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“Chinese core, global trend”: A critical discourse analysis of Chinese civics teachers’ perceptions on global citizenship education

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has stimulated widespread reforms of traditional citizenship education. Regional sociopolitical and cultural circumstances substantially influence global citizenship education (GCE) discourse. A more in-depth examination of the recontextualization of GCE in educational institutions is required to comprehend its inner power tensions and potential dilemmas. This study investigates how GCE is recontextualized in China’s civics curriculum through a critical discourse analysis of 17 civics teachers’ perceptions, considering the expanding global perspective on national curriculum in recent years. The analysis revealed a nation-centric view of GCE dominated by sociopolitical ideology and Confucian norms, communicated in complicity with localized constructivist teaching and learning approaches that tend to be co-opted as a tool for dissimulating and euphemizing official knowledge standing for nationalism in educational practice. The study discusses the epistemological paradox in Chinese teachers’ perceptions, shedding light on repressed teacher subjectivity and limited educational initiatives in the nationalist-dominated GCE. It advocates a critical and reflective examination of the educational practice of GCE and a better way of speaking GCE that avoids equating it with teaching and learning techniques while ignoring the extent to which these methods have shaken educational relationships and value assumptions.

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization and educational transformation, the past two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in global citizenship education (GCE) as a response to today’s global challenges, leading to a vast body of empirical and theoretical scholarship (Pashby et al., 2020). International organizations such as UNESCO and Oxfam promote their sustainable conceptual frameworks of GCE that aim to move beyond individualism and national perspectives towards international education (Oxfam, 2006; UNESCO, 2015). In addition, GCE has been considered contentious in a number of studies conducted in various countries and regions with a focus on how it is manifested in diverse contexts. Regional analyses undertaken in Global North (e.g., Swanson & Pashby, 2016; Wang & Hoffman, 2016), Global South (e.g., Howard et al., 2018; Skårås et al., 2020), Asian Pacific countries (e.g., Baidon & Alviar-Martin, 2020; Cho & Mosselson, 2018; Lin & Jackson, 2020) and across the globe (e.g., Cotton et al., 2019; Lee, 2020) have illustrated the dynamics and

diverse forms and value orientations of GCE. Although GCE is indisputably a global phenomenon, its implementation varies significantly (Goren & Yemini, 2017a). Due to its multiple underlying value orientations, GCE continues to be a contentious field.

In China, although the concept of GCE has not been formally adopted, its relevant elements and characteristics such as global thinking, global visions, and international understanding have gained prominence in recent years (Law, 2013; Shi et al., 2019; Tse, 2011). As Zhu and Camicia (2014) have pointed out, discourses of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism and Confucianism interact and serve in China's citizenship education curricular standards and policy documents. Accordingly, there is a need to further investigate how GCE, laden as it is with these value tensions, is transposed and digested within schools. In line with Bernstein's (1990, 2000) theorizing, the knowledge and values contained in the official field inevitably undergo recontextualization within the pedagogic field. In Bernstein's (2000, p. 31) terms, a "pedagogic discourse" as a recontextualizing principle for the circulation and reordering of discourses embeds two dimensions: regulative discourse and instructional discourse. Regulative discourse as the dominant form, produces the order in the instructional discourse. Based on this hypothesis, we investigate the competitive forces and value regulation process underlying GCE.

This article aims to demonstrate how dominant ideologies of GCE are recontextualized in Chinese educational settings by teachers' representations of GCE. First, we present a review of contemporary literature on GCE, the research context, and the theoretical framework, highlighting that China's citizenship curriculum in schooling is an under-researched area. Second, we describe Fairclough's (2003, 2015) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the methodology and elaborate on the data collection and analytical procedure. Third, based on an analysis of 17 teachers' interviews, the findings illustrate how teachers represent and implement GCE. Fourth, we present a discussion of the nation-centric orientation towards GCE which is underpinned by state-national policy and Confucian culture, and of how localized constructivist learning theories are made complicit with the dominant nationalism in GCE. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for future research.

Discourses of global citizenship education

An increasing sense of global interconnection and potential tensions around nation-states has placed new demands on citizenship education. There is a desire for schooling to promote learners' sense of belonging to a broader community and a shared humanity, and to encourage them to contribute to a more inclusive, just, and peaceful world (UNESCO, 2015). Given its educational importance in today's globalized context, the concept of GCE has been widely discussed in recent literature. It has been found to have a multiplicity of discursive orientations in terms of value meanings and social actions, as alluded to by the descriptions of Pais and Costa (2020, p. 10; GCE as an "empty container") and Mannion et al. (2011, p. 448; GCE as a "nodal point"). Accordingly, rather than striving for common consensus, many scholars have focused on the typologies of GCE and their intended value orientations (e.g., Andreotti, 2014; Oxley & Morris, 2013; Veugelers, 2011). The social cartography of GCE typologies by Pashby et al. (2020) mapped existing discussions across three main discursive orientations – neoliberal, liberal, and critical – and their interfaces. They supplemented the map with the notion of post-critical orientation to explore alternative GCE possibilities (Pashby et al., 2020). This meta-review of GCE typologies revealed the various epistemologies behind its conceptualizations.

