DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 318 320 HE 023 353

AUTHOR Hayhoe, Ruth
TITLE Chinese Higher Education and Commodity Socialism: The Problem of Political Education.
PUB DATE 1 Apr 89
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society (Cambridge, MA, April 1, 1989).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Trends; Foreign Countries; *Free Enterprise System; Higher Education; Models; Political Attitudes; *Political Socialization; *Trend Analysis; Values
IDENTIFIERS *China

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews trends in political education in China and examines implications of the new market emphasis on political education in institutions of higher education. Trends toward increased academic openness and cross fertilization among academic fields after the Cultural Revolution are identified. Reforms during this period are seen to have focused on guiding student energies along lines acceptable to Party reform directions and not deviating essentially from traditional Confucian approaches. The more recent emphasis on money and market forces is considered in the context of its role in steering Chinese society. The model of J. Habermas in his critique of western capitalism is applied to the current situation in China, suggesting that the release of money as a steering mechanism is shaking up social and cultural patterns and leading to a sense of meaninglessness among university students. The effects of political education under commodity socialism are briefly considered from three different perspectives: (1) largely positive; (2) mixed; and (3) limited strictly to the economic realm. (DB)

Chinese Higher Education and Commodity Socialism: The Problem of Political Education

by

Ruth Hayhoe

Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Harvard University, April 1, 1989. Not to be cited.

Table of Contents

1. Modernization as Commodity Socialism

In the first period after the Revolution of 1949 the Chinese saw their development in terms not of modernization but of socialist construction. For this there was a ready made model - that of the Soviet Union - and higher education was completely reformed under Soviet guidance to suit the needs of socialist production. The success in production that resulted can be easily documented, especially in the area of the development of a heavy industrial base, also in agriculture[1] yet the social and cultural rigidities that were part of planned socialist construction led to a series of upheavals culminating in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when development was seen in terms of the revolutionary transformation of social relations which should in turn open the way for a grass roots economic growth. The social-political chaos and economic slowdown that actually resulted reached the point in 1976 when the death of Mao made possible the emergence of a new pragmatist leadership under Deng Xiaoping bent on four modernizations. This seems to be the first time since 1949 that the term modernization took a central place in China's social goals and concomitant with this internal reorientation came an external remaking of ties with Japan and the capitalist West, also with such organizations as the IMF and the World Bank. The specificity of the Four Modernizations (agriculture, industry, national defence, science and technology) has gradually given way to more general modernization goals, including the demands for political structure reform, first raised in 1986 and ongoing. Economically there has been increasing space given to market mechanisms within what remains an overall planned economy, stimulated by increasing efforts to enter capitalist world markets and inspired by the achievements of the so-called Asian dragons (the capitalist economies of Taiwan, South Korea etc.). The utilization of the market and the freer circulation of money that has resulted led to the definition of China's present development stage as the initial stage of socialism at the 13th Party Congress in October of 1987.[2] Subsequently this initial stage of Chinese socialism has been characterized as "commodity socialism" or a socialist commodity economy" a term that seems to combine socialist construction with modernization.[3]

---

[1] *Ten Great Years* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960).

[2] "Ten Examples of the Initial Stage of Socialism," *Jingji ribao* 21 October, 1987, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report (FBIS)*, No. 209, 29 October, 1988, p. 27.

[3] Gao Shangquan, "Develop Theories on the Socialist Commodity Economy in the Course of Deepening Reform in All Fields," *Renmin ribao* 18 Nov., 1988 in *FBIS*, 1988, No. 233, 5 Dec. 1988, p. 58.

It is in terms of this tr .nsition that higher education theorists are reflecting on reforms in the higher education system.[4] After the end of the Cultural Revolution trauma, the patterns revived in 1978 were essentially the Soviet patterns of the fifties, where knowledge within the higher curriculum was specifically linked to the "production" of socialist construction in all of the major sectors, as well as reflecting the classical academic disciplines which had been preserved intact under Soviet socialism. Chinese critiques of this knowledge system between 1978 and 1986 focused on the narrow specialization it fostered and the tendency to sterility that blocked the innovative, flexible thinking needed for technological change. My own analysis of the situation[5] suggested that this knowledge system made possible the preservation of patterns of political control and social order deeply rooted in Confucian tradition. While the Cultural Revolution attack on the system threw it into disarray, it produced no viable alternative and so its re-instatement in 1978. The reforms in the higher curriculum from 1978 to 1985 were largely academically inspired and saw a revitalization and opening up of the social sciences, which had been most strictly regulated under Soviet patterns, as well as the cross fertilization of applied and basic scientific fields which led to the training of young people more able to adapt their knowledge and skills to changing industrial and technical needs. Basically these reforms were inspired by older scholars who had studied in Europe and the United States in the forties, and growing contacts with educators of OECD countries in the eighties. The tension created by the reforms can be seen most strikingly in the demands of intellectuals for political structure reform in the spring of 1986 and the student movement from December of 1986 to January of 1987, with its call for greater democracy - condemned rather half-heartedly in an official campaign against bourgeois liberalization in the spring of 1987.[6]

However it is really only in the last two years that a new dimension has begun to impinge on higher education, bringing a sobering note to the ongoing reforms. The transition is now not seen as one from product-oriented socialism to greater intellectual autonomy and a broader conception of knowledge, but to a kind of higher education that suits and serves commodity socialism. Universities are encouraged to increase as far as

---

[4]See *Renmin ribao* 24 August, 1988 for the report of a speech by Li Tieying on higher education reform in terms of the transition from a production economy to a commodity economy.

[5]R. Hayhoe, *China's Universities and the Open Door* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989).

