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西语东渐与中国社会思想演变

章少泉 著



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ELT in China and Its Lily Pond Effect: An Introduction

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Since China's reforms started in the late 1970s English language teaching (ELT) has been developing at a phenomenal rate in China. Nowadays you are more or less considered uneducated in China if you do not speak or read some English. Examination marks in English are essential not only for upgrading one's formal education but also for the promotion in one's career, whether in the profession of engineering or government bureaucracy, or in obtaining a good job in a foreign-owned company. Furthermore, English is the gateway for hundreds of thousands of aspiring Chinese to study abroad or to migrate to a foreign country, and of course the USA is the number one destination.

The demand for learning a foreign language (English) in China is unprecedented in human history, not only because of the number involved (anything that China does the first time is unprecedented since it has so many people) but also because of the phenomenal intensity, ferocity, determination and single-mindedness of both the government and the population. An ordinary person can become a popular television star in China simply because he or she happens to be good at teaching you how to speak English on television, as the case of an English woman by the name of Flower

who did the *Follow Me* programme shows. Millions of Chinese came to know and became loyal listeners to the Voice of America (VOA) because of its English language programmes. If you pay a visit to any university or college in China you will not fail to notice that the English department is one of the most prestigious and usually one of the wealthiest departments. Teachers of these departments have extra hours to teach and they earn more than teachers of some other departments. English language teaching (ELT) is a big business in China. But why?

English is useful and powerful, useful because it has become a *de facto* universal language and powerful because of the political, military, economic and therefore cultural influences of the countries where English is the first language. Do we have to mention the USA that has the best resourced universities, the best technology base and that is a country that remains to be the only military super power after the Cold War? The USA is supposed to have the best political system too. So are we told by VOA and so do many Chinese believe. These factors obviously account for the Chinese desire to learn English and explain the phenomenon of the massive ELT market. But there are more profound political culture reasons for the enormous expansion of ELT in China.

The Chinese are a proud people that have a long history of civilization, but they are less exclusive and more tolerant to other cultures. This may be a very controversial proposition and I am sure many non-Chinese as well as Chinese will not agree with me. They would argue that China and the Chinese are no more tolerant than any other people and country. Many foreign observers again and again raise the issue that the name for China *zhongguo* (Middle Kingdom) is an indication that China was exclusive and the Chinese were arrogant and Sino-centric. Almost every time a foreign country or politician does not take a perceived necessary tough stand against China on, say, the issue of human rights, you can

bet the mainstream Western media would accuse the government of that foreign country or that politician of *kowtowing* to China.

There are some standard arguments that China and the Chinese are exclusive and Sino-centric. One might argue that even the Chinese written language is very exclusive in that it can hardly completely absorb a loan word from an alphabetic language. One can also point out historical incidents such as the Boxers Rebellion to show how exclusive and xenophobic the Chinese can be. One can also say the Chinese are as racist as any other people on earth (Frank Dikötter 1992).

It is ingenious for Huntington (1992) to propose the thesis of clashes of civilizations to conceptualize the existing and incoming conflicts on the international stage. However, Huntington chooses not to consider the idea that there will not be clashes of civilizations if one does not desire to get rid of another. I believe the Chinese civilization, if there is such an entity, does not desire to get rid of or take over any other civilization. The two largest empires in Chinese history in terms of territories were the Yuan and Qing Dynasties when China was ruled by the ethnic minorities who did not belong to the sphere of Chinese civilization. It is therefore really ironical that both the Mongols and Manchus conquered China and ruled the Chinese for hundreds of years and yet the essential features of Chinese culture survived. This is because Chinese culture has the heart and space to embrace difference and adversity. Here is one example. Chinese men wearing a long queue were once considered an essential feature of being a Chinese. It was a target of ridicule when a Chinaman travelled abroad. But the custom was imposed on the Chinese by the Manchus after the latter's conquest of China. Eventually the Chinese thought that wearing a pig tail was part of their culture. It required a republic revolution in 1911 to undo the idea and practice of Chinese men wearing a queue.

