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“Law Does Not Come Down From Heaven”: Youth Legal Socialisation Approaches in Chinese Textbooks of the Xi Jinping Era

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Abstract

Schools constitute key sites for legal socialisation, the process whereby youth develop their relationship with the law. Yet, what does legal socialisation entail in the context of an authoritarian party-state such as China? The article examines this question by analysing Chinese citizenship education textbooks of the Xi era. The study finds that China's current textbooks contain elements associated with both a coercive and a consensual approach to legal education. Nonetheless, it is the consensual orientation that receives greater stress, as the books highlight the positive benefits of legal compliance and endorse the idea that youth should advance beyond the external supervisory stage to the self-discipline level of legal consciousness. Reflecting the attempt of the Chinese Communist Party leadership to draw on legality as a key source of legitimacy, this approach is nonetheless undermined by the propagandist tone of the textbooks and their ambiguous messages regarding citizens' ability to challenge China's existing laws.

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Keywords

China, youth, legal socialisation, citizenship education

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Introduction

Around the world, education systems attempt to inculcate in youth basic knowledge and understanding of political institutions and provide direction towards becoming full-fledged citizens (Merry, 2020: 124, 133). Schools constitute key sites for legal socialisation, the process whereby young people “develop their relationship with the law via the acquisition of law-related values, attitudes, and reasoning capacities” (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016: 418). Studies have identified different pedagogical approaches to youth legal socialisation, with potentially different implications for the development of young people’s attitudes and behaviour. To date, however, scholarship on youth legal socialisation has almost exclusively focused on Western liberal democracies. The extent to which findings from these studies can be generalised to other countries that have historically different relationships between state, society, and the law is unclear (Trinkner et al., 2020: 7).

China is an illustrative case. In 1978, the Chinese government launched market reforms and an Open-Door policy following close to thirty years of a command economy and revolutionary struggle. Over the past four decades or so, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government has also moved to rebuild its legal system. Together with legal reform, the government implemented systematic campaigns to inform and educate officials and citizens about new legislation and the principle of *fazhi* (法治) – a term which can be translated as “legal rule,” or more controversially as “rule of law” (Li, 2015; Ng and Tse, 2011; Peerenboom, 2015).

These state campaigns have targeted not only adults but also youth. The PRC’s recent plans for the “Promotion of Legal Rule Education in the National Education System” have called on schools to construct a “legal-rule campus culture” (校园法治文化, *xiaoyuan fazhi wenhua*), foster “the spirit of the contract” (契约精神, *qiyue jingshen*) among students, and advance the “legal literacy” (法治素养, *fazhi suyang*) of youth (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2016, 2021). Yet, what does legal literacy entail precisely in the context of an authoritarian party-state such as China? And how do current school textbooks attempt to teach Chinese adolescents to comply with the law? These issues are the focus of the present article, which explores the legal socialisation approach of China’s contemporary citizenship education curriculum.

Amid the launching of large-scale legalisation reforms in post-1978 China, scholars of Chinese education have documented the emergence of new citizenship ideals in the country’s school curriculum, grounded in a legalised discourse of collective duties as well as personal rights (Cantoni et al., 2017; Fairbrother, 2014; Hsu et al., 2020; Law, 2011; Tse, 2011; Zhong and Zhang, 2015). Existing studies have provided valuable insight into such issues as the functions of China’s constitution and the compatibility between the “legal rule” principle and the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Chinese school materials. Few studies however have focused on the legal socialisation approach China’s textbooks employ to induce compliant behaviour in the country’s youth. A noted exception is a 2011 study by Ng and Tse, which compared the “legal culture” embodied in junior secondary textbooks published in 1997–2000 in mainland China, Hong Kong,

and Taiwan. Since the publication of this pioneering study, however, the citizenship curriculum in mainland China has undergone additional revisions, the most recent of which under the leadership of Xi Jinping (2012–). Notably, this revision has taken place during a period in which the Chinese government has stressed the role of the law as a means to monitor and control the population and utilised the legal system to suppress civil rights activists and other social forces deemed hostile to the party-state (Creemers, 2015; Liu, 2020; Palmer and Winiger, 2019). In this article, I draw on legal socialisation theory to explore how China's current citizenship education curriculum attempts to promote law-abiding behaviour among youth. I further contextualise the legal socialisation orientation of mainland Chinese textbooks within the political and ideological environment of the Xi era.

The discussion will begin with an outline of key legal socialisation theories which form the background to the study, followed by a description of the historical and political context of China's legalisation drive and the development of the country's law-related education. I provide an overview of the junior high school textbooks which form the basis for the study and their modes of analysis, and then present the study's main findings. Using content and textual analysis, I show that China's contemporary citizenship education curriculum contains elements associated with both a "coercive" and a "consensual" approach to youth legal socialisation. Nonetheless, it is the consensual orientation that receives greater stress in the Xi era textbooks. I conclude with an explanation of this finding and a discussion of the potential effects of the books' legal socialisation approach on youth attitudes towards the law. I further consider the broader implications of the study's results for our understanding of the social and political functions of the law and legal education in contemporary China.

Theoretical Background

Learning about the law and how to relate to it is an important part of growing up in many societies. The study of legal socialisation is concerned with understanding how this process occurs and how variations in socialisation lead to variations in adult orientations towards the law (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016: 2). Studies have shown that legal socialisation is a multi-layered process that can take place through formal (e.g. curriculum and courses) and informal (e.g. everyday life experiences, civic participation, and engagement) channels (Ng and Tse, 2011: 164). Even within the school, however, law-related education is about more than merely developing knowledge and understanding of the law. Curriculum designers must consider what kind of legally compliant citizens they wish to encourage and the manner in which these citizens might be formed (Rowe, 1992: 82).

Research on legal socialisation commonly distinguishes between two major orientations towards the law, each corresponding to different approaches to law-related education: "coercive" and "consensual" (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016; Tyler and Trinkner, 2018). Coercive orientations to legal socialisation are rooted in the use of force and punishment, ultimately leading to an instrumentally focused relationship built on dominance. Consensual orientations are in contrast rooted in the acquisition of favourable attitudes

and values towards legal authority. Here, people understand the importance of the law in ordering society and recognise its authority to make rules and control behaviour. They are less concerned about the risks or rewards associated with their conduct and instead focus on their felt responsibilities to accept the law and defer to the decisions of legal actors (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016: 2, 427; Tyler and Trinkner, 2018: 36–38).