Furthermore, GCE is presented as a discursive space with distinct orientations in different contexts, based on existing empirical studies undertaken in numerous places with a variety of teacher groups. Studies conducted in relatively economically developed and socially stable European and American nations demonstrate a clear predominance of a liberal orientation towards GCE (Bruce et al., 2019; Ghosn-Chelala, 2020; van Werven et al., 2021). In the case of Asian countries, as well as in less socially stable countries or regions, teachers' conceptions of GCE demonstrate a larger tension between nationalism and global values (i.e., Western values) (Bitna, 2017; Camicia & Zhu, 2011; Goren

& Yemini, 2017b). For instance, in Lebanon, both Akar (2012) and Ghosn-Chelala (2020) suggest that most teachers promote nationalistic notions of citizenship. A similar situation is seen in Korea, where teachers are concerned about GCE despite (or because of) the fact that social studies textbooks and curricula solely privilege Eurocentric and U.S.-centric accounts and perspectives (Cho, 2017; Kim, 2019). It is never a simple task to transmit the discourse of GCE, which largely developed in the West, to nations with distinct cultural and political traditions (Skårås et al., 2020). Teachers generally recognize the value of GCE, but their understanding and representations of it vary depending on the context. Hence, GCE can be viewed as a discursive field, rather than a term with fixed meanings.

Benchmarked against existing typologies, much previous GCE literature has shed light on the hidden ideologies within GCE and pointed out the strong presence of neoliberal, liberal, and nationalistic values in various countries (e.g., Baidon & Alviar-Martin, 2020; Cho and Mosselson, 2018; Choi & Kim, 2020; Swanson & Pashby, 2016). However, few studies have unpacked the “black box” of its recontextualization in schooling and revealed the power of compromise or resistance to the dominant regulative discourse occurring in the concerned regions. This paper is based on the view that, according to Bernstein’s (1990, 2000) pedagogic discourse, when educators reflect and articulate their views, values are recontextualized in educational language (Akar, 2012). In the case of China, this paper describes teachers’ understanding of GCE, focusing on the values articulated in their perceptions, their justifications in the local educational field, as well as the ways they manage GCE’s inherent tensions.

Civics curriculum and global citizenship education in China’s official pedagogic field

Citizenship education, also widely known as moral education in China, is inextricably tied to social and political situations, as well as to ideological and political education (Law, 2013; Lee & Ho, 2005). China’s civics curriculum is a crucial component in achieving the goals of ideological-political education and is strictly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), both in terms of the process of textbook production and consumption and in the curriculum goals for national identification (Tan et al., 2011). Since 2016, the central government has tightened its control over the civics curriculum. For instance, in 2016 the CCP released a policy on the development of textbooks that, for the first time, explicitly stressed the state’s control over textbook construction (MOE, 2020). In 2017, the State Council decided to establish the National Teaching Materials Committee, whose primary responsibilities include guiding and revising textbooks nationwide, as well as implementing the CCP’s policies on textbooks. Moreover, the subject of *Thought and Character* (思想品德 *sixiang pinde*) was renamed as *Morality and Rule of Law* (道德与法治 *daode yu fazhi*) at the stage of compulsory education in September 2017. All types of schools, including private international schools, were required to offer this curriculum with the Ministry of Education (MOE) -compiled textbooks.

Simultaneously, globalization has elicited new concerns for citizenship education in China. Even though GCE was not explicitly mentioned as an educational keyword in official policies, it has been indirectly brought about by the growing interest in the agendas of China Education Modernization 2035 and the trend of the internationalization of education. For civics curriculum, globalization has also brought about new representations of its underlying nationalist traditions (Law, 2006). In recent decades, the narratives of the world and other nation-states in civics textbooks have shifted from exclusive and negative to inclusive and optimistic (Shi et al., 2019; Tse, 2011). According to the *Curricular Standard of Morality and Rule of Law* that was recently promulgated by the (MOE 2022), the entire volume of the second semester of grade nine in *Morality and Rule of Law* concerned global topics and aimed to enable students to “comprehend the changes in the world, the connotation of the common values of all humans, and the importance of constructing a community of common destiny for mankind” (MOE, 2022, p. 41). Specifically, political initiatives such as “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind”¹ and “The Belt and Road”² both proposed by Xi Jinping are particularly prevalent in global-related chapters of the new textbook. These political phrases are

united with classical Confucianism to legitimize nationalism in the face of globalization, aiming to build a harmonious world, promote the revival of China's past greatness and national rejuvenation, and showcase China's soft power (Bell, 2014; Guo, 2004; Qian, 2022).

