

Tracking Subjectivity in Political Socialization: University Students' Perceptions of Citizenship Learning Experiences in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract : There is widespread debate about the nationalistic top-down approach to citizenship education. Employing the notion of cultural citizenship as a useful theoretical lens, citizenship education research tends to focus on the process of subjectivity construction among students' citizenship learning process. As the Communist Party of China (CPC) plays a dominant role in cultivating citizens through ideological and political education (IaPE) in Chinese universities, the research problem herein focuses on the dynamics and complexity of how Chinese university students construct their subjectivities regarding citizenship learning through IaPE, mediated by the interaction between the state and university teachers. Drawing on questionnaire data from 212 students and interview data from 25 students in one university in China, this paper examines the ways in which students understand and respond to dominant discourses. Its findings reveal there is a deficit of citizenship learning in IaPE, and that students feel ideologically pressurized. From its analysis of social contexts' influence, the article suggests Chinese higher education students act as either mild changemakers or active self-motivators to enact complex subjectivities, in that they must involve themselves in IaPE for personal academic and career development, yet adopt covert strategies to realise their self-conscious citizenship learning expectations. These strategies take the form of passive and active freedoms, ranging from obediently completing basic curriculum requirements and distancing themselves by studying abroad, to actively searching for learning opportunities from other courses and social media. This paper contributes to the research on citizenship education by recognizing the complexities of how subjectivities are formed in formal university settings.

Keywords : university students, citizenship learning, cultural citizenship, subjectivity, Chinese higher education

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