Within the context of law-related education, these different orientations are further associated with developmental models of legal and moral reasoning. Lawrence Kohlberg's work has been particularly influential in this regard. Kohlberg and his colleague, June Tapp, have identified three main levels of moral reasoning: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Kohlberg, 1981; Tapp and Kohlberg, 1971). The "pre-conventional" level of moral judgment is characterised by instrumental reasoning, manifested as being submissive to authority. At this level, which according to Kohlberg is especially common in young children but can also be found among adults, rules are obeyed to avoid bad consequences such as punishment and physical harm. The "conventional level" of moral reasoning is characterised by deference to rules instead of simply to crude power. In its early form, this perspective is expressed by a desire to conform to expected standards of behaviour (Kohlberg described it as the "good boy/good girl" stage), followed later by a view that laws and rules are necessary to prevent disorder and chaos. The third, "post-conventional," level of moral reasoning is characterised by universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. In this stage, the individual comes to recognise the intrinsic value of rules and laws, while the value of laws in preventing crime or disorder becomes of secondary importance. People may begin to account for the differing values, opinions, and beliefs of others. Rules are seen as the result of a social contract between individuals, and therefore, as changeable. As the criteria for moral choices (e.g. universality and impartiality) extend beyond the sphere of law, a universalistic moral orientation is possible, and laws may be criticised on grounds of the notion of "justice" or "individual rights" (Tapp and Kohlberg, 1971: 70).

Kohlberg's model has informed divergent approaches to school legal socialisation. Thus, one approach assumes that law-abiding behaviour is best achieved through lessons that emphasise the negative side of the law, for instance by stressing the consequences of crime. This kind of compliance model, which has been described as "coercive," corresponds to Kohlberg's pre-conventional level of moral reasoning. Such an educational model often places an emphasis on criminal law in curricular contents, with the prevention of juvenile delinquency a primary justification for their introduction (Rowe, 1992: 82, 85; Trinkner and Tyler, 2016: 425).

A different pedagogical framework draws on the notion that "socializing supportive values and encouraging favorable attitudes" towards the law not only motivates compliance with the law but also "promotes voluntary deference and willing cooperation with legal authorities" (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016: 417). To induce wilful legal compliance, consensual models of legal education may encourage students to voluntarily modify their behaviours to match that of others, with an emphasis on conformity and on consideration of how one's behavioural choices influence the state of a society as a whole, a

theme closely corresponding to Kohlberg's conventional level of reasoning (Cohn et al., 2010; Rowe, 1992; Trinkner and Tyler, 2016). In doing so, consensual education programmes may paint an idealised picture of the legal system while glossing over the system's imperfections (Rowe, 1992: 82; Tyler and Trinkner, 2018: 179). Alternatively, consensual approaches to youth legal education might utilise a more critical orientation, encouraging students to develop autonomous legal judgment and recognise the potential existence of multiple legal perspectives – an approach which more closely resembles Kohlberg's post-conventional reasoning (Rowe, 1992: 83).

The different socialisation approaches identified here represent ideal types, which may overlap empirically in a given society. That said, a government-sanctioned curriculum frequently has a “basic posture” approximating one type more closely than the others, while embodying aspects of different socialisation approaches (Ng and Tse, 2011: 171; see also Nonet and Selznick, 2001: 17). Drawing on this insight, in the present study I seek to identify the legal socialisation orientation embodied in the citizenship education curriculum of China: a non-Western, non-democratic country, which in the past several decades has witnessed extensive legalisation reform and a concerted government effort to foster a spirit of law-abidingness among its citizens.

China's Legalisation Reforms in the Post-1978 Era

The development of China's modern legal system in the past century has been fitful. After the 1911 revolution that ended Imperialist rule, the new Chinese Republic adopted a Western-style legal code largely based on German civil law tradition introduced to China via Japan, while retaining select elements of indigenous legal traditions grounded in Confucian, Legalist, and other schools of thought (Zhu and Peters, 2019: 670). Following the establishment of the PRC in 1949 under the leadership of the CCP, socialist law based on Soviet influence took hold. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, law was mostly marginalised and used occasionally and explicitly to assist class and political struggle, a stance that was also reflected in the educational curriculum of the period (Law and Xu, 2020: 139; Wang and Liu, 2019: 3).

The complex heritage of imperial Chinese, German civil, and socialist law has undergone rapid transformation since 1978 when China entered the era of “opening up,” globalisation and international trade. Under the reign of Deng Xiaoping, the CCP began to promote a new public and government mindset in opposition to the Maoist era “rule of man” that had helped generate the internal chaos of both the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Since the 1980s, the CCP has instead endorsed the law as an important regulatory tool for economic development, a political institution to ensure party rule, and a governing principle to be followed by the public administration (Jenco, 2010: 181; Wang, 2010: 6; Wang and Liu, 2019: 3).

In 1982, the PRC promulgated a new version of its Constitution (three earlier versions were enacted in 1954, 1975, and 1978). The revision reflected Deng's resolve to lay an institutional and legal framework for China's reform and opening. Dropping the notion of class struggle, the 1982 Constitution gives economic development top priority and

incorporates non-party members into China's modernisation drive. In theory, the Constitution also limits state power while asserting various freedoms that Chinese citizens enjoy. In practice, China's Constitution lacks any meaningful mechanism for enforcement (Yuen, 2013: 68; Zhang, 2021: 586). The first decade of reform nonetheless witnessed a revival of legal institutions and the promulgation of new legislation, including the Administrative Litigation Law (ALL, adopted 4 April 1989, effective 1 October 1990), a move that indicated, at least in principle, that Chinese citizens could employ the law to challenge specific (local) government abuses (Pils, 2019: 36–37).

The adoption of ALL preceded the eruption of the Tiananmen protest movement in April 1989, a movement that called for an expansion of civil rights and democratic reforms. The movement failed, ending with brutal repression. Yet, during the 1990s, the Chinese party-state continued to emphasise the need to strengthen and develop the principle of “legal rule” (*fazhi*) (Peerenboom, 2015; Zhu and Peters, 2019: 671). The liberal laws enacted before 1989 stayed in place and the implementation of further legal reforms remained an important domestic and international legitimising strategy (Pils, 2019: 38). At the 15th National Party Congress in 1997, the General Secretary of the CCP, Jiang Zemin, first announced: “governing according to the law” or “law-based governance” (依法治国, *yifa zhiguo*) as a ruling paradigm for the party-state. The 1990s further witnessed the introduction of the term “human rights” (人权, *renquan*) in official discourse as one of the stated goals of “law-based governance,” though the CCP continually asserted its definition of rights in terms of subsistence needs rather than civil liberties (Chen and Hsu, 2018: 535).