In this regard, some literature has explored how citizenship education in China strikes a balance between globalization and the requirements of nationalism and national identification. Tse (2011) and Zhao (2013) indicate that China's civics curriculum has gradually emphasized GCE by introducing new global topics. Along this line of argument, Law (2006), Shi et al. (2019) state that ideas of global citizenship and multiple levels of citizenship, from local to national to global, have started to develop in China. In this process, GCE – as a new face of citizenship education – is inextricably linked to the game of ideologies and hidden agendas (Camicia & Zhu, 2011; Yemini, 2018). According to Zhu and Camicia (2014), the discursive field of citizenship education is fractured, dynamic, and context-specific. They claim that nationalism, cosmopolitanism, neoliberalism, and Confucianism are espoused in China's citizenship education; these conceptions maintain the status quo and hegemonic control of society's most powerful group, rather than facilitating Chinese citizens' emancipatory movements.

Existing research has investigated the relationship between national citizenship and global citizenship, if not between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, in China's citizenship education by focusing on official policy documents and textbooks. However, few studies have explored the discursive practice or the recontextualizing principles in the field of educational practice. To supplement these arguments, this paper draws on the perceptions of China's civics teachers to examine not only the underlying value orientations of GCE, but also the relations of control or struggle within it. In brief, this study explores two primary questions:

- (1) How do Chinese teachers of the civics curriculum represent GCE?
- (2) What value presuppositions and power relations are implied by their representations?

Theoretical framework: Bernstein's pedagogic discourse

This study adopts Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse to explain the recontextualizing principles of GCE in the participants' representations. Bernstein (2000) criticizes works that are only concerned with the superficial messages of pedagogic communication and what is delivered or relayed while neglecting the constitution of the relay itself. Instead, he focuses on the ways a pedagogic device functions in maintaining a certain social order, which implies a theoretical position on viewing schooling as an arena of value negotiation and resistance. According to Bernstein (1990, 2000), pedagogic discourse appears to be a discourse without a discourse. He refers to pedagogic discourse as "a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into a special relation with each other for the purposes of their selective transmission and acquisition" (Bernstein, 1990, p. 159). In line with this, pedagogic discourse – as a recontextualizing principle – selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses, and relates other discourses to constitute its own order; it involves transferring parts or elements of interactions and texts out of their original context into a different context (Bernstein, 2000). Pedagogic discourse as a rule is made up of two discourses: regulative discourse and instructional discourse. Regulative discourse relates to the role of pedagogies in constituting social relations and orders, whereas instructional discourse concerns the transmission and acquisition of knowledge. Fundamentally, regulative discourse produces the order in the instructional discourse. As Clark (2005) highlighted, Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse has the benefit of offering an account of how cultural reproduction operates. Such a conception is consistently the aim of this study in GCE, in which the ideologically formed notion of global citizenship has been transferred into educational terminology and has been altered in the realm of school education. Taking a Bernsteinian approach to analysing GCE does not assume a direct link between political ideology and schooling; instead, it pinpoints the discursive practice that delocates or borrows from other discourses and relocates them within itself, i.e., the so-called recontextualizing

rules (Bernstein, 2000; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). In this regard, teachers, as pedagogic agents in the field of pedagogic recontextualization, may thus represent GCE differently than the GCE discourse reflected in textbooks and educational policy in the field of official pedagogic recontextualization. Although teachers' perception of GCE may still be essentially determined by the social order in which it operates, it has undergone a process of recontextualization within the pedagogic concepts and power relations of the educational system.

We must acknowledge that Bernstein's theory is very abstract and open to multiple interpretations (Muller, 2004). In this work, we focus on his notions of pedagogic discourse, regulative discourse, and instructional discourse to assess the value assumptions and the educational power relations they mirror, as embedded in GCE in China's civics curriculum. As noted earlier, GCE is primarily susceptible to the prevailing ideological influence of the society in which it functions. However, in the context of education, it must provide instructional discourse nested in regulative discourse. In this context, we examine how teachers' conceptions of global citizenship are governed by certain ideological values and how the social orders regulate teachers' languages on GCE teaching and learning issues. Analysing this recontextualization can shed light on how the teachers' imagination of global citizenship is constrained within a particular political or cultural structure, the ways the teachers transmit political values in GCE, and the tensions and contradictions teachers encounter when translating political ideologies into the representations of GCE.