It is worth pointing out at this juncture the tradition of

anti-tradition in China since the so-called May 4th Movement in 1919. In the early 20th century all the forward looking Chinese, from the left to the right, from Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu to Lu Xun and to Hu Shi, were very critical of Chinese traditional culture. Today Chinese tradition is still the target of the Enlightenment liberals. One can hardly think of any other case like this: the flag bearers of a country's culture have been consistently and continuously bashing their own culture. Even the Japanese, who want to cast away the Asian skin and to be like Europeans, to be honorary white at least, have never gone this far. All nations and peoples have to adopt and adjust to advance with the times, but it is hard to identify any other nation or people who advocate self-hatred and self-destruction as much as the Chinese.

Even though there has been a call for the revival of Confucianism in recent years, traditional cultural nihilism still holds the swing in China. Therefore, I would argue it is due to the absence of religious fundamentalism that there is no culture and value supremacy in Chinese culture. However, this alone still does not explain the whole story of the ELT phenomenon in China. We need to move nearer to modern history to seek further explanation. It all started with Western imperialism and colonialism. It is this post-colonial account that I would like to offer, even though many neoliberals in China would argue that the conceptualization of post-colonialism cannot apply to China since China has never really been a colony of Western colonialism. But I would argue that in terms of physical occupation China was at least semi-colonial. Hong Kong and Macau were colonies and Shanghai was a colony of some kind. Foreigners controlled Chinese customs for a long time and foreign goods penetrated the Chinese hinterland. But the most important is not the material but the mental occupation, the colonial mentality that the Chinese were an inferior race and Chinese civilization was sick and dying.

When the Western powers, with Great Britain as its ringleader, started to penetrate China and when the Chinese saw China was in danger of being carved up between these powers, they wanted to find a way to beat off them. The fact that the Japanese joined the gang to swallow up Chinese territory only reinforced the Chinese perception that the only way to succeed was to ape the West (according to one estimate the cash "compensation" the Japanese demanded from the Chinese after its victory in *jiu wu* (1894—1895) war amounted to four years of Japan's total GDP at that time or the equivalent of seventeen years of financial income of the then Chinese government). The Chinese could see clearly that the Western powers respected only power and strength along the lines of social Darwinism. The forward looking Chinese first only wanted to copy Western military and economic technology, as these were perceived to be the source of Western power. When this *fu guo qiang bing* (rich country and strong army) did not succeed as the Chinese expected they started to question their own cultural values and tradition. Thus the Chinese of the left persuasion took up the Western idea of Marxism and Leninist idea of government while the Chinese of the right persuasion took up the Western idea of liberal democracy. During the era of Mao from the 1950s there was a surge of Russian language learning. Since the late 1970s there was a tide of learning English.

Dr Zhang's book is one of the first to track down the historical development of foreign language learning in relation to Chinese nationalism and international politics. But Dr Zhang's book goes further than that. Let me explain why. It is almost a common sense to say that a country's internal politics affects its foreign language policy. It is more than common sense to say that a dominant ideology influences how English is taught and what kind of English is taught in a country. Dr Zhang's book has a good discussion of both these issues. The thesis exploited in the book

that Chinese ideology influences ELT in China itself is interesting enough. There is not much literature in the field to explore this thesis, as Dr Zhang shows in the book. Dr Zhang's discussion in this respect deserves to be read. However, such a thesis can be said to be something that one would expect.

What may not be expected and therefore intellectually exciting is a thesis that there can be some kind of reverse impact by ELT in that how English is taught and what is taught also influences the country's ideology. To use an analogy: the fact that a dog may bite people is expected and therefore to make a statement on that is not a discovery even though to explain why a dog may bite people is still a worthwhile project. But to say the people may bite a dog is not expected and therefore it is interesting to explain why that is the case is even more interesting. This is exactly what Dr Zhang's book is set to do.

In any country, Western or Asian, value norms and beliefs influence and regulate state policy-making. These value norms and beliefs can be, but not necessarily official. If these value norms and beliefs are official the state will use its governing machinery such as education, political and economic policies, the law and media to reinforce and protect them. This kind of reinforcement and protection can be violent if there are contradictory and counter value norms and beliefs that are unofficial in the society. If, on the other hand, the official value norms and beliefs happen to be these that are accepted and held by the popular and therefore there is not much unofficial opposition, the state's governing machinery can afford to be less intrusive and the society appears to be freer. The contents of the value norms and beliefs are usually called ideology.