The endorsement of the legal rule principle has impacted the educational domain as well. Beginning in the 1980s, the Chinese government institutionalised and regularised legal socialisation efforts in workplaces, learning groups, and the education system (Altehenger, 2020: 17). Subsequent revisions in the school curriculum constitute an important part of this legal popularisation drive. Weatherley and Magee (2018) note for instance a growing emphasis on the importance of legal institutions in China's middle school history textbooks published in the 2000s. Citizenship education textbooks have likewise witnessed an ideological shift, including a move from the overwhelming domination of collectivism to an increased tension between the themes of collectivism and individualism, between nationalism and globalisation, and between the promotion of development and modernisation and the preservation of “traditional Chinese culture” (Law, 2006, 2017: 241). Since the 1990s, China's citizenship education has explicitly promoted the principle of law-based governance, with the official aim of increasing students' understanding and observation of laws as well as their knowledge of “civic rights and obligations” (Lee and Ho, 2008: 423; see also Liang, 2020; Ng and Tse, 2011; Tse, 2011; Zhan and Ning, 2004). Chinese textbooks published in 1997–1998 presented the law as an “effective instrument” in the maintenance of national security and the social and economic order, and noted the “importance of refraining from breaking the law” (Ng and Tse, 2011: 178). At the same time, the textbooks placed an emphasis on the law as a tool of rights protection, with descriptions of “constitutional rights” and “freedoms” outnumbering those of citizens' “duties and obligations” (Ng

and Tse, 2011: 167, 169, 176). Following an additional round of curricular revision in 2003–2005, the theme of personal rights became even more pronounced in the citizenship education materials (Tse, 2011: 168, 177).

In line with the growing emphasis on the theme of legal rights in China's school curriculum and in official CCP rhetoric more broadly, the first decade of the 2000s witnessed the flourishing of a lively intellectual debate in China on the functions of the law and on constitutionalism. Some PRC thinkers publicly advocated better implementation of the Constitution, including the establishment of external means of oversight over the party-state, mandatory transparency of state operation, and recognition of civil and political liberties (Creemers, 2015; Pils, 2019: 37; Veg, 2019). Although government crackdowns occurred from time to time during this decade, under the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (2002–2012), the CCP allowed some space for social and political activism to grow and even thrive, thereby employing what some scholars term a “soft authoritarian” or “neo-socialist” mode of governance (Liu, 2020: 73; see also Palmer and Winiger, 2019; Shambaugh, 2016). Notably, during this period, Chinese citizens of different social backgrounds began to explicitly invoke the law when they wished to hold the state or state actors accountable, whether via formal complaints, petitions, protests, or direct lawsuits (Gallagher, 2017; Hsu et al., 2020; Lei, 2017; O'Brien and Li, 2006; Stern, 2013).

This moderate political climate started to deteriorate in the late 2000s, however, with the emergence of “stability maintenance” (维稳, *weiwēn*) as an imperative for the Chinese party-state (Liu, 2020: 74; see also Minzner, 2015). Especially since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, the CCP has moved to suppress critical political discourse, including alternative ideas on civil society, citizenship, and the *fazhi* principle expressed on academic platforms, in regular media, and on social media (Liu, 2020: 74). The 2010s also saw escalating repression of activist lawyers and other human rights civil society advocates, including more extensive censorship and in some cases imprisonment of activists (Trevaskes, 2018: 349, 360; Veg, 2019: 41; Wang and Liu, 2019: 15).

Centralising power and control to a degree much higher than any other post-Mao leader, Xi has nonetheless continued to champion law-oriented governance as a pathway to stability, growth, and development. Moreover, the past decade has seen sweeping changes to China's judicial institutions and several constitutional amendments that give the CCP a stronger constitutional foundation for leadership. These amendments include the removal in early 2018 of constitutional term limits for the presidency, a move that may allow current President Xi Jinping to rule for life (Zhang, 2021; Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019). Simultaneously, Xi has implemented a vigorous anti-corruption campaign, and under his leadership, the party-state has adopted new laws on domestic security and expanded technology-based approaches to social control to further strengthen the ability to police various forms of illegal conduct and suppress political contention within Chinese society (Greitens, 2019; Liu, 2020: 74–75). Arguably then, rather than circumventing legal principles and institutions altogether, the party under Xi has sought to harness the organisational and legitimising capacities of the law to buttress its rule (Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 309–10).

The CCP's attempt to reap legitimacy benefits from its avowed commitment to the law is illustrated in the extensive propaganda effort aimed at increasing social awareness of the law and the Constitution. In 2018, for instance, the party announced a new public holiday, designating December 4, the anniversary of the Constitution's enactment in 1982, as China's "Constitution Day." Soon after, the Ministry of Education (MOE) directed schools at all levels to promote "constitutional education curriculum," and announced plans to include questions about the Constitution in all future high school admissions examinations (cited in Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 350–351; see also Zhang, 2020). Party rhetoric, though, clarified that its model of constitutionalism is fundamentally different from "Western Constitutionalism" (Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 351). The party-controlled media has reasserted the idea of "nativist exceptionalism" while rejecting "universal norms" and "foreign influences" on China, including in the legal sphere. Within the framework of what the CCP terms "socialist legal rule" (社会主义法治, *shehui zhuyi fazhi*), official articulations of the past decade emphasise that legal institutions are under party rule. The law primarily functions to further the state's political goals, including that of maintaining social order and exercising better control over corrupt or recalcitrant officials (Lin and Trevaskes, 2019: 42; Trevaskes, 2018: 364).

The stress on using the law to maintain "stability" and "security" has found an expression in the educational domain as well, with official party discourse promoting the idea that youth legal education is necessary for the prevention of juvenile delinquency, increasingly portrayed as a serious social problem in China (see, e.g. Fazhi Jiaoyu Wang, 2018; Li, 2015; Tian, 2019; Yu, 2019). To strengthen the "legal consciousness" and law-abiding behaviour of youth, China's MOE under Xi announced a major reform in the citizenship education curriculum. The reform included the publication of revised textbooks for the primary and junior high school level under the new title, *Morality and Legal Rule* (道德与法治, *Daode yu fazhi*), along with a considerable expansion of law-related contents, particularly at the junior high school level (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2016; see also Law and Xu, 2020: 141; Ye, 2019: 517). In what follows, I focus on the legal socialisation approach embodied in these new textbooks.

Data and Methodology

Citizenship education is not a separate subject in mainland China's school curriculum, but rather is included in Political Education, Ideological Education, and/or Moral Education classes (Lee and Ou, 2008). The present study employs content analysis and textual analysis of the mandatory textbooks used in Morality and Legal Rule classes in Grades 7–9 (ages 12–15): the final stage of compulsory education in China. The writing of the textbooks was organised by the MOE and followed the official curricula standards drawn up by the government, specifically the "Compulsory Ideological and Morality Education Curriculum Standards" (2011 Edition) and the "Syllabus for Youth Legal Rule Education" (2016). The revised volumes were reviewed and approved by the National Textbook Committee (Zhong and Zhu, 2018: 18), and published by the People's Education Press in Beijing, the leading authorised publishing house for

textbooks in China (Tse, 2011). The books were introduced in 2017–2019, and are currently in use in all schools across the country.