Methodology

Setting and participants

Teachers' perceptions of GCE are influenced, not only by the political and cultural contexts in which they reside, but also by their personal experiences, school environments, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Goren & Yemini, 2017b). Therefore, this study confines itself to an area with the same regional policy radiation and, while capturing the heterogeneity in the selection of the school samples. Shanghai was selected because it is one of China's most frontier metropolitans, responsive to national policies which are timelier and more intertwined with international affairs than other regions (Lee & Leung, 2006).

Interviews were conducted with 17 civics curriculum teachers across 17 public and private international secondary schools in Shanghai. The decision to select two kinds of schools was based on the state policy promulgated in 2019, which claims that both public schools and private international schools for Chinese students are required to provide the same state-sanctioned civics curriculum with official teaching materials made by the MOE since 2016 (State Council, 2019). Some schools and participants were accessed through the researcher's personal ties, while others were accessed through snowball sampling and a gatekeeper in charge of teacher training programmes. The 17 participants included a wide range of backgrounds in terms of sex, teaching age, and institution (as shown in Table 1).

Due to the exploratory character of the study, semi-structured interviews were employed to allow participants to elaborate on three areas: (1) personal background in terms of titles of major works and years of experience; (2) their understanding of global citizenship and GCE; and (3) GCE-relevant practices in their daily teaching and its challenges. Further questions have been asked based on the participants' responses.

Critical discourse analysis

CDA combines critique of discourse with an explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing reality; it views discourse as a practice not just of representing the world, but of constituting and constructing the world in meaning (Fairclough, 2015). In educational research, CDA offers an approach to conceptualizing interactions that is compatible with sociocultural

Table 1. Participants' details.

| No. | Sex | Teaching experience | Subject teacher and administrative position | School type |
|-----|--------|---------------------|---|---------------|
| 1 | Male | 12 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 2 | Female | 17 years | Civics teacher, Moral education director | Public |
| 3 | Female | 3 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 4 | Female | 8 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 5 | Female | 2 years | Civics teacher | International |
| 6 | Female | 23 years | Civics teacher, Moral education director | Public |
| 7 | Female | 1 year | Civics teacher | Public |
| 8 | Female | 23 years | Civics teacher, School office director | Public |
| 9 | Female | 4 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 10 | Male | 6 years | Civics teacher | International |
| 11 | Female | 2 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 12 | Female | 13 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 13 | Male | 25 years | Civics teacher, Civics curriculum leader | Public |
| 14 | Female | 20 years | Civics teacher, Grade leader | Public |
| 15 | Female | 24 years | Civics teacher, School CCP branch leader | Public |
| 16 | Female | 2 years | Civics teacher | Public |
| 17 | Male | 20 years | Civics teacher | Public |

perspectives and which complements the understanding of the abstract workings of pedagogic discourse with a method for textual and discursive analysis (Chouliaraki, 1998; Rogers, 2011; Signh et al., 2013; Yan, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, the study is based on 17 interviews with teachers in Shanghai. Following Fairclough's (2015, p. 58) suggestion, this study treats the interviews as "texts" to see how meaning is constructed and recontextualized within the pedagogic device. The analysis comprised three stages. First, the interview transcripts were analysed using thematic coding which addressed not only what participants said, but also the perspectives they adopted. The parts of interview transcripts link to GCE were selected and categorized thematically using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (Saldaña, 2016). Ultimately, five categories emerged from the data after two rounds of meticulous coding, and these were combined into two overarching themes: conceptual implications and educational practices. These themes and subcategories identify the texts that are used for linguistic analysis and build the main structure for the presentation of the findings. The second stage of analysis considered how events and people are represented in teachers' interviews. Specifically, a range of linguistic features including vocabularies and semantic relations between words, such as hyponyms, metaphors, collocational patterns, and presuppositions were examined with a focus on the themes in the participants' responses, and the discourse types which the text drew upon (Fairclough, 2003). Third, the linguistic findings were complemented with further interpretation and explanation (presented in the discussion below) to identify the connections both between the parts of interviews, and between the parts of interviews and the educational and sociopolitical context. Accordingly, the dependence of GCE on background assumptions and the ideological properties of these assumptions which link them to relations of power are revealed.

Research findings

The findings are organized according to the two main themes that emerged from the interviews: conceptual implications and educational practices. Examining the content and perspectives of the participants' expressions reveals that the majority view the notion of global citizenship from a political and cultural standpoint. Constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, the roles of learners and teachers, and teaching reference resources are the main aspects they refer to when they engage in relevant GCE practices. These themes and their subcategories are described below with detailed linguistic analysis of typical extracts from the participants' responses.