[6]R. Hayhoe, "China's Intellectuals in the World Community," in *Higher Education*, VOl. 17, No. 1 (1988).

possible "horizontal" sources of funding through contracts with central ministries, regions and enterprises for both personnel training and research in specific areas,[7] and students have become caught up in the excitement of "knowledge as a commodity," in many cases starting small businesses on or off campus which enable them to make money.[8] The "hot" subjects which increasingly attract student interest are commercially oriented ones and both general academic seriousness and the interest in demanding programs of graduate study are reported by professors to have lessened in the last year or two.[9] The craze seems to be either to go abroad, if possible, or to make money as quickly as possible by whatever means come to hand.

A recent visit to China and wide-ranging discussion with faculty, administrators and students made me sense a real crisis situation, even though research and teaching generally seem to be going on well. My sense was that the obsession with money - reflected in both student behavior and in bitter complaints from professors about the economic undervaluing of their "intellectual labor" - went beyond a desire for the goods that are increasingly prevalent - the ubiquitous refrigerators, washing machines and televisions that were so much rarer in the early eighties - to a fascination with the social power exercised by money under commodity socialism.

This has led me in turn to some reflections as to whether aspects of the critique Habermas has developed of the capitalist modernization process might not be cautiously applied to the Chinese context, and illumine the rapid process of change now underway.

Habermas uses the image of an uncoupling of system and cultural life world in his analysis of the pathology of the western mdoernization process - with the steering mechanisms of money and power institutionalized in the capitalist economy and the modern bureaucratic state dominating development and resulting in a colonization of the cultural life world that erodes both the freedom of individuals and their sense of meaning.[10] His prescription for the redemption of modernity lies in the conception of

---

[7]R. Hayhoe, "Shanghai as a Mediator of the Educational Open Door," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer, 1988).

[8]Zhang Hua, "End Business Fever in College Students," *China Daily* 9 August, 1988, p. 4

[9]"University Students 'Craze for Schooling' Declines," Beijing: *Xinhua* in Chinese 25 August, 1988 in *FBIS*, 1988, No. 167 29 August, 1988, p. 24-5.

[10]Habermas, Juergen, *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol. 2 *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), especially chapter VI.

communicative action, a process whereby the lifeworld is rationalized through an interconnecting of debates in the instrumental technical sphere related to the truth claims of modern science and technology with open discussion in the sphere of moral-practical reason over norms of rightness and in the aesthetic-expressive sphere over the authenticity of self presentation.

My sense of the Chinese case as sketched out above is of a modernization process since 1949 in which the steering mechanism of power has predominated and that of money has been unimportant in the socialist planned economy. With the revolution of 1949 there was a genuine reordering of power relations with a whole new group - the revolutionary intellectuals and their proletarian and peasant supporters - established in a style of socialist government modelled on the Soviet Union. What happened subsequently, however, was the emergence of a socialist bureaucracy in which the combination of a highly stratified cadre system operating on the basis of rewards for seniority within the Party and a knowledge system oriented to producing technical experts for specific production tasks made possible a kind of re-incarnation of Confucian patterns. In this situation the loss of freedom was inevitable - each person had to be fitted into the plan for overall socialist development - but there was no concomitant loss of meaning. Political instructors drew on the classical texts of Marxism-Leninism to make sense of this socialist development process in ways that parallelled and to some extent reproduced Confucian explanations for imperial order. Three standard courses, based on Sovet models, were the staples of meaning making over the period - the History of the Chinese Communist Party, political economy and philosophy.

The Cultural Revolution, I have argued elsewhere,[11] was a revolt against the loss of freedom which was the more violent because it saw the ways in which Soviet forms of domination had exacerbated Confucian stratification and separated off a category of mental laborers whose privileges and misuse of power were seen as intolerable. Unfortunately, however, the Cultural Revolution anarchy made possible even less freedom, except for the few revolutionary "helicopters" whose rise to the top precipitated even more intolerable abuses of power. Nor did Maoist revolutionary rhetoric provide a substantive diet of meaning more satisfying than the political education of the fifties - its constant repetition left a hollow emptiness. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the introduction of "modernization" goals in 1978 the power structure and the concomitant knowledge patterns of the early sixties were revived and political education

---

[11] R. Hayhoe, *China's Universities and the Open Door*, chapter 1.

again produced "meaning" around the same three courses. However since 1978 the courses have been gradually revised in ways that adapted to the new academic spirit and the training and position of political educators within the universities has undergone reforms towards greater professionalism. The increased freedom of expression and taste of political freedom, evident in the campaign for political structure reform and the student movement, brought a challenge to political educators, but it was one they were ready to cope with.

However since the autumn of 1987 the notion of China being in an initial stage of socialism characterized by a socialist commodity economy has given place for money as a steering mechanism in society, presenting a totally new set of challenges to political educators. This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the way money is affecting Chinese society, but what is clear is that it is being combined with power in a peculiarly Chinese way - those cadres having access to certain resources due to their position of power are able to make profits that reflect a kind of Chinese bureaucratic capitalism rather than the pure capitalism of the historical bourgeoisie. There are also limited possibilities for ordinary people to change dramatically their social positions through money, while the majority are even less free than before, with the purchasing power of their modest salaries daily falling. This situation has led to a loss of meaning that may be far more difficult for political educators to remedy than the loss of freedom that has been a natural part of socialist construction.

In my talks with young people during a month in China in November of 1988, a theme that they constantly raised was their sense of the loss of meaning and direction in society. Some put it in extreme terms " we feel as if it is the end of the world." Others expressed it more moderately: "We are a socialist society yet we have no direction, no goals, no sense of purpose, that may be alright for the capitalist world but not for us." The general impression was that this sense of meaninglessness has two concrete manifestations in young university students -either a total passion and absorption in finding ways to "get to the West," no matter how fragile or tenuous the means, or a determination to make as much money as possible in a short time.