The textbooks were compiled by a team of multiple authors, with Beijing Normal University education professor, Zhu Xiaoman, serving as the editor-in-chief of the entire junior high school series. The revision process reportedly took place in 2012–2017 and included consultations with frontline teachers and with researchers in the fields of pedagogy, political science, law, ethics, psychology, and philosophy (Zhu and Wang, 2018: 24). According to editor-in-chief, Zhu Xiaoman, the revised textbooks place a particular emphasis on connecting “abstract and conceptual contents” with children’s “individual life experiences,” and therefore include an extended selection of supplementary readings, interactive features, exercises, and activities (Zhong and Zhu, 2018: 20).

Consisting of six volumes altogether, two in each junior high school grade, the books cover a range of topics, including physiological and psychological changes in adolescence; students’ social interactions at school, in the home, and in their local communities; as well as broader issues related to the development of Chinese society and culture, national history, the CCP, and the operation of various state institutes. Global concerns, including issues such as war, peace, and environmental protection, are also included. Law-related contents are concentrated in four of the junior high school volumes, specifically Grade Seven, Volume Two; Grade Eight, Volumes One and Two; and Grade Nine, Volume One. Within these volumes, seven out of sixteen units (单元, *danyuan*) are devoted exclusively to legal issues. The present analysis focuses on these units (see Table 1 in the Appendix for the list of units in each volume).

The theoretical framework of legal socialisation approaches discussed earlier served as an analytical tool for selecting, categorising, and interpreting the curricular materials analysed for the study. Paragraphs containing prescriptive statements about the rationales for legal compliance and/or the functions of the law were selected and marked for additional analysis. Paragraphs that did not discuss the law or those that only listed legal institutions and procedures without accompanying normative commentary were excluded. This method yielded more than 300 paragraphs for further analysis.

The selected paragraphs consisted of three main types: (a) running text; (b) supplementary reading; and (c) student activity. As noted, the textbooks’ editorial team has attempted to connect abstract concepts to students’ concrete experiences by including a variety of supplementary readings, activities, and assignments (Zhong and Zhu, 2018: 20). In practice, some frontline teachers in China may ignore the editors’ intent and assign greater importance to running text paragraphs than to the other two types of content. Nonetheless, the aim of the present study was not to evaluate actual teaching practices but to identify the overarching legal socialisation approach adopted in the revised textbooks. With that in mind, all three types of paragraphs were included in the analysis.

In the content analysis stage, selected paragraphs were coded as associated with either a coercive or a consensual approach. Paragraphs that invoked the use of force and the negative consequences of crime (i.e. punishments) were categorised as indicating a

coercive approach. Paragraphs that referred to positive benefits of legal compliance (e.g. conflict resolution, economic development, the maintenance of “social harmony” or the protection of individual rights) were marked as indicating a consensual approach. Paragraphs containing statements that could be associated with both approaches (i.e. referring both to punishments and to individual or collective benefits of the law and legal compliance), were coded once for each category. Table 2 in the Appendix presents the results of the content analysis.

The textual analysis stage, which forms the key part of the study, sought to delve deeper into the meanings of specific paragraphs and their contributions to the overall discourse of legal socialisation. In this stage, special attention was paid not only to the contents of each separate paragraph, but also to the relationship between different types of paragraphs, as well as to the rhetorical and pedagogical devices the book employs to advance its messages. Specifically, the analysis examined the following issues: (1) How does the textbook attempt to induce legal compliance in students? (2) If the consensual approach is employed, do the textbooks present students with a relatively idealised picture of China’s legal system or do they also acknowledge its imperfections and/or encourage criticism and independent thinking about the legal system? (3) If both the coercive and consensual socialisation approaches are detected, how are the different approaches related to each other in the text?

Drawing on the assumption that the Chinese citizenship education curriculum is not only an embodiment of CCP leaders’ “will and aspirations for governance and the future of the Chinese nation,” but also a “dynamic, contextualized, social construction” (Law, 2017: 259), the analysis further considered the relationship between the legal socialisation patterns detected in the textbooks and the features of China’s political and legal ideology in the Xi era (2012–).

“The Web of the Law is Intact and Lets Nothing Through”

Content analysis of the law-related prescriptive paragraphs in the four junior high school volumes reveals patterns matching both a coercive and a consensual approach to youth legal socialisation. Nonetheless, it is the latter approach that receives greater stress in the analysed paragraphs (for details, see Table 2 in the Appendix). A coercive approach was evident in only 37 per cent of analysed paragraphs, including those reflecting an exclusively coercive approach as well as those coded for both a coercive and a consensual approach.

The coercive approach was detected in the running text as well as in the supplementary readings and student assignments. Beginning in Grade Seven, for instance, children read that the “law is there to tell us what we can do, what we should do, and what we should not do.” In a reflection of the Xi era’s stress on nativist approaches to the law, this message is backed by references to indigenous Chinese sayings. Examples include the ancient idiom, “wood is straightened by the rope, the law instructs people to act with caution” (木受绳则直、人学法则慎, *mu shou sheng ze zhi, ren xue faze shen*) by third century BCE Confucian philosopher Xun Zi, associated in China with the idea

that human nature is evil, and that goodness is only acquired by training (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 93).

The eighth-grade volume paraphrases another old Chinese idiom, “The mesh in the net of heaven is wide, but it lets nothing through” (天网恢恢、疏而不漏, *tianwang huihui, shu er bu lou*) – originally a phrase by Daoist scholar Lao Zi, alluding to the notion that no evildoers can escape heavenly justice. Replacing “heaven” (天, *tian*) with the term, “law” (法, *fa*), the running text tells eighth graders that in contemporary China, it is the “mesh” of the law that is “wide” (法网恢恢, *fawang huihui*), and “lets nothing through” (疏而不漏, *shu er bu lou*). No crime goes undetected and all illegal behaviour “receives punishment according to the law” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 54). In relation to this point, a supplementary reading passage explains that in recent years, China’s public security organs have begun to deploy the “grid management” system, which combines digital technologies, surveillance cameras, and informants to effectively monitor any disruptive and criminal activity (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 24). The running text in the eighth-grade volume further introduces students to China’s technology-based “social credit system” (社会信用体系, *shehui xinyong tixi*) and “personal integrity system” (个人诚信体系, *geren chengxin tixi*), while a supplementary reading passage surveys the different punishments and incentives this new system employs to reward and sanction “trustworthy” and “dishonest” individuals, businesses, and other legal entities (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 45).

The eighth-grade textbook spares no detail in the depiction of different types of legal offences, ranging from the publication of “slander” and “fake information” on the Internet, to disorderly conduct in public and causing damage to public property; to debt and tax evasion, embezzlement, corruption, and fraud; drug consumption and drug trafficking; robbery, assault, rape, and even murder. Other punishable violations mentioned in both the running text and supplementary readings include shirking compulsory military service, attempting “to split the country” or “overthrow the socialist system,” as well as divulging “state secrets.” The books instruct students that depending on the seriousness of the crime, legal punishments might include “fines,” “confiscation of property,” “detention,” “fixed-term or life-term imprisonment,” “deprivation of political rights,” “deportation,” and the death penalty (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017). To test students’ knowledge, a class activity for eighth graders presents different illegal behaviours and asks students to match each behaviour to the corresponding criminal act and its penalty as listed in China’s Criminal Law (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 52).