Conceptual implications

The necessity of global perspectives for national identification

The majority of teachers displayed their understanding of “global citizenship” and “global citizenship education” with an expressive modal meaning of possibility; they often used the modal auxiliaries “may” (e.g., 可能 *keneng*; 也许 *yexu*; 或许 *huoxu*) and very tentative expressions (e.g., “I wonder maybe this concept might refer to ...”). Synonyms such as “global thinking”, “global perspective”, “global awareness”, and “global vision” were frequently mentioned as alternatives. This indicates that the majority of teachers were unfamiliar with the terms “global citizenship” and “global citizenship education”, but they agreed that the notion of “global” was an essential and valued component of their curriculum. When the teachers attempted to articulate their understanding of global citizenship, they uniformly highlighted the convergence of GCE with patriotism and viewed it favourably. The responses below typified this occurrence.

For example, we now have the Belt and Road Initiative, right? In fact, these grips, and Community of Common Destiny for Mankind. These elements are blended into curriculum teaching materials, and then we consciously create situations to support pupils, which signifies a global perspective and education in global citizenship. (Teacher #12)

Students’ consciousness of Community of Common Destiny for Mankind must be gradually developed. It is vital to our subject to foster students’ abilities to comprehend problems in-depth and to expand their horizons. Discussing diverse worldwide public issues... and helps pupils understand and encourage patriotic feelings, which is one of our curriculum goals. (Teacher #14)

The aforementioned responses demonstrate how participants use political phrases, such as “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind” and “the Belt and Road”, to explain the importance of GCE for pupils. The prevalence of these terms in the participants’ statements indicates a shared imagination or expectation of the nation and an understanding of people as global citizens with shared values, such as peace, development, and justice. Furthermore, a reciprocal, conditional relation between a “global vision” and a “patriotic spirit” can be found in some participants’ phrasing of GCE.

Patriotism is not incompatible with the global perspective. You can only be more patriotic if you have a better awareness of the entire planet. You have a complete understanding of the globe, so you may look back and uncover some of the country’s positive side, which you will soon be proud of. (Teacher #7)

The words “if” and “so” in this participant’s expressions are the cue for an assumption necessary to give coherence to two terms: “patriotism” and “global perspective”. Teacher #7 believed that an understanding of the world is a prerequisite for a patriotic orientation and that only by learning both the good and bad sides of the world in a variety of ways can people have a less biased approach to their own community. Teacher #7 also regarded patriotism as a prerequisite for global comprehension as it prevents one from being swayed by “other” beliefs.

Teacher #6’s concise phrase can vividly summarize the positioning of patriotism and nationalism in teachers’ perceptions of GCE. In her words, “Chinese core, global trend” (中国核, 世界流 *zhongguo he shijie liu*) emphasizes adopting a China-centric posture in the trend of globalization and shows a national perspective of GCE. She explained:

Global citizenship education, in my opinion, is a crucial component of our curriculum. Why is it necessary? I believe it is essential to cultivate the “Chinese core, global trend” for the youngsters. We should have a patriotic heart, should understand what Chinese core is. I am Chinese, and I am proud of my country. Global trend: we are in the current social background; I should grasp and know each country’s position and their plans to prepare for our own country’s future integration into the world. We should have such a vision. It is important. (Teacher #6)

In addition, “rational patriotism” (理性的爱国 *lixing de aiguo*; Teachers #7, 11, 17) as a collocation, i.e., a pattern of co-occurrence of words in texts, was referred to by several respondents as a priori, inescapable, and an unavoidable horizon and component of national identification education. In this view, GCE is legitimated by functioning as both a precondition and a result of “rational patriotism” in

the form of semantic causal and conditional relations of purpose that are explicitly marked by connectors (e.g., “if”, “so that”, “in order to”, etc.).

The compatibility of global ethics with Confucian virtues

Moreover, the participants held the view that there are universal obligations and virtues that apply to everyone. They tended to combine personal, national, and global development in a ripple pattern or concentric circle to illustrate how GCE covers and links the content of each dimension. As Teacher #2 stated, only when an individual loves themselves, their family, and their nation, could they extend that love to the global community. Without the preceding link, worldly love was superficial. Furthermore, several interviewees directly quoted a Confucian classic to express their understanding of GCE:

GCE should be founded on our traditional culture, which emphasizes “self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and bringing peace to all under heaven” (修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下 xiushen, qijia, zhiguo, pingtianxia). We must have the mentality of “the vast ocean that accepts hundreds of rivers emptying into it” (海纳百川 haina baichuan). Therefore, when discussing big topics, such as environmental protection and sustainability, we must consider what individual students can do and what rights and obligations they have. (Teacher #12)

The Confucian classic mentioned by the interviewee extracted from “The Great Learning” (大学 *daxue*) is well-known to all Chinese; it represents a process whereby an individual’s virtue and self-improvement are inseparable from their political aspirations of serving and benefiting an ever-larger whole. This intertextuality reveals that teachers reproduced their perceptions of GCE in terms of traditional Confucian culture, thereby anchoring GCE in the pursuit of students’ personal moral traits, including empathy, fairness, and kindness (Teacher #1, 2, 3, 6, 14), which were thought to be universally possessed by all humans.