The new challenge this presents for political education can be seen in the following incident which got quite wide press coverage in China - the so-called "Sheko storm." Early in 1988, the Chinese Society for Research into Thought Education held a seminar in Shekko and several political educators criticized Chinese young people for moving to Shen Zhen just to "collect gold" from the results of the labor of others. They suggested

that a much larger proportion of the profits of individual enterprises should go to the state for welfare programs and bemoaned the number of foreign cars on Chinese soil. The young people at the seminar, for their part, reacted strongly to these remarks, defending their economic aspirations and a local newspaper carried a discussion of the argument. A few months later on August 6th, 1988, the People's Daily carried an article presenting both sides of the "Sheko Storm." The author noted the outdated approach of political educators, reflecting the authoritarianism of Confucius, Han Yu and even Mao's view that the masses themselves could not produce Marxism but it had to come to them through certain channels. Intellectuals in Shekko made it clear that they would not welcome these traditional educators from the North who could not listen to divergent points of view but responded with a demand to know the name and unit of anyone who dared to disagree. The whole situation showned the pressing need for a new approach to political education where content as well as method could address successfully the erosion of meaning that seems to be accompanying commodity socialism.[12]

This paper is intended as merely a first exploration of this issue. I deal first with the reforms that have been carried out in course content, in the training of political instructors and the adjustment of their positions in the period between 1978 and 1986. This was a period when students were eager for academic opportunity and excited about possibilities for democratic reform. For political educators therefore it was not so much a callenge to provide new meaning as to guide student energies along lines acceptable to Party reform directions. I then go on to consider the new demands on political educators recently in face of the new directions of commodity socialism and a situation in which the loss of meaning is prevalent on Chinese campuses.

2. Political Education Reform 1978-1986

I have suggested earlier that higher education reforms from 1978 to 1985 were largely inspired by scholars who had studied in the West and the academic influences of the Open Door - perhaps one of the most concrete evidences of this was the establishment of an academic degree system encompassing bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees in the early eighties which is intentionally compatible with North American patterns and those increasingly common in Europe as well. The problem facing political instructors was thus how to adapt political education courses to the new academic situation while protecting Chinese youth from the kinds of bourgeois or capitalist values identified with

[12] *Jiahua ribao* 28 Sept., 1988.

western academicism and targetted by the Party in successive campaigns against spiritual pollution (1983), cultural contamination (1984) and bourgeois liberalization (1987).

The years from 1978 to 1984 might be see as a period of regrouping after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution and the main task for political educators was to re-establish the three standard courses on the History of the Chinese Communist Party, political economy and philosophy and ensure an interpretation of reform efforts towards the four modernization in terms of classical theory derived from the Soviet Union. However as curricular and administrative reforms began to change the university scene the need for reforms in political education became more and more evident. A document issuing from the State Education Commission in 1984[13] opened the way for a series of reforms and experimentation which have been quite sucessful both in changing the courses themselves and the instruction process.

In terms of course reform, two approaches were taken, first the transformation of existing courses in such a way as to suit the new mood of students and secondly the addition of new courses, some elective, which are intended to help students make sense of China's open door situation and develop political and moral values suited to a more open society. The course in political economy, which originally drew much material from the History of the Soviet Communist Party[14] and Soviet Marxism-Leninism has been gradually replaced by a course entitled "The Construction of Socialism in China" which analyses the development of Chinese socialism since 1956, using fundamental principles of Marxist-Leninist theory.[15] This course is closely linked to another new courses entitled "The History of the Chinese Revolution" which replaces the History of the Chinese Communist Party with a broader approach to China's revolutionary history and an affirmation of the contribution of all revolutionary forces.[16] Thirdly Marxist-Leninist philosophy, sometimes called basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, has been revised to put much greater emphasis on fostering independent thought and using Marxism-

---

[13]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 12 Nov., 1984.

[14]Zhang Kewen, "Soviet book on CPSU History re-evaluated," *China Daily* 18 July, 1988, p.4.

[15]For a detailed discussion of the content of this couse see Zhang Fengshu, "Zhongguo shehui zhuyi jianshi jiaoxue tixi chutan," *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* No. 2, 1988, pp. 28-29.

[16]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 7 Sept., 1985.

Leninism to analyse general trends in world history, the history of science, and international relations.[17] A new State Education Commission document on higher political education issued early in 1987 affirmed this revision of the three basic courses and gave detailed guidelines for implementation.[18] In the case of all three courses there is a greater rootedness in both the Chinese environment and the kinds of world issues that are of interest to Chinese students. The teaching of such broadly conceived courses also requires a higher level of general knowledge and culture in the teacher than was characteristic of the old-style cadre who simply passed on Soviet-derived dogma.

In addition to the reform of these basic courses, a whole range of new courses, some elective have been introduced which are clearly directed towards moderating the greater freedom of individuals in Chinese society and giving meaning to individual behavior and choice, a concern that was barely relevant to the situation of the fifties and early sixties. These new courses fall under the rubric of *pinde jiaoyu* (moral education) and include such subjects as professional ethics, the legal system, situation and policy, personal life philosophy, and the thought cultivation of university students.[19] Experimental courses to help students deal with influences coming in through the open door include such topics as "The Evaluation of contemporary western intellectual currents."[20]

Clearly the implementation of such reforms calls for relatively high academic quality in the political instructors responsible for teaching. This has meant both changes in the status of such personnel on university campuses in order to attract better people and changes in their training. While originally many such instructors were graduates of political theory departments who were kept on as young teachers or older cadres whose political experience was regarded as valuable, with these reforms a broader base of knowledge is seen as essential if a convincing intellectual legitimation of political theory is to be achieved. Therefore new training programs have been established by the State Education Commission which include double degree programs for undergraduates,

---

[17]Cheng Fuchun, "Zhixue jiaoxue gaige zhaozhu yuanyin peiyang xuesheng de zhixue sixiang nengli," *Chengdu daxue xuebao*, No. 4 (1986) in *Gaodeng jiaoyu* collated by People's University, G4, No. 2, 1986, pp. 55-60.