Within the description of crimes and punishments, special attention is given to crimes committed by youth. The running text in the Seventh-Grade volume warns twelve- to thirteen-year-old students that as minors, their “ability to distinguish right from wrong and to control themselves is not strong” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 96). Eighth graders are told that crime “is the most dangerous trap” on their “growth path,” and that they must familiarise themselves with the contents of the Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency. The running text cautions that although “the law stipulates that a person can only commit a crime at a certain age,” this does not mean that the “bad actions” of minors bear no consequence (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 55).

The books further detail that those who have reached the age of 16 “shall bear criminal responsibility” for any type of crime (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 57), while a person who has reached the age of fourteen but not the age of sixteen who commits serious crimes such as “intentional homicide, intentional injury causing serious injury or death, rape, robbery, drug trafficking, arson, explosion, or poisoning, shall be held criminally responsible” for these actions (notably, since the book’s publication, the age of criminal responsibility for such crimes has been lowered from fourteen to twelve) (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 55).

In other supplementary reading sections, the textbooks further cite different clauses of China’s Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law, detailing a list of “bad behaviors” students should avoid. These range from “truancy” and “spending the night outside the home,” to “carrying controlled knives,” “fighting,” “forcibly demanding property from others,” “stealing or deliberately destroying property,” “gambling,” “consuming pornographic products,” “entering commercial music and dance halls and other places which laws and regulations stipulate that are unsuitable for minors,” and other “behaviors that seriously violate social morality” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 56). There are also detailed descriptions of specific offences and the types of punishments youth may receive for committing different legal violations. Seventh graders are told for instance that “the act of writing on, smearing or otherwise deliberately damaging nationally protected cultural relics, places of interest, and historical sites” may be subject to a warning or a fine of not more than CNY 200, and in more serious cases, five to ten days of detention and a higher fine (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 93). Students are also informed that traffic violations, such as pedestrians running a red light, can incur fines ranging from CNY 5 to 50 (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016) while smoking on a train will incur a fine of CNY 500 (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 25).

Student assignments present specific scenarios and detailed stories involving both adults and minors, asking learners to discuss the legal and moral lessons of the case or story. Examples for scenarios include teenagers “falsely calling a firefighter,” “destroying a railway fence,” and physically assaulting a fellow student (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 49); passengers holding up a train because their companions had failed to arrive at the station – an action for which they earned “ten days of administrative detention” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 27); an (adult) burglar running away with his loot; and a group of armed kidnappers holding a man for ransom (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017:14). Eighth graders read a story about a person named Li, who had “slandered people on the internet” and “spread false information that had a negative impact on state agencies.” In 2011, said Li was detained by the police “in accordance with the criminal law.” After a public trial, the People’s Court issued a guilty verdict and sentenced Li to “three years in prison” for “seriously disrupting public order” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017). Yet another section involves the story of a fifteen-year-old boy named Chen,

Who was originally a good student with excellent academic achievements. After becoming acquainted with a group of idle “friends,” Chen gradually became unwilling to study and

often missed class. At first, he apologized to his parents and teachers for his behavior. Later though he kept indulging himself until he was disciplined by the school for stealing things from his classmates and for beating and verbally attacking other students. Instead of learning his lesson, Chen continued stealing property. He was detained by the public security organs, but still did not repent. In order to get money to play games in internet cafes, Chen and two other “friends” committed multiple robberies over a course of several days and were eventually sentenced for these crimes. (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 55)

Eighth graders are asked to discuss this story and explain how Chen had “embarked on the path of crime” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017). There are several such cautionary tales in the books, which impart the message that youth should fear the law and follow it from an early age to avoid negative personal consequences. As the next section reveals, however, alongside such negative messages the textbooks also contain many statements associated with a consensual orientation to legal socialisation.

“I Choose to Obey the Law Consciously”

Statements that highlight the positive functions of the law and the benefits of legal compliance appear in more than 80 per cent of paragraphs examined in the study. As Table 2 in the Appendix shows, most of these paragraphs (63 per cent) carry statements associated exclusively with a consensual approach, while 23 per cent of these paragraphs were found to carry messages associated with both a consensual and a coercive approach.

Students are told, for instance, “in our common life, we all yearn for order and harmony and desire freedom and equality.” The running text further notes that laws ensure the achievement of these goals and provide “a civilized, orderly, harmonious, free space for our growth.” The “legal rule” principle is also a means to achieve “political clarity” and the “long-term stability of the country” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 84, 88, 2017: 50). In grade nine, students hear that the Chinese government has introduced the principle of “legal rule” to “coordinate social forces, balance social interests, and regulate social behavior,” so that society would run in “an orderly manner” even as it undergoes profound changes in the reform period. The running text further explains that under the current leadership of Xi Jinping, “legal rule” is also the basic guarantee for the development of a market economy and the realisation of a rich population and that laws are an effective way to “solve social contradictions, maintain social stability, and realize social justice” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018b: 47).

Another benefit the textbooks dwell on is the ability of the law to protect personal rights. Notably, though, this theme is often mentioned side by side with the idea of the law as a tool for maintaining order. Seventh graders are told for instance:

In life, we are not only bound by the law, but also protected by the law. The law safeguards our legitimate rights and interests by resolving disputes [...] punishing evil, promoting good, and upholding justice. With the continuous advancement of the legal rule principle in our country, the law will make our lives better (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 94)

The running text and supplementary readings in the volumes for grades seven to nine further instruct students that China's Constitution is the fundamental law of the country and "fully embodies the common will of the people." Citing Xi Jinping, the eighth-grade textbooks state that the power of the Constitution "lies in the heartfelt support" and "belief" of citizens (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 22, 27), thereby highlighting the consensual nature of the document. Seventh and eighth graders learn that China's Constitution regulates "the operation of state power to protect the rights of citizens," and that these rights include "religious freedom" and "the freedom of speech, publication, assembly, association, procession, and demonstration" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 100, 2018a: 3, 14, 98). Elsewhere, citizens' consumer and private property rights are highlighted (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 41), as is the use of legal means to protect minors from violence incurred not only by their classmates but also by family members (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 41, 101). The eighth-grade textbook offers detailed explanations of the process of filing a lawsuit while a supplementary reading introduces the role of lawyers and legal consultancy agencies in assisting regular citizens through the litigation process (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 58–59).

