

CGC Seminar on Researching Citizenship Education in China - New Directions and New Thinking

Date: 21st June 2011 (Tuesday)

Time: 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Rationalized Paternalism:

Structuring Chinese Moral Education

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The aim of this presentation is to explore the process by which rationality, especially in education, combines with paternalism to strengthen the legitimacy claims of the Chinese state, with a specific focus on the intersection of these two institutions in the area of moral education. It starts from the premise that proper governance in the Chinese tradition encompasses the promotion of morality among the people, or rule by morality. As an enduring institution, such governance is exemplified in the attention to moral education by all Chinese states from the late Imperial period to the present, with this moral paternalism serving as an important state legitimacy claim. At the same time, while Chinese states also come from a long bureaucratic tradition, rationality in governance with regard to the various functions of the state has significantly strengthened since the mid-1800s, especially in the post-1978 reform period of rapid modernization and development, also strengthening the state's legitimacy claims. The intersection of paternalism and rationality has been particularly manifest in the reform period in the increased structuring of moral education in terms of frameworks, support, delivery, and monitoring. Drawing from detailed analysis of national, provincial, and municipal level moral education policy directives, the paper concludes that while state control over moral education and socialization is strict with regard to potentially legitimacy-threatening aspects such as textbooks and electronic communications, strengthened moral education structures themselves buffer the state from threats to legitimacy due to gaps between stated moral education policy goals and actual implementation.