular was number 4 ('Citizens who contribute to society through volunteer service ...'), which only four per cent of the respondents picked up their top choice. An additional 143 respondents chose number 5 as their second choice, or about 11 per cent of the sample. More respondents choose number 4 as their second choice (149 respondents). Respondents were nearly three times more likely to list it as their last choice than their first choice. Educational attainment had a slight effect on choice number 5 as seen in Tables 4 and 5; it was similarly unpopular across all levels of education. Controlling for a person's age, a one unit increase in education multiplies the odds of a low rather than high rating of 'Serve in government' by 0.87, or decreases them by 13.21 per cent. In short, if the goal of Chinese citizenship education is to promote *subjecthood citizenship*, it is not succeeding

Table 5: Ranking of ‘Serve in Government’ by Educational Attainment*

	First choice	Second choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	11 (7.2%)	14 (9.3%)	37 (24.5%)	151
Medium Education	21 (8.1%)	28 (10.8%)	73 (28.2%)	259
High Education	66 (7.7%)	101 (11.8%)	178 (20.8%)	854
<i>Total</i>	98 (7.7%)	143 (11.3%)	288 (22.8%)	1264

* *There were no discernible differences by educational level.*

By contrast, choice 1 (‘Citizens who support the Communist Party’) was one of the most popular choices. This option also expresses a passive version of citizenship compatible with *subjecthood* and *socialist citizenship*. Although option 1 is more appealing than choice 5 for individuals in every educational category, it is not equally popular among people of different educational level (see Tables 4 and 6). Respondents with lower levels of educational attainment are statistically more likely to rank this choice highly, than individuals with higher levels of education. Of those with a middle school education or less, over half picked this choice as one of their top two options. By contrast, only 37 per cent of those who attended university chose this option as one of their top two. Those with more education were also more likely to choose this option as their lowest choice, with over a quarter of them ranking it number six out of six. These differences were statistically significant at the 0.001 level of critical value. Expressed differently, controlling for a person’s age, a one unit increase in education multiplies the odds of a low rather than high rating of ‘Support the Communist Party’ by 1.40, or increases them by 40.31 per cent.

Table 6: Ranking of ‘Support the Communist Party’ by Educational Attainment*

	First Choice	Second Choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	58 (38.4%)	23 (15.2%)	24 (15.9%)	151
Mid Education	77 (29.7%)	41 (15.8%)	56 (21.6%)	259
High Education	93 (26.0%)	77 (10.9%)	242 (28.3%)	854
<i>Total</i>	357 (28.2%)	157 (12.4%)	322 (24.5%)	1264

* *Differences by educational level are statistically significant to the 0.001 level.*

Table 7: Ranking of ‘Abide by Laws and Regulations’ by Educational Attainment*

	First Choice	Second Choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	41 (27.15%)	27 (17.88%)	32 (21.19%)	151
Mid Education	80 (30.89%)	36 (13.90%)	63 (24.32%)	259
High Education	221 (25.88%)	136 (15.93%)	175 (20.49%)	854
Total	342 (27.06%)	199 (15.74%)	270 (21.36%)	1264

* *There were no discernible differences by educational level.*

The results shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7 do not support hypotheses 1 or 2. Respondents who were exposed to more years of Chinese citizenship education are not more likely to believe that supporting the Communist Party or other passive conceptions are the most important component of good citizenship. Nor is the relationship curvilinear, with people with high school degrees more supportive of this position than those with less education, as well as those with university experience. Instead, this evidence supports hypothesis 3 that the more years of citizenship education a person is exposed to, the less likely they are to choose this more passive option. This is true despite the fact that, for the last six decades, the Chinese citizenship education curriculum has deliberately and consistently proclaimed the message that supporting the Communist Party is a central component of being a good citizen.

Additionally, increased exposure to Chinese citizenship education appears to make people more open to *suzhi* citizenship, which was manifested in choice 3 (‘Citizens who contribute to the country through education, expertise, and high-quality skills’). Although this was a popular result for respondents of all educational levels, results reveal that increased exposure to Chinese citizenship education raises the likelihood that respondents ranked this choice highly (see Tables 4 and 8). These results were statistically significant, again at the 0.001 level of critical value. As the level of education increased, respondents were less likely to rank this option among their least important choices, compared to those with lower levels of education. They were also more likely to move it from second to first place in their ranking than those with less education. Among those with the highest level of education, 31 per cent ranked it as their top choice, while 58 per cent of them picked it as one of the first two choices. By contrast, 47 per cent of high school graduates and ~40 per cent of those with the middle school level of education or less ranked this choice among the top two. Controlling for a person’s age, a one unit increase in education multiplies the odds of a low rather than high rating of ‘Education and expertise’ by 0.67, or decreases them by 33.23 per cent. Again, the results shown in Tables 8, 9 and 10 are not curvilinear, but point to more of a direct relationship between educational attainment and support of a slightly more active conception of citizenship.

Since the Deng Xiaoping regime, Chinese citizenship education has taught that those who succeed in terms of education and expertise contribute more to China’s development than those who do not; although the curriculum has not advocated for more activist versions of this form of citizenship. However, it would not be accurate to say that the reason why those who spent more years in formal education support *suzhi citizenship* is due to their exposure to more citizenship education. If that were the case, we would expect those who were more educated to also be more

supportive of choice number 5 (‘Serves in government’) or choice number 1 (‘Citizens who support the Communist Party’), since those options represents much stronger components of the curriculum.