[18]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 24 March, 1987, p.1.

[19]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 30 July, 1988, p.3.

[20]Jiang Changren, "Kaishe 'Dangdai xifang sichao pingjia' de changshi," *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* No. 12, 1987, pp. 13-14.

ensuring knowledge of another discipline besides political theory, and two year graduate programs for those who already have degrees in other social science or arts areas. Beginning in 1987 these graduate programs have lead to a masters degree in political theory. Thus systematic efforts are being made to form a new group of political instructors who have specialist knowledge in another discipline as well as training in political theory.[21]

Concomitant with this has been a new set of regulations on the status of political instructors, allowing their careers to progress along the same lines as other faculty from assistant to lecturer to associate and full professor. Clearly academic respectability has been a main concern in this reform.[22]

The intention has been to match the questions and concerns of academically lively and curious students with political instructors whose breadth of knowledge and general academic quality will enable them to make a convincing apologetic for the reformist policies of the Deng government. In addition to adopting more lively and elicitative teaching methods for the reformulated basic courses required by all, they are called on to develop new courses in moral and legal education that will offer appropriate guidance to the greater individualism and opportunity for participation that is a part of the reform environment.

Up until late 1987 it seems this approach was well suited to the mood of university students with an enthusiasm for academic study being prevalent and an idealistic concern for democracy and patriotism finding expression in the anti-Japanese demonstrations of 1985 and the student movement of Dec. 1986 and January 1987. However, the changes in university life resulting from the unleashing of "commodity socialism" seem to be presenting a whole new set of challenges, which the political education reforms outlined above may not be adequate to address. In fact, there are already reports that even the newly professionalized young political instructors are being swept off their feet by the new trends and opportunity of commodity socialism and are not prepared to stay at their jobs for more than one or two years.[23]

---

[21] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 16 May, 10 August, 17 Nov., 1987.

[22] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 16 May, 1987.

[23] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* August 30, 1988.

3. Political Education for Commodity Socialism

Just at the time when political instruction has been professionalized and made both academically respectable and intellectually appealing (with broader and more stimulating content) university students have begun to lose their enthusiasm for academic pursuits and political reform in face of the allurements of commodity socialism. This seems to be the central irony of higher education reform in China in 1988. I have suggested earlier that Habermas critique of western modernity might provide helpful insights into the challenges facing Chinese reform at present. What seems to have taken place in China's 39 years of socialist modernization is that the steering mechanism of power was activated in a "modern" socialist bureaucracy but the absence of money as a steering mechanism made possible the persistence of Confucian patterns of social order and political hierarchy, in turn keeping alive a cultural life world which gave a sense of meaning and coherence to the Chinese people, new in its Marxist explanatory terminology but rooted in the familiarity of traditional cultural and social patterns. Now for the first time the release of money as a steering mechanism is shaking up these social and cultural patterns and has led to a sense of meaninglessness unknown since the Revolution of 1949. This is particularly evident among university students. The reconstitution of meaning in terms of theories of commodity socialism may be possible within Marxist theory, though that is questionable given the important disinction between use value and exchange value in Marxist theory. What is even more certain is that it will be difficult to construct these new meanings on a Confucian basis. This is what makes the present task of political education such a challenging one. It comes at a point when China is perhaps standing at the threshold of a new level of social-cultural modernity and facing both its threats and its promise.

It is obviously too early to analyse the reforms in political education that will be devised to meet this situation. But what I would like to do in these concluding paragraphs is look at some of the discussion now going on over the ways in which political instruction should adapt to commodity socialism and their implications.

In a discussion on political education under commodity socialism held in early 1987, three different views were expressed that indicate the fundamental level at which this issue is being debated. The first view is that a commodity economy would inevitably affect the political and moral realms and that these effects would be largely positive. The commodity economy with its principle of equal exchange for equal value will foster egalitarian and democratic thinking in young people; the competition characteristic of the commodity economy will stimulate young people to form new attitudes towards time

and efficiency; the emphasis of the commodity economy on value will cause young people to develop a respect for new views of value. These were all seen as positive developments which political instructors should encourage. The second view was that while the commodity economy could have some beneficial expression in student moral development, it would also have negative effects, so that there would be progress on some fronts, regress on other. Indications of regress are student tendencies to seek personal advantages and harm others in the process, a refusal to submit to national planning imperatives in job assignment and a tendency towards hedonism in personal living. The third view was that the commodity idea should be strictly limited to the economic realm and should not impinge upon either the political or moral arenas, that socialist morality has nothing to do with equal exchange for equal value but is a matter of correctly regulating relations between the state. the collective and the individual; any other approach would reduce socialist morality to capitalist morality.[24]

These three lines of analysis clearly suggest very different possibilities for the reform of political education under commodity socialism. The first would seek to foster new kinds of meaning around the values of individual discipline and responsibility within an economy in which money comes to have as strong a regulating force as bureaucratic power. The second is a kind of compromise position which suggests promoting some of the values of commodification yet fostering resistance to others, specifically those of high individual consumption and overly individualistic career aspirations. Finally the third indicates belief in the possibility of maintaining the contours of the Confucian-Soviet bureaucracy intact from the corrosion of commodification and fostering the traditional values of socialist collective planning and stratified Confucian social solidarity.