Like the descriptions of crime and punishments, the positive functions of the law are illustrated through references to concrete scenarios. These include descriptions of civil court cases in which Chinese of all walks of life deploy the law to safeguard their rights and interests. For instance, eighth graders read about a successful court case involving a teenager whose copyright was infringed on (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 59) and about a case in which the court had ordered compensation for injuries incurred in a traffic accident (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 8). The same volume presents a 2003 lawsuit in which a job applicant to China's civil service was rejected due to his Hepatitis B illness. The textbook notes that the court ruled in favour of the plaintiff, and students read that this "legal victory had an important impact on the subsequent abolishing of Hepatitis B discrimination in China" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 103–104). In another example, a villager by the name of Xie was diagnosed with a debilitating illness associated with his coal mining work and sued his employer for his work-related injury insurance benefits. In 2015, the court ruled in favour of Xie (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 92). The message in the book is that Chinese courts treat all citizens "equally," regardless of their background. In addition, the running text discusses China's administrative laws and emphasises that if citizens "believe that an administrative agency has not exercised its functions and powers in accordance with the law and infringed on their legitimate rights and interests," they may file an "administrative lawsuit" against the agency. In such cases, the courts can "provide effective relief and protection of citizens' rights thereby safeguarding justice and social fairness" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 93). Noting that since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the country has increased its anti-corruption efforts, "going after both 'tigers' and 'flies'" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 92), the eighth-grade textbook further clarifies that when faced with "illegal or negligent conduct of state agencies and state officials [...] citizens have the right to lodge complaints with the relevant state agencies" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 92).

The primacy of the consensual approach is evident in explicit statements in both the running text and in student activities. The seventh-grade textbook, for instance, cites a saying by the French Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), according to which “the most important law of all is not engraved on marble or brass, but in the hearts of the citizens.” The book further explains to seventh graders that they should not merely follow “external constraints” but also “internalize the value” of the law (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 102). Notably, this message is backed both by allusions to Western thinkers as well to indigenous writings. The running text in the ninth-grade volume invokes, for instance, a saying associated with Legalist philosopher Shen Dao (慎到, ca. 350–275 BCE), “Law does not come down from heaven nor does it emerge from the earth. Rather, it comes from the human realm, according with the human heart, and that is all.” This ancient saying, explains the textbook, highlights the importance of “jointly creating a good cultural environment” for observing the law in contemporary China (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018b: 55).

Another student activity presents the following tale about the Chinese neo-Confucian thinker Xu Heng (许衡, 1209–1281), which appears in the fourteenth-century book *History of the Yuan Dynasty* (元史, *Yuan shi*):

Before Xu Heng became an official, he went out one summer. Because of the heat everyone was thirsty in the extreme. By the roadside there was a pear tree, where a crowd of people scrambled desperately for pears and gobbled them down. Only Xu Heng remained composed. Someone asked him about this, and he replied: “It is not my pear tree, I cannot pick it randomly!” Someone else said, “It is a time of chaos! And these pears have no master.” Xu Heng replied, “though the pears have no master, does that mean my heart has no master?” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 28)

The idea that legal compliance should draw not (only) on coercion but also on voluntary deference illustrated in this ancient tale is further conveyed to eighth graders through a present-day scenario of pedestrians crossing a red light. A girl comments on this scene, “the red light is on, but everyone else is crossing, so I can follow them.” Another states: “As long as no one sees you, and no one is in charge, you can cross the street in a red light,” while a third opines: “When there are many vehicles, you cannot cross in a red light, but when there are few or no vehicles, it is okay.” Young readers are prompted to consider the scenario and the students’ various comments. The running text then clarifies that all three are in fact mistaken: we should follow the law even in the absence of external supervision or when those around us are willing to break laws and regulations (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 29). Youth must not only focus on the potential risks associated with unlawful conduct but should also recognise their responsibility to accept the law, and should willingly defer to the decisions of legal actors.

In an exercise in the Grade Nine textbook, readers are presented with a more abstract articulation of this idea. Here, four students are shown conversing on their motivations for following the law. One boy explains: “I abide by the law, because there are laws and regulations, and I cannot break them.” Another states: “I abide by the law because I am afraid

and dare not break the law.” A female student claims, “I abide by the law because I want to avoid trouble,” while another retorts, “I abide by the law because I have freedom thanks to the law. I choose to obey the law consciously” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018b: 54). The underlying message is that legal compliance requires both “rewards, punishments and other external constraints,” as well as strict “self-discipline” and constant “self-reflection.” Nonetheless, the latter approach is presented as a more progressive mode of thought and behaviour (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2017: 28).

While promoting consensual legal compliance, the textbooks exhibit a clear tendency to depict the country’s legal system in relatively rosy terms. The Chinese government is said to work continuously to “increase the protection of various human rights, including economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights,” and students are assured that “respect for and protection of human rights form the basic requirements of legislative activities in the country” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 7). The textbooks offer concrete examples for recent improvements in China’s laws, particularly in the realm of rights protection. Students are told, for instance, that China’s Criminal Procedure Law now bans the use of “illegal detentions” or “torture” to extract confessions, and that “judicial agencies at all levels” have “strengthened judicial fairness and openness” thereby ensuring the right of every citizen to “a fair trial” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 9, 16, 35, 100). Youth further learn about the abolishment of the administrative detention system of “re-education through labor” (劳动教养, *laodong jiaoyang*) that had targeted “minor criminals” in China since the Mao era (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 22). Notably, legal scholars outside mainland China maintain that the formal abolition of this system in 2013 did not in fact end the use of arbitrary, non-criminal administrative detention methods, as these continue to operate in China under different names and forms to this day (see, e.g. Biddulph, 2019: 385). The eighth-grade textbook, published in 2018, glosses over this fact. Instead, it tells young readers that although “the re-education through labor system had played an important role in maintaining social order” during “a special period” in Chinese history, with “the development of society and the progress of legal rule,” its drawbacks had become “more and more obvious,” as it “lacked a clear legal base” and “contradicted the spirit of the Constitution” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 22).

Arguably, such assurances do hint at certain imperfections in China’s legal system. Indeed, students also read that the implementation of the legal rule principle in China is “a long-term systematic project, which cannot be achieved overnight” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018b: 56); that the “laws are not set in stone,” and that with China’s rapid social development, some laws “lose their rationality and need to be abolished, while others should be modified or added,” for example in areas such as protection of online privacy or consumer rights (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2016: 91, 2017: 31, 2018a: 34). Ninth graders are even encouraged to “actively contribute” to the improvement of the legal system by offering their own ideas and “actively supervising” the “administration of the country according to law” (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018b: 52).

Nonetheless, this type of statement and criticism of China's present legal system were detected in a small number of paragraphs analysed for the study, and the textbooks clarify the limitations to Chinese citizens' ability to change or challenge the law. As noted earlier in the discussion, legal education that espouses post-conventional moral reasoning often draws on the idea of the "social contract," according to which regular individuals have the capacity to judge and consent on weighty legal matters. China's junior high school textbooks do not promote such a notion. The books invoke "contracts" mainly in reference to agreements that guarantee "safe and smooth progress" of economic activities (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 50–51). Drawing on a Marxist conceptualisation of the law, the textbooks emphasise that laws and the Constitution reflect the economic basis of society and may be changed as the economy passes through various stages. Youth are also taught that they can "demand better implementation of national laws and policies by local government officials." Yet they are told that they must adhere to the leadership of the CCP. Laws are said to be an "embodiment of the will of the ruling class," and the books explain that in China, socialist state law "serves the people," who are "the masters of the country," yet the CCP acts as the vanguard of the people. The party ultimately "leads the people" in the formulation of the Constitution and other laws," directs "the legislation process," and ensures "law enforcement" (Renmin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2018a: 20, 2018b: 50).