In summary, “global” characteristics, including “global citizenship”, were assigned extremely positive implications by the respondents. Such views of globality believe that it can both advance in harmony with patriotism and also embody the individual qualities of open-mindedness and broadness that the Chinese have always admired.

Educational practices

Constructivist teaching and learning strategies

Responses relating to the participants’ GCE practices reflected their strong willingness to bring attention to global issues in their classroom. Meanwhile they noticed that their daily curricular education comprised various GCE-related educational practices. Numerous participants provided real-world teaching and learning examples for this, such as giving students 15 minutes before daily classroom instruction to share global news (Teachers #9, 11, 13, 15), creating a multicultural environment (Teacher #10), organizing inquiry and investigating activities related to environmental production issues (Teacher #8), and having classroom dialogues and debates on international issues (Teachers #3, 5, 9, 12, 17). Many constructivist teaching and learning concepts, such as inquiry-based learning, situated learning, and cooperative learning, typically arise in the formulation of these activities. This overwording, i.e., a discursive strategy that employs terms from semantically related domains and suggests “intense preoccupation” that points to “inconsistencies in the ideology” of the group that adopts it (Fairclough 1992, p. 193), suggests a preoccupation with constructivist teaching and learning as an alternative to a tradition of inculcation. In addition, “Core Competencies”, a crucial term advocated by Chinese academia in recent curriculum reform, was also commonly used by teachers to underscore the connection between GCE and the state-sanctioned civics curriculum they teach (Teachers #2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 17). By focusing on international understanding competency as one of the officially recommended competencies, teachers aimed to show that they favoured the development of students’ global awareness over the transmission objective knowledge in their everyday curriculum practice. Influenced by the constructivist orientation of China’s recent

curriculum reforms (Tan, 2017), the participants naturally believed that GCE and the core purpose of the official curriculum were aligned; that is, they should both pursue the attributes of student-centred and individual constructivism.

The roles of learners and educators

The representation of learners in the interview transcripts centred on pronouns: “pupils” (学生 *xuesheng*) and “children” (孩子 *haizi*). Teachers were more inclined to share their ideals and expectations of students rather than describing what students have done or could do. Here, in terms of the grammatical forms of relevant clauses, students as participants were mostly affected by or are beneficiaries of external actions. Furthermore, junior high school students were seen as “naïve” (Teacher #6), “cognitively immature” (Teachers #6, 14), and “unsophisticated” (Teachers #8, 13) by the participants. Given that pupil’s cognitive level is incompletely developed, as suggested by Teacher #2, educators are responsible for ensuring that instructional content has a clear stance and values to avoid value misunderstanding.

Our current kids, especially junior high students ... their values are still in the process of being formed. Secondary education does not equal higher education. You can’t combine so many different ideas and perspectives and expect them to conduct their own research and draw their own conclusions. As a result, you [as an educator] must have your own point of view. In other words, you have to believe what you say first, right? If there is no core value, children will be perplexed.(Teacher #2)

Teachers, as the other actors in the classroom, were characterized as incompetent and lacking in effort. The interviewees believed that GCE, unlike subjects such as mathematics and science, was extremely demanding on teachers’ capacity and initiative. Civics teachers were required to be willing to change and continue to learn (Teacher #17); to be able to assist learners in resolving problems regarding social reality (Teacher #9, 17); to believe and comprehend what they teach (Teacher #6, 10, 14); and to have adequate techniques to effectively organize teaching in classroom (Teacher #7, 8, 12, 15, 17). However, there was always a gap between their everyday curricular instruction and an ideal one because teachers expressed that it was difficult to have the courage to step outside the norms. For example, one participant stated “Staying in such a system for a long time, we teachers lack the courage to change. There is a lot of staying in one’s comfort zone and being unwilling to mess around” (Teacher #2). Another remarked, “In fact, we all have cognitive inertia, and it is the role of teachers to challenge and question the content of the textbooks. However, this is hard to do” (Teacher #17).