Intellectually appealing academic arguments are likely to be developed as a kind of sugar coating for the political education pill yet it is the decision among these three distinctive approaches to values under commodity socialism that will make a difference for China's future What will the choice be and what are the implications of each for Chinese society and China's road to modernization?

---

[24] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 24 January, 1987.

Chinese Higher Education and Commodity Socialism: The Problem of Political Education

by

Ruth Hayhoe

Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Harvard University, April 1, 1989. Not to be cited.

Table of Contents

1. Modernization as Commodity Socialism

In the first period after the Revolution of 1949 the Chinese saw their development in terms not of modernization but of socialist construction. For this there was a ready made model - that of the Soviet Union - and higher education was completely reformed under Soviet guidance to suit the needs of socialist production. The success in production that resulted can be easily documented, especially in the area of the development of a heavy industrial base, also in agriculture[1] yet the social and cultural rigidities that were part of planned socialist construction led to a series of upheavals culminating in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when development was seen in terms of the revolutionary transformation of social relations which should in turn open the way for a grass roots economic growth. The social-political chaos and economic slowdown that actually resulted reached the point in 1976 when the death of Mao made possible the emergence of a new pragmatist leadership under Deng Xiaoping bent on four modernizations. This seems to be the first time since 1949 that the term modernization took a central place in China's social goals and concomitant with this internal reorientation came an external remaking of ties with Japan and the capitalist West, also with such organizations as the IMF and the World Bank. The specificity of the Four Modernizations (agriculture, industry, national defence, science and technology) has gradually given way to more general modernization goals, including the demands for political structure reform, first raised in 1986 and ongoing. Economically there has been increasing space given to market mechanisms within what remains an overall planned economy, stimulated by increasing efforts to enter capitalist world markets and inspired by the achievements of the so-called Asian dragons (the capitalist economies of Taiwan, South Korea etc.). The utilization of the market and the freer circulation of money that has resulted led to the definition of China's present development stage as the initial stage of socialism at the 13th Party Congress in October of 1987.[2] Subsequently this initial stage of Chinese socialism has been characterized as "commodity socialism" or a socialist commodity economy" a term that seems to combine socialist construction with modernization.[3]

---

[1] *Ten Great Years* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960).

[2] "Ten Examples of the Initial Stage of Socialism," *Jingji ribao* 21 October, 1987, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report (FBIS)*, No. 209, 29 October, 1988, p. 27.

[3] Gao Shangquan, "Develop Theories on the Socialist Commodity Economy in the Course of Deepening Reform in All Fields," *Renmin ribao* 18 Nov., 1988 in *FBIS*, 1988, No. 233, 5 Dec. 1988, p. 58.

It is in terms of this transition that higher education theorists are reflecting on reforms in the higher education system.[4] After the end of the Cultural Revolution trauma, the patterns revived in 1978 were essentially the Soviet patterns of the fifties, where knowledge within the higher curriculum was specifically linked to the "production" of socialist construction in all of the major sectors, as well as reflecting the classical academic disciplines which had been preserved intact under Soviet socialism. Chinese critiques of this knowledge system between 1978 and 1986 focused on the narrow specialization it fostered and the tendency to sterility that blocked the innovative, flexible thinking needed for technological change. My own analysis of the situation[5] suggested that this knowledge system made possible the preservation of patterns of political control and social order deeply rooted in Confucian tradition. While the Cultural Revolution attack on the system threw it into disarray, it produced no viable alternative and so its re-instatement in 1978. The reforms in the higher curriculum from 1978 to 1985 were largely academically inspired and saw a revitalization and opening up of the social sciences, which had been most strictly regulated under Soviet patterns, as well as the cross fertilization of applied and basic scientific fields which led to the training of young people more able to adapt their knowledge and skills to changing industrial and technical needs. Basically these reforms were inspired by older scholars who had studied in Europe and the United States in the forties, and growing contacts with educators of OECD countries in the eighties. The tension created by the reforms can be seen most strikingly in the demands of intellectuals for political structure reform in the spring of 1986 and the student movement from December of 1986 to January of 1987, with its call for greater democracy - condemned rather half-heartedly in an official campaign against bourgeois liberalization in the spring of 1987.[6]

However it is really only in the last two years that a new dimension has begun to impinge on higher education, bringing a sobering note to the ongoing reforms. The transition is now not seen as one from product-oriented socialism to greater intellectual autonomy and a broader conception of knowledge, but to a kind of higher education that suits and serves commodity socialism. Universities are encouraged to increase as far as

---

[4]See *Renmin ribao* 24 August, 1988 for the report of a speech by Li Tieying on higher education reform in terms of the transition from a production economy to a commodity economy.

[5]R. Hayhoe, *China's Universities and the Open Door* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989).

[6]R. Hayhoe, "China's Intellectuals in the World Community," in *Higher Education*, VOl. 17, No. 1 (1988).

possible "horizontal" sources of funding through contracts with central ministries, regions and enterprises for both personnel training and research in specific areas,[7] and students have become caught up in the excitement of "knowledge as a commodity," in many cases starting small businesses on or off campus which enable them to make money.[8] The "hot" subjects which increasingly attract student interest are commercially oriented ones and both general academic seriousness and the interest in demanding programs of graduate study are reported by professors to have lessened in the last year or two.[9] The craze seems to be either to go abroad, if possible, or to make money as quickly as possible by whatever means come to hand.