While Chinese citizens – and minors in particular – are said to enjoy a range of rights, the textbooks emphasise that these rights are only possible because the party is there to protect them. There is little room for individuals' independent consideration of persistent issues within the political and legal system. The textbooks also do not recognise the existence of conflicting perspectives on the law among various social groups in China. Thus, while the Xi era textbooks place an emphasis on consensual legal socialisation, they do so by drawing mainly on conventional rather than post-conventional legal reasoning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to identify, examine, and contextualise the patterns of youth legal socialisation in the citizenship education curriculum of the Xi era – a time of deepening surveillance and monitoring of public discourse, greater restrictions of legal activism, and an expansion of technologies of social control. Drawing on legal socialisation theory, the analysis of legal themes within China's junior high school textbooks discerned elements associated with both a coercive and a consensual approach to youth legal education.

The textbooks warn adolescents about the "long reach" of the law, provide detailed and often quite graphic descriptions of illegal offences, crimes, and punishments, and present cautionary tales on the repercussions of juvenile delinquency. In teaching youth to obey rules to avoid bad consequences and physical harm, the books arguably endorse an instrumental, dominance-based relationship between citizens and the law, and seek to incite fear of legal retribution. At the same time, however, the analysis documented a greater stress on consensual legal compliance in the Xi era textbooks. The books

present the Constitution and other legal documents as beneficial tools for protecting personal rights as well as maintaining social order. Moreover, the books' authors explicitly endorse the notion that youth should advance beyond the external supervisory stage to the "self-discipline" level of legal consciousness. In making this point, the Xi era textbooks refer to both indigenous as well as Western texts grounded in Enlightenment-era liberal thinking. This discursive choice indicates that despite the CCP's recent stress on nativist exceptionalism, the citizenship education curriculum of the Xi era has not wholly rejected foreign influences in its conceptualisation of the law. Rather, the current curriculum attempts to amalgamate these influences with China's refashioned local traditions to stress not only the punitive power of the law but also the importance of voluntary legal compliance.

This pedagogic approach may help foster an appreciation for the law and law-abiding behaviour among Chinese students. Yet, as we also saw, the textbooks allow little criticism of the country's legal system. Rather, they tend to paint an idealistic picture, in which China's laws are "fair," "justice prevails," and the party's actions are "all for the best" (cf. Rowe, 1992: 82). There is also no recognition of the potential existence of multiple perspectives on the law among various social groups in China, a key feature of the post-conventional approach to the law. Such a tactic may be counter-productive for the inducement of wilful legal compliance in youth. At some point, students might realise that the textbooks are wrong or redundant (cf. Rowe, 1992: 82; Tyler and Trinkner, 2018: 179–180). The information Chinese students receive in the textbooks may be contradicted by a repressive reality not only outside the school but also inside it, as schools in China often employ harsh disciplinary measures and recently also extensive digital surveillance to manage students (see, e.g. Li, 2018; Wang, 2019; Xue, 2019). When youth are presented with an overly positive view of the legal system which cannot be supported by evidence, they may end up developing an attitude of apathy or cynicism towards the law. Ultimately, the capacity of Chinese youth to make legal decisions for themselves can thereby become limited (cf. Rowe, 1992: 82; Tyler and Trinkner, 2018: 179–180).

Acknowledging this problem, some PRC education scholars have publicly advocated that school teachers allow for more critical discussions of legal issues. Class discussions, argue these Chinese scholars, can and should go beyond the textbooks to engage in timely topics, including, for instance, the legal and ethical aspects of the Chinese government's recent handling of the COVID-19 epidemic. Raising this issue in class can prompt a meaningful discussion on whether "it was necessary to sacrifice individual interests for the benefit of the majority" or "the tension between privacy rights and epidemic control; information disclosure and social stability considerations" (see, e.g. Du and Lei, 2020; Zhang, 2020: 17).

These critical recommendations illustrate some of the limitations of the present study. The materials examined here reflect the Chinese government's official perspective, but do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of other curriculum stakeholders, such as education scholars, teachers, students, and caregivers. The present analysis also cannot attest to the actual outcomes or classroom teaching and learning realities in schools of various

types and in different locations across the country (cf. Law, 2014: 337; Vickers, 2009: 526). Such issues may be explored in future empirical studies. Subsequent studies could also delve deeper into the books' conceptualisation of the function of the Constitution within China's legal system; the status of the law vis-à-vis that of the party and the state, or the relationship between civic rights and civic duties. These topics could be examined not only in the *Morality and Legal Rule* junior high school textbooks but also in legal education materials used in other grades and subjects, including, for instance, Chinese and History.

These caveats notwithstanding, the findings of the present study are significant in that they illuminate broader trends in the development of China's law-related curriculum, and the relationship between the design of the citizenship education curriculum and the CCP's governing techniques in the 2000s. The fact that the Xi era curriculum employs both a consensual and a coercive legal socialisation approach may reflect the party's current intent to promote a hybrid method of social management, one which draws not only on harsh repression but also on people's consensual self-regulation. This approach suggests that the reign of Xi Jinping does not constitute a complete break with the supposed liberal trends of the early 2000s, as some scholars maintain, but rather the continued use of a "soft authoritarian" or "neo-socialist" mode of governance (Palmer and Winiger, 2019). This relatively sophisticated governing technique, which some scholars argue is evident not only in CCP rhetoric but also in various social domains in the 2010s (Palmer and Winiger, 2019), can presumably limit the need for constant surveillance and deployment of law enforcement, thereby reducing costs for the state.

The emphasis on the consensual legal socialisation approach in the Xi era textbooks may further indicate the current leadership's recognition of the benefits it may reap from political investment in the law, including more effective socioeconomic dispute resolution and stronger control over local agents. These benefits can in turn bolster the CCP's continued rule over the population at a time of increasing social fragmentation (see also Fu, 2015; Liebman, 2014; Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 322).

As noted earlier, some scholars maintain that despite the crackdowns on lawyers and civil rights activism in recent years, legal developments of the past decade may indicate "a strong path dependency" in the regime's use of legal institutions throughout the 2000s (see Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 387). From this vantage point, Xi and the rest of the party leadership have invested heavily in the development and strengthening of legal institutions not only because they view the law as instrumental for effectively centralised control of the bureaucracy, but also because the current leadership is acutely aware of the strong support for legal rule among different sectors in China's population, a trend which has only intensified since the Hu era (see also Lei, 2017; Whiting, 2017; Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 364, 387). The current party leadership arguably seeks to accommodate the growing popular demand for legal adherence as a crucial "defense against attempts at ideological persuasion from the leadership's foreign and domestic adversaries" (Zhang and Ginsburg, 2019: 375–376, 367).