Table 8: Ranking of ‘Education and Expertise’ by Educational Attainment*

	First Choice	Second Choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	24 (15.9%)	36 (23.8%)	7 (4.6%)	151
Mid Education	51 (19.7%)	71 (27.4%)	4 (1.5%)	259
High Education	257 (30.1%)	239 (28.0%)	16 (1.9%)	854
Total	332 (26.3%)	346 (27.4%)	27 (2.1%)	1264

* Differences by educational level are statistically significant to the 0.001 level.

Table 9: Ranking of ‘Business and Entrepreneurship’ by Educational Attainment*

	First Choice	Second Choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	10 (6.62%)	32 (21.19%)	28 (18.54%)	151
Mid Education	17 (6.56%)	55 (21.24%)	40 (15.44%)	259
High Education	63 (7.38%)	183 (21.43%)	113 (13.23%)	854
Total	90 (7.12%)	270 (21.36%)	181 (14.32%)	1264

* There were no discernible differences by educational level.

Table 10: Ranking of ‘Volunteering and Charity’ by Educational Attainment*

	First Choice	Second Choice	Last Choice (6th Place)	Total N
Low Education	7 (4.64%)	19 (12.58%)	23 (15.23%)	151
Mid Education	13 (5.02%)	28 (10.81%)	23 (8.88%)	259
High Education	25 (2.93%)	102 (11.94%)	130 (15.22%)	854
Total	45 (3.56%)	149 (11.79%)	176 (13.92%)	1264

* There were no discernible differences by educational level.

Instead, it seems that those with higher levels of educational attainment choose to selectively absorb the aspects of Chinese citizenship education that serve themselves the best. For those with university degrees, *suzhi citizenship* offers a narrative with personal psychological and social benefits. It provides them with an argument that they deserve higher status and admiration since they are China's 'best citizens'. Conversely, those with lower levels of education also choose a conception of good citizenship that they can attain more easily, 'Support the Communist Party', rather than the ones that are out of reach for them, which would include not only 'Education and Expertise', but also 'Serves in Government'.

In summary, we find that Chinese citizenship education is not effective at promoting more passive versions of citizenship. The longer an individual is exposed to this education, the more likely they are to select a more active conception of citizenship.

Conclusion

Since its inception, Chinese citizenship education has primarily taught students to adore and obey their political leaders and the Chinese Communist Party. Yet over the decades, the curriculum has had to include additional messages in an attempt to adjust to changing national and global circumstances. Since the 1980s, the ruling regime has been aware that it needs to create citizens that can compete successfully in the global economy, once with skill, knowledge, creativity and ambition. The vision of the ideal Chinese citizen has shifted somewhat from the enthusiastic, but submissive worker to the 'patriotic professional' (Hoffman 2010). Although 'patriotism' in Chinese citizenship education has always been defined as loving the Party and upholding its leadership, these additions to the curriculum have allowed an educated subsection of the population to redefine the term. For them, patriotism can mean professionalism, since (in their view) 'high quality' citizens contribute more to society than their less well-educated peers.

The rise of *suzhi citizenship* among educated people in China has influenced state-citizen relations in the P.R.C. According to *suzhi citizenship*, those who are educated contribute more to society than others since they understand science and technology, and since they are cultured, well-mannered, urban, and cosmopolitan. *Suzhi citizenship* can potentially be the basis for more active citizenship, as educated middle-class urbanites argue that they have the status and expertise to advise political leaders or solve social problems on their own. This has led, among other things, to the emergence of a robust NGO sector in China (J. Hsu et al. 2017). In addition, citizens who believe in *suzhi citizenship* can insist that is the government's job to improve the quality of their conditions so that they can become 'quality' people. If the government fails to deliver this, it is legitimate to respond with various forms of 'rightful resistance'.

This study reveals that students in China who receive citizenship education do not absorb it wholesale, but pick and choose among its multiple messages to find the narrative that suits them the best. They gravitate to the definition of good citizenship that they can achieve more easily, and the one that allows them to see themselves as good citizens. For those with university degrees this means focusing on the ways that those with more education served the nation better than those with less, and believing that passively supporting the Communist Party was not enough good citizenship.

We used China as a confirming case for the causal relationship between citizenship education and conception of good citizens since citizenship is taught continuously throughout students' educational careers up until to the tertiary level. If citizens vary in their conception of citizenship, or believe in a conception counter to the state's vision, this greatly weakens the

causal argument of the state using education to construct citizenship. We find that contrary to this hypothesis, greater exposure to citizen education is positively correlated with a more active and participatory views of citizenship, despite the fact that this was not the goal of the curriculum. We find that citizenship education is effective at lower educational levels, but at higher levels this education is not only ineffective, but serves to create (or does not deter) more active conceptions of citizenship. We do not find evidence supporting hypotheses 1 or 2, but do find support for hypothesis 3 that more education attainment undermines citizenship education that promotes more passive conceptions of good citizens.

The broader implication of our study's findings is that the agenda of constructing contemporary citizens, underway in many authoritarian regimes, will only be effective if concentrated on citizens with less educational attainment. The authoritarian leader's dilemma is that higher education is necessary in a global marketplace as nations move up the value chain; thus education becomes a double-edged sword as being competitive in global markets require a labour force with higher educational attainment. Put bluntly, as China grows out of the middle-income trap, it needs more educated workers; which might present an increased challenge to the more passive conception of citizenship in Xi Jinping's 'China Dream'.

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