A recent visit to China and wide-ranging discussion with faculty, administrators and students made me sense a real crisis situation, even though research and teaching generally seem to be going on well. My sense was that the obsession with money - reflected in both student behavior and in bitter complaints from professors about the economic undervaluing of their "intellectual labor" - went beyond a desire for the goods that are increasingly prevalent - the ubiquitous refrigerators, washing machines and televisions that were so much rarer in the early eighties - to a fascination with the social power exercised by money under commodity socialism.

This has led me in turn to some reflections as to whether aspects of the critique Habermas has developed of the capitalist modernization process might not be cautiously applied to the Chinese context, and illumine the rapid process of change now underway.

Habermas uses the image of an uncoupling of system and cultural life world in his analysis of the pathology of the western mdoernization process - with the steering mechanisms of money and power institutionalized in the capitalist economy and the modern bureaucratic state dominating development and resulting in a colonization of the cultural life world that erodes both the freedom of individuals and their sense of meaning.[10] His prescription for the redemption of modernity lies in the conception of

---

[7]R. Hayhoe, "Shanghai as a Mediator of the Educational Open Door," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer, 1988).

[8]Zhang Hua, "End Business Fever in College Students," *China Daily* 9 August, 1988, p. 4

[9]"University Students 'Craze for Schooling' Declines," Beijing: *Xinhua* in Chinese 25 August, 1988 in *FBIS*, 1988, No. 167 29 August, 1988, p. 24-5.

[10]Habermas, Juergen, *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol. 2 *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), especially chapter VI.

communicative action, a process whereby the lifeworld is rationalized through an interconnecting of debates in the instrumental technical sphere related to the truth claims of modern science and technology with open discussion in the sphere of moral-practical reason over norms of rightness and in the aesthetic-expressive sphere over the authenticity of self presentation.

My sense of the Chinese case as sketched out above is of a modernization process since 1949 in which the steering mechanism of power has predominated and that of money has been unimportant in the socialist planned economy. With the revolution of 1949 there was a genuine reordering of power relations with a whole new group - the revolutionary intellectuals and their proletarian and peasant supporters - established in a style of socialist government modelled on the Soviet Union. What happened subsequently, however, was the emergence of a socialist bureaucracy in which the combination of a highly stratified cadre system operating on the basis of rewards for seniority within the Party and a knowledge system oriented to producing technical experts for specific production tasks made possible a kind of re-incarnation of Confucian patterns. In this situation the loss of freedom was inevitable - each person had to be fitted into the plan for overall socialist development - but there was no concomitant loss of meaning. Political instructors drew on the classical texts of Marxism-Leninism to make sense of this socialist development process in ways that parallelled and to some extent reproduced Confucian explanations for imperial order. Three standard courses, based on Sovet models, were the staples of meaning making over the period - the History of the Chinese Communist Party, political economy and philosophy.

The Cultural Revolution, I have argued elsewhere,[11] was a revolt against the loss of freedom which was the more violent because it saw the ways in which Soviet forms of domination had exacerbated Confucian stratification and separated off a category of mental laborers whose privileges and misuse of power were seen as intolerable. Unfortunately, however, the Cultural Revolution anarchy made possible even less freedom, except for the few revolutionary "helicopters" whose rise to the top precipitated even more intolerable abuses of power. Nor did Maoist revolutionary rhetoric provide a substantive diet of meaning more satisfying than the political education of the fifties - its constant repetition left a hollow emptiness. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the introduction of "modernization" goals in 1978 the power structure and the concomitant knowledge patterns of the early sixties were revived and political education

---

[11] R. Hayhoe, *China's Universities and the Open Door*, chapter 1.

again produced "meaning" around the same three courses. However since 1978 the courses have been gradually revised in ways that adapted to the new academic spirit and the training and position of political educators within the universities has undergone reforms towards greater professionalism. The increased freedom of expression and taste of political freedom, evident in the campaign for political structure reform and the student movement, brought a challenge to political educators, but it was one they were ready to cope with.

However since the autumn of 1987 the notion of China being in an initial stage of socialism characterized by a socialist commodity economy has given place for money as a steering mechanism in society, presenting a totally new set of challenges to political educators. This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the way money is affecting Chinese society, but what is clear is that it is being combined with power in a peculiarly Chinese way - those cadres having access to certain resources due to their position of power are able to make profits that reflect a kind of Chinese bureaucratic capitalism rather than the pure capitalism of the historical bourgeoisie. There are also limited possibilities for ordinary people to change dramatically their social positions through money, while the majority are even less free than before, with the purchasing power of their modest salaries daily falling. This situation has led to a loss of meaning that may be far more difficult for political educators to remedy than the loss of freedom that has been a natural part of socialist construction.

In my talks with young people during a month in China in November of 1988, a theme that they constantly raised was their sense of the loss of meaning and direction in society. Some put it in extreme terms " we feel as if it is the end of the world." Others expressed it more moderately: "We are a socialist society yet we have no direction, no goals, no sense of purpose, that may be alright for the capitalist world but not for us." The general impression was that this sense of meaninglessness has two concrete manifestations in young university students -either a total passion and absorption in finding ways to "get to the West," no matter how fragile or tenuous the means, or a determination to make as much money as possible in a short time.