This thesis has been challenged on the grounds that Xi's recent political and legal centralisation drive ultimately "serves the absolute leadership of the Party," and thus

undermines any substantive judicial reform that would allow for a true implementation of the legal rule principle (see Zhang, 2021: 591). That may be the case. Yet, the findings of the present study do lend support to the claim that Xi and the other party leaders are eager to tap into legal principles and institutions – or at the very least an educational discourse that extolls these principles and institutions – as a key source of public legitimacy.

The political benefits of fostering a positive attitude towards the law and the propagandist tone of the textbooks notwithstanding, the stress on consensual legal compliance in the citizenship curriculum of the Xi era can produce another effect, which may be riskier for the party-state. Thus, the primacy the textbooks attach to the recognition of the intrinsic value of the law and the discussion of the rights protection functions of the legal system can socialise some Chinese adolescents to perceive the law not merely as a tool of political control, stability maintenance or dispute management, but also of challenging the party-state's governing capacity or even demanding greater civil liberties as future citizens.


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Appendix

Table 1. Table of contents of the textbooks included in the study.

Book title	Grade & volume	Year of publication	Table of contents ^a
<i>Morality and Legal Rule (Daode yu Fazhi)</i>	Grade 7, Vol. 2	2016	<p>Unit 1: “Youth Time (<i>Qingchun shiguang</i>),” pp. 1–32</p> <p>Unit 2: “Being the Master of Emotions (<i>Zuo qingxu qinggan de zhuren</i>),” pp. 33–50</p> <p>Unit 3: “Growing Up in the Group (<i>Zai jiti zhong chengzhang</i>),” pp. 51–82</p> <p>Unit 4: “Entering the World of Legal Rule (<i>Zoujin fazhi tiandi</i>),” pp. 83–103</p>
<i>Morality and Legal Rule (Daode yu Fazhi)</i>	Grade 8, Vol. 1	2017	<p>Unit 1: “Entering Social Life (<i>Zoujin shehui shenghuo</i>),” pp. 1–20</p> <p>Unit 2: “Observing Social Rules (<i>Zunshou shehui guize</i>),” pp. 21–62</p> <p>Unit 3: “Courageously taking Social Responsibility” (<i>Yong dan shehui Zeren</i>), pp. 63–84</p> <p>Unit 4: “Safeguarding National Interests (<i>Weihu guojia liyi</i>),” pp. 85–110</p>
<i>Morality and Legal Rule (Daode yu Fazhi)</i>	Grade 8, Vol. 2	2018	<p>Unit 1: “Upholding the supremacy of the Constitution (<i>Jianchi xianfa zhishang</i>),” pp. 1–30</p> <p>Unit 2: “Understanding Rights and Obligations (<i>Lijie quanli yiwu</i>),” pp. 31–58</p> <p>Unit 3: “The People are the Masters” (<i>Renmin dangjia zuo zhu</i>),” pp. 59–94</p> <p>Unit 4: “Advocating the Spirit of Legal Rule (<i>Chongshang fazhi jingshen</i>),” pp. 95–118</p>
<i>Morality and Legal Rule (Daode yu Fazhi)</i>	Grade 9, Vol. 1	2018	<p>Unit 1: “Prosperity and Innovation (<i>Fuqiang yu chuangxin</i>),” pp. 1–28</p> <p>Unit 2: “Democracy and Legal Rule” (<i>Minzhu yu fazhi</i>),” pp. 29–56</p> <p>Unit 3: “Civilization and Homeland (<i>Wenming yu Jiayuan</i>),” pp. 57–88</p> <p>Unit 4: “Harmony and Dreams (<i>Hexie yu mengxiang</i>),” pp. 89–117</p>

^aNote: Highlighted units were selected for further analysis.

Table 2. Summary of content analysis: paragraphs by type & legal socialisation approach.

Book title	Grade & volume	Unit title	No. of analysed paragraphs	Paragraphs by type ^a	Coercive approach paragraphs by type	Consensual approach paragraphs by type	Both coercive & consensual approach paragraphs by type
Morality & Legal Rule	Grade 7, Vol. 2	Unit 4: "Entering the World of Legal Rule"	45	RT: 24 SR: 4 SA: 17	5 RT: 0 SR: 1 SA: 4	28 RT: 16 SR: 3 SA: 9	12 RT: 8 SR: 0 SA: 4
Morality & Legal Rule	Grade 8, Vol. 1	Unit 2: "Observing Social Rules"	79	RT: 35 SR: 15 SA: 29	20 RT: 10 SR: 4 SA: 6	39 RT: 20 SR: 3 SA: 16	20 RT: 5 SR: 8 SA: 7
Morality & Legal Rule	Grade 8, Vol. 2	Unit 1: "Upholding the supremacy of the Constitution"	55	RT: 29 SR: 8 SA: 18	1 RT: 0 SR: 1 SA: 0	43 RT: 26 SR: 5 SA: 12	11 RT: 3 SR: 2 SA: 6
		Unit 2: "Understanding Rights and Obligations"	59	RT: 37 SR: 4 SA: 18	12 RT: 5 SR: 0 SA: 7	37 RT: 27 SR: 2 SA: 8	10 RT: 5 SR: 2 SA: 3
		Unit 3: "The People are the Masters"	13	RT: 6 SR: 2 SA: 5	4 RT: 2 SR: 0 SA: 2	5 RT: 2 SR: 1 SA: 2	4 RT: 2 SR: 1 SA: 1
		Unit 4: "Advocating the Spirit of Legal Rule"	30	RT: 16 SR: 7 SA: 7	2 RT: 0 SR: 1 SA: 1	18 RT: 11 SR: 4 SA: 3	10 RT: 5 SR: 2 SA: 3

(Continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Book title	Grade & volume	Unit title	No. of analysed paragraphs	Paragraphs by type ^a	Coercive approach paragraphs by type	Consensual approach paragraphs by type	Both coercive & consensual approach paragraphs by type
<i>Morality & Legal Rule</i>	Grade 9, Vol. 1	Unit 2: "Democracy and Legal Rule"	24	RT: 15 SR: 4 SA: 5	0	22 RT: 15 SR: 3 SA: 4	2 RT: 0 SR: 1 SA: 1
Total ^b	-	-	305	RT: 162 (53%) SR: 44 (14%) SA: 99 (33%)	44 (14%)	192 (63%)	69 (23%)

^aThe types of paragraphs are: running text (RT); supplementary reading (SR); and student activity (SA).

^bPercentages have been rounded to full numbers.