Official textbooks and state-owned media as educational sources

Based on the aforementioned view of the GCE participants, the respondents primarily exhibited two separate approaches when discussing GCE-related curriculum content. One was repeating relevant sections of the textbook *Morality and Rule of Law* that include international or global issues (e.g., Teachers #4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15). The other was to note that GCE requires a great deal of international affairs discussion and commentary. The teachers would then claim that their own abilities restricted the classroom presentation of controversial global topics; for instance, “They might not understand, and I cannot explain it clearly” (Teacher #3), “I’m unable to speak clearly, so I cannot truly comment on this” (Teacher #4), and “Only senior teachers can handle these topics” (Teacher #7). Therefore, they would avoid discussing certain controversial issues in the classroom (e.g., Teachers #1, 4, 5) and instead, gather relevant information from state-owned medias (e.g., the “Study and Make the Nation Great” Application³, the Website of China Central TV) to prepare their classroom instruction from a “correct” perspective (e.g., Teachers #3, 4, 7, 11); this definition of correct refers to maintaining congruence with the official guidance. Consequently, the teachers lack the courage to offer information from sources other than state-approved textbooks and information portals. They tend to purposefully downplay contentious issues and conflicting opinions and choose what to teach based on textbooks and official curriculum standards.

Discussion: an epistemological concern in recontextualization

Although unfamiliar with GCE, participants were confident that it is represented in the national civics curriculum and does not conflict with China's existing national identity-focused civics education. Political rhetoric and Confucian values heavily impacted the teachers' conceptions of global citizenship. In addition, teachers emphasized the importance of constructivist teaching strategies for GCE implementation and said textbooks and official materials were their main teaching resources in their GCE-relevant curriculum activities. Teachers saw that GCE required a high degree of professionalism and initiative, but few had these qualities, and their motivation to improve was poor.

According to the participants' descriptions, Chinese secondary school teachers tend to align GCE with constructivist teaching strategies. Notions such as authentic learning environments and student-centred environments penetrated teachers' concepts of GCE and even the "good" education. However, is it really the case that teachers engage with such emergent meanings? Hong (2022) pointed out that embracing student-centred learning in GCE is conflict with the ideo-political discourse and ethnonationalism that defends local culture. In accordance with the findings of this study, when both nationalist ideology and constructivist educational concepts are emphasized in GCE, teachers' statements contain an epistemological contradiction that dispels the signified of constructivist-related terms.

Theoretically, constructivism generally questions the idea that a student passively obtains knowledge about an objective and external reality. It maintains that information is absorbed when the student engages in knowledge-building activities (Lowenthal & Muth, 2008). Simply put, knowledge is "made" rather than "discovered" (Phillips, 1995, p. 7). In the past two decades, although constructivist ideas have not been specifically marked in official policies, such theories have received a great deal of attention in Chinese educational academia, which seeks to change the tradition of examination-oriented education in China (Gu, 2015; Jiang et al., 2016; Zhong & Jiang, 2004). The interviewed teachers reported that these constructivist concepts were frequently mentioned in their teacher training programmes in higher education institutions where they learned the strategies to reform their classrooms. However, the participants' ways of representing these constructivist ideas are mostly employed as methods to arrange daily reading and writing in classrooms, rather than worked as rules, regulations, or routines. This can be demonstrated from two aspects: the selection of subject matter and the roles of the participants.

First, nationalism and Confucianism are dominant in teachers' imaginations of global citizenship, which leads to a nation-centric perspective for representing global topics and educational aims and limits the knowledge selection and discussion scope in the classroom. Only topics that can provoke patriotic feelings and cultivate national identity, and resources that are officially sanctioned and endorsed by the CCP-led government, are welcome in the classroom. In this case, the learning objective, content, and position are essentially defined within the premise of bolstering the sense of national identity, despite the fact that the learning process and approaches may be diverse.

Second, teachers self-evaluated as inadequate in their abilities to address challenging global topics though they may appear to be competent in terms of instructional techniques. Teachers believed that students' abilities to understand certain grand international issues and make value judgements were extremely limited. Teachers' self-identity and perceptions of their students' abilities affect their classroom engagement. Hence, teachers might organize activities in a variety of ways, but they always rely on the official information supplied by MOE-compiled textbooks and educational policies to ensure that they are the authority on the classroom's most crucial facts, issues, and value judgements.

This reveals that the regulative discourse about the relationships, orders, rules, and identities in education are fundamentally controlled by nationalism (Bernstein, 1990, 2000), and it also maintains to some degree the traditional norms in China's education (i.e., content mastery, knowledge transmission, and exam orientation). This hinders the internalization and implementation of transformational pedagogical theories by educators. Consequently, concepts and signifiers associated

with constructivist theory that the teachers learned from academia tend to become deployed as a technique that conceals *what* learners learn and emphasizes the issues of *how* learners learn. The concepts of constructivism in teachers' expressions represent the means and methods for organizing and arranging how teachers can teach and students can learn the official knowledge in textbooks more effectively, rather than a constructivist ethical and epistemological assumption of knowledge that viewing all knowledge is socially constructed and that teaching and learning is an active and negotiating process (Phillips, 1995).