The new challenge this presents for political education can be seen in the following incident which got quite wide press coverage in China - the so-called "Sheko storm." Early in 1988 the Chinese Society for Research into Thought Education held a seminar in Shekko and several political educators criticized Chinese young people for moving to Shen Zhen just to "collect gold" from the results of the labor of others. They suggested

that a much larger proportion of the profits of individual enterprises should go to the state for welfare programs and bemoaned the number of foreign cars on Chinese soil. The young people at the seminar, for their part, reacted strongly to these remarks, defending their economic aspirations and a local newspaper carried a discussion of the argument. A few months later on August 6th, 1988, the People's Daily carried an article presenting both sides of the "Sheko Storm." The author noted the outdated approach of political educators, reflecting the authoritarianism of Confucius, Han Yu and even Mao's view that the masses themselves could not produce Marxism but it had to come to them through certain channels. Intellectuals in Shekko made it clear that they would not welcome these traditional educators from the North who could not listen to divergent points of view but responded with a demand to know the name and unit of anyone who dared to disagree. The whole situation showned the pressing need for a new approach to political education where content as well as method could address successfully the erosion of meaning that seems to be accompanying commodity socialism.[12]

This paper is intended as merely a first exploration of this issue. I deal first with the reforms that have been carried out in course content, in the training of political instructors and the adjustment of their positions in the period between 1978 and 1986. This was a period when students were eager for academic opportunity and excited about possibilities for democratic reform. For political educators therefore it was not so much a callenge to provide new meaning as to guide student energies along lines acceptable to Party reform directions. I then go on to consider the new demands on political educators recently in face of the new directions of commodity socialism and a situation in which the loss of meaning is prevalent on Chinese campuses.

2. Political Education Reform 1978-1986

I have suggested earlier that higher education reforms from 1978 to 1985 were largely inspired by scholars who had studied in the West and the academic influences of the Open Door - perhaps one of the most concrete evidences of this was the establishment of an academic degree system encompassing bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees in the early eighties which is intentionally compatible with North American patterns and those increasingly common in Europe as well. The problem facing political instructors was thus how to adapt political education courses to the new academic situation while protecting Chinese youth from the kinds of bourgeois or capitalist values identified with

---

[12] *Jiahua ribao* 28 Sept., 1988.

western academicism and targetted by the Party in successive campaigns against spiritual pollution (1983), cultural contamination (1984) and bourgeois liberalization (1987).

The years from 1978 to 1984 might be see as a period of regrouping after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution and the main task for political educators was to re-establish the three standard courses on the History of the Chinese Communist Party, political economy and philosophy and ensure an interpretation of reform efforts towards the four modernization in terms of classical theory derived from the Soviet Union. However as curricular and administrative reforms began to change the university scene the need for reforms in political education became more and more evident. A document issuing from the State Education Commission in 1984[13] opened the way for a series of reforms and experimentation which have been quite sucessful both in changing the courses themselves and the instruction process.

In terms of course reform, two approaches were taken, first the transformation of existing courses in such a way as to suit the new mood of students and secondly the addition of new courses, some elective, which are intended to help students make sense of China's open door situation and develop political and moral values suited to a more open society. The course in political economy, which originally drew much material from the History of the Soviet Communist Party[14] and Soviet Marxism-Leninism has been gradually replaced by a course entitled "The Construction of Socialism in China" which analyses the development of Chinese socialism since 1956, using fundamental principles of Marxist-Leninist theory.[15] This course is closely linked to another new courses entitled "The History of the Chinese Revolution" which replaces the History of the Chinese Communist Party with a broader approach to China's revolutionary history and an affirmation of the contribution of all revolutionary forces.[16] Thirdly Marxist-Leninist philosophy, sometimes called basic principles of Marxism-Leninism, has been revised to put much greater emphasis on fostering independent thought and using Marxism-

---

[13]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 12 Nov., 1984.

[14]Zhang Kewen, "Soviet book on CPSU History re-evaluated," *China Daily* 18 July, 1988, p.4.

[15]For a detailed discussion of the content of this couse see Zhang Fengshu, "Zhongguo shehui zhuyi jianshi jiaoxue tixi chutan," *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* No. 2, 1988, pp. 28-29.

[16]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 7 Sept., 1985.

Leninism to analyse general trends in world history, the history of science, and international relations.[17] A new State Education Commission document on higher political education issued early in 1987 affirmed this revision of the three basic courses and gave detailed guidelines for implementation.[18] In the case of all three courses there is a greater rootedness in both the Chinese environment and the kinds of world issues that are of interest to Chinese students. The teaching of such broadly conceived courses also requires a higher level of general knowledge and culture in the teacher than was characteristic of the old-style cadre who simply passed on Soviet-derived dogma.

In addition to the reform of these basic courses, a whole range of new courses, some elective have been introduced which are clearly directed towards moderating the greater freedom of individuals in Chinese society and giving meaning to individual behavior and choice, a concern that was barely relevant to the situation of the fifties and early sixties. These new courses fall under the rubric of *pinde jiaoyu* (moral education) and include such subjects as professional ethics, the legal system, situation and policy, personal life philosophy, and the thought cultivation of university students.[19] Experimental courses to help students deal with influences coming in through the open door include such topics as "The Evaluation of contemporary western intellectual currents."[20]

Clearly the implementation of such reforms calls for relatively high academic quality in the political instructors responsible for teaching. This has meant both changes in the status of such personnel on university campuses in order to attract better people and changes in their training. While originally many such instructors were graduates of political theory departments who were kept on as young teachers or older cadres whose political experience was regarded as valuable, with these reforms a broader base of knowledge is seen as essential if a convincing intellectual legitimation of political theory is to be achieved. Therefore new training programs have been established by the State Education Commission which include double degree programs for undergraduates,

---

[17]Cheng Fuchun, "Zhixue jiaoxue gaige zhaozhu yuanyin peiyang xuesheng de zhixue sixiang nengli," *Chengdu daxue xuebao*, No. 4 (1986) in *Gaodeng jiaoyu* collated by People's University, G4, No. 2, 1986, pp. 55-60.

[18]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 24 March, 1987, p.1.

[19]*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 30 July, 1988, p.3.

[20]Jiang Changren, "Kaishe 'Dangdai xifang sichao pingjia' de changshi," *Zhongguo gaodeng jiaoyu* No. 12, 1987, pp. 13-14.

ensuring knowledge of another discipline besides political theory, and two year graduate programs for those who already have degrees in other social science or arts areas. Beginning in 1987 these graduate programs have lead to a masters degree in political theory. Thus systematic efforts are being made to form a new group of political instructors who have specialist knowledge in another discipline as well as training in political theory.[21]

Concomitant with this has been a new set of regulations on the status of political instructors, allowing their careers to progress along the same lines as other faculty from assistant to lecturer to associate and full professor. Clearly academic respectability has been a main concern in this reform.[22]

The intention has been to match the questions and concerns of academically lively and curious students with political instructors whose breadth of knowledge and general academic quality will enable them to make a convincing apologetic for the reformist policies of the Deng government. In addition to adopting more lively and elicitative teaching methods for the reformulated basic courses required by all, they are called on to develop new courses in moral and legal education that will offer appropriate guidance to the greater individualism and opportunity for participation that is a part of the reform environment.

Up until late 1987 it seems this approach was well suited to the mood of university students with an enthusiasm for academic study being prevalent and an idealistic concern for democracy and patriotism finding expression in the anti-Japanese demonstrations of 1985 and the student movement of Dec. 1986 and January 1987. However, the changes in university life resulting from the unleashing of "commodity socialism" seem to be presenting a whole new set of challenges, which the political education reforms outlined above may not be adequate to address. In fact, there are already reports that even the newly professionalized young political instructors are being swept off their feet by the new trends and opportunity of commodity socialism and are not prepared to stay at their jobs for more than one or two years.[23]

---

[21] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 16 May, 10 August, 17 Nov., 1987.

[22] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 16 May, 1987.

[23] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* August 30, 1988.

3. Political Education for Commodity Socialism

Just at the time when political instruction has been professionalized and made both academically respectable and intellectually appealing (with broader and more stimulating content) university students have begun to lose their enthusiasm for academic pursuits and political reform in face of the allurements of commodity socialism. This seems to be the central irony of higher education reform in China in 1988. I have suggested earlier that Habermas critique of western modernity might provide helpful insights into the challenges facing Chinese reform at present. What seems to have taken place in China's 39 years of socialist modernization is that the steering mechanism of power was activated in a "modern" socialist bureaucracy but the absence of money as a steering mechanism made possible the persistence of Confucian patterns of social order and political hierarchy, in turn keeping alive a cultural life world which gave a sense of meaning and coherence to the Chinese people, new in its Marxist explanatory terminology but rooted in the familiarity of traditional cultural and social patterns. Now for the first time the release of money as a steering mechanism is shaking up these social and cultural patterns and has led to a sense of meaninglessness unknown since the Revolution of 1949. This is particularly evident among university students. The reconstitution of meaning in terms of theories of commodity socialism may be possible within Marxist theory, though that is questionable given the important disinction between use value and exchange value in Marxist theory. What is even more certain is that it will be difficult to construct these new meanings on a Confucian basis. This is what makes the present task of political education such a challenging one. It comes at a point when China is perhaps standing at the threshold of a new level of social-cultural modernity and facing both its threats and its promise.

It is obviously too early to analyse the reforms in political education that will be devised to meet this situation. But what I would like to do in these concluding paragraphs is look at some of the discussion now going on over the ways in which political instruction should adapt to commodity socialism and their implications.

In a discussion on political education under commodity socialism held in early 1987, three different views were expressed that indicate the fundamental level at which this issue is being debated. The first view is that a commodity economy would inevitably affect the political and moral realms and that these effects would be largely positive. The commodity economy with its principle of equal exchange for equal value will foster egalitarian and democratic thinking in young people; the competition characteristic of the commodity economy will stimulate young people to form new attitudes towards time

and efficiency; the emphasis of the commodity economy on value will cause young people to develop a respect for new views of value. These were all seen as positive developments which political instructors should encourage. The second view was that while the commodity economy could have some beneficial expression in student moral development, it would also have negative effects, so that there would be progress on some fronts, regress on other. Indications of regress are student tendencies to seek personal advantages and harm others in the process, a refusal to submit to national planning imperatives in job assignment and a tendency towards hedonism in personal living. The third view was that the commodity idea should be strictly limited to the economic realm and should not impinge upon either the political or moral arenas, that socialist morality has nothing to do with equal exchange for equal value but is a matter of correctly regulating relations between the state, the collective and the individual; any other approach would reduce socialist morality to capitalist morality.[24]

These three lines of analysis clearly suggest very different possibilities for the reform of political education under commodity socialism. The first would seek to foster new kinds of meaning around the values of individual discipline and responsibility within an economy in which money comes to have as strong a regulating force as bureaucratic power. The second is a kind of compromise position which suggests promoting some of the values of commodification yet fostering resistance to others, specifically those of high individual consumption and overly individualistic career aspirations. Finally the third indicates belief in the possibility of maintaining the contours of the Confucian-Soviet bureaucracy intact from the corrosion of commodification and fostering the traditional values of socialist collective planning and stratified Confucian social solidarity.

Intellectually appealing academic arguments are likely to be developed as a kind of sugar coating for the political education pill yet it is the decision among these three distinctive approaches to values under commodity socialism that will make a difference for China's future. What will the choice be and what are the implications of each for Chinese society and China's road to modernization?

---

[24] *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* 24 January, 1987.