As opposed to worries that constructivist ideas would overwhelmingly replace or overpower the Confucian pedagogic norms (e.g., Wang, 2004), we argue that constructivist ideas within GCE are dominated by China's political ideologies and cultural traditions which contributes to the indoctrination-style educational order, relations, and identity and strongly frame the civics curriculum (Bernstein, 1990). In this setting, such a recontextualizing principle creates teachers as agents with recontextualizing functions (Bernstein, 2000), who tend to meet the official requirements for the cultivation of national identification and the professional requirements for the improvement of pedagogical approaches in the era of globalization. Given that GCE and conventional national citizenship education are so inextricably connected, teachers find it challenging to relinquish the stance by which they handle diversity and address issues containing latent value conflict from a nationalistic perspective. Concerns about unsanctioned information that could undermine official core values in China (Tan, 2017) lead teachers to defer to the authority of official knowledge and view anything unrelated or in opposition to it as harmful or unmanageable. This epistemic restriction largely obstructs the imaginaries of alternative GCE in China.

Conclusion

This study found that despite teachers' attempts to describe GCE by constructivist teaching and learning notions, the central role of CCP-sanctioned official knowledge and teachers' unwillingness to confront controversial topics indicate that these transformative educational theories have not fundamentally altered the traditional norms of China's citizenship education and have unwittingly aided the operation of nationalism in GCE.

This study demonstrated, using China as a case, a potential practical obstacle that "new cosmopolitanism" theories may face in GCE. According to research on the tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism, the nation-centric version of GCE emerging from this study is comparable to new cosmopolitanism voices such as universal cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, 1996), "rooted cosmopolitanism", or "cosmopolitan patriotism" (Appiah, 1997, p. 168), which advocate preserving cultural identity while recognizing universal global virtues. Based on the case of China, when these orientations are applied to GCE, the resulting educational approach may not only fail to encourage people to extend their sense of political community outward (Pashby, 2013) but, coupled with the strong framing of schooling, may also increase the transmission of homogenized information. Such a nation-centred GCE does, in fact, circumvent the Eurocentric and relativistic values that may result from educating learners in global ethics (Papastephanou, 2018; Wright, 2012), but it tends to marginalize voices of education and restrict the power of educational transformation. Moreover, at the discursive level, when GCE functions as nation-building, it inevitably restricts the possibility of other value expressions and tends to obliterate ethnic diversity within and beyond its state territory. China's case shows that promoting GCE in national curricula that aim to construct national identity is likely to be counterproductive and restrict the discursive space.

We identify two key issues for consideration in GCE in light of its strong framing feature in China. First, following Biesta's (2022, p. 8) call for a better way of speaking that "does not dissolve the complex normative and political questions concerning education into 'smooth' technical language of learning", an essential starting point would be to reflect the pragmatic understanding of educational ideas, to challenge their expectations of education and the notions (e.g., student-centred, global perspective) that are accepted without further epistemological consideration. Second, it is

utopian to disregard the prevailing educational norms and tradition but to highlight teachers' autonomy unilaterally. Teachers' agency cannot be fostered by teachers themselves, but rather by all the participants in various educational system domains (Priestley et al., 2015). Critical and reflective analysis of the educational practice of GCE is required to enlarge the space for GCE. Views on post-critical GCE (Andreotti, 2021; Boiso, 2021; Pashby et al., 2020; Stein, 2015) could facilitate educational researchers and practitioners' ongoing self-reflection and dialogues regarding the epistemological constraints and action inertia they face.

Finally, regarding the study's limitations, due to the coronavirus pandemic, China's schools have severely restricted access to campuses. As a result, this study focused solely on the narratives of teachers as provided in in-depth personal interviews with a limited number of educators. The conclusions based on the self-declarations and reflections of the participants may not always correspond with what occurs in their classrooms. To widen and deepen understandings of the inner tensions and negotiations on GCE within classroom interactions, we encourage future research to move beyond the official educational field and conduct classroom observations to investigate the implemented curriculum.

Notes

1. Community of Common Destiny for Mankind, officially translated as community with a shared future for mankind (人类命运共同体 *renlei mingyun gongtongti*), is a political slogan by the CCP to describe a stated foreign-policy goal of China.
2. The Belt and Road Initiative, formerly known as One Belt One Road (一带一路 *yidai yilu*), is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted in 2013 by the Chinese government to invest in approximately 150 countries and international organizations.
3. Study and Make the Nation Great is an instant messenger, news aggregator, and social network that was introduced by the CCP.

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