For the sake of convenience we may as well use the more familiar term ideology, as it is used in Dr Zhang's book. Now it is commonly perceived that for a long time in China ideology has been brutally, overtly and sometimes violently reinforced. It is quite

easy to see why there has been such a perception. The value norms and beliefs that the Chinese state wants to be accepted were not only the antithesis of traditional Chinese values such as Confucianism but also ran counter to the liberal democracy values and beliefs commonly accepted and held in the most powerful countries on earth. Therefore, to reinforce a set of values and beliefs against such odds could indeed not have been a dinner party. Therefore, the power and influence of ideology on the policy of ELT in China should be obvious and expected. ELT is not simply a way to learn a language, it introduces ideology from another culture.

However, it is also commonly accepted that ideology reinforcement has gradually become less overt and less violent during the post-Mao era of China and this is inevitably reflected in ELT policies. Dr Zhang analyses and discusses this aspect of decline of or the less blatant implementation of ideology in what he terms as "depoliticization". Even here, Dr Zhang adopts a very sophisticated approach to interpret this direction of the relationship between ideology and ELT policies, i. e. the direction of the impact of ideology over ELT. Dr Zhang uses the distinction between pure ideology and practical ideology, a nuanced distinction made in the field of Chinese studies but ignored by many. These two types of ideologies can interact and shift around in their importance and impact at any given period of Chinese politics. Thus in the post-Mao era, the pure ideology may still be Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, CCP leadership and socialism, which may pull the state away from ELT. But the practical ideology is Modernization, which may push the state towards ELT.

Precisely because of the mechanism of the shift between pure ideology and practical ideology a door is open for the other direction of the relationship between ideology and ELT policies, i. e. the reverse impact. By using the three case studies of VOA, George

Orwell and D. H. Lawrence, Dr Zhang demonstrates that ELT policies and their implementation have impacted and influenced the change of Chinese ideology, covertly if not overtly and gradually if not instantaneously.

Since late 1970s practical ideology Modernization took priority over pure ideology (one may recall Deng Xiaoping's decree of not to dispute over isms), which led to two immediate developments. One was the large scale learning of English. There was ELT during the era of Mao of course, but the scale was smaller and not so much of a huge importance was attached to it. The second development was the more relaxed attitudes to the selection and collection of teaching materials. In the book Dr Zhang has a comprehensive presentation of how the contents of ELT textbooks have changed over time.

It is the second development that is not only more complex but also source of evidence of how ELT in turn impacts on pure ideology. Let me continue the exposition of this by stating a simple but somewhat perplexing fact: The translation of some of George Orwell's books such as *Animal Farm* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* are not allowed to be on the Chinese market for sale but the English versions are and can be used as teaching materials. Why this double standard? One obvious explanation that one can offer is that those who can read English are few and the Chinese authorities would not mind a small audience of such books but would worry about the undesirable effect for the large populus if these books were available in Chinese. This is quite a reasonable guess and it might well be true. However, whoever thought of this double standard must be short-sighted, as the events in contemporary China have shown. Equally one can suggest that the Chinese authorities, in order to train qualified experts in English, have decided that what is considered to be important in the English language is important for the Chinese students to learn and therefore such texts mentioned above cannot be excluded. This

consideration is of course driven by the ideology of Modernization. Have we not been told again and again that it does not matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice?

One can of course be more speculative by suggesting that the Chinese educational elite who make ELT policies are not very supportive of the pure ideology anyway and therefore are more sympathetic with books such as those by George Orwell. These highly-educated and well-informed people may well be too influenced by Western ideology and may want to bring the undesirable to the Chinese for precisely that purpose. They cannot do that very openly and blatantly since they would violate the official pure ideology. This speculation may be a bit cynical or can even be considered as advocating a theory of conspiracy. I think at least for some of the Chinese education elite this is very likely. In any case this design goes hand in hand with the Modernization ideology.

Whatever the reason or reasons for the double standard of allowing English texts on the market while banning the Chinese versions, the tolerance of allowing the accessibility of some Western books, albeit in English, could and actually has had some unintended or intended effect: Once the taboo is broken and once one book is allowed more will be allowed. This has become a self-feeding process. The more you feed the more it is demanded and the more is demanded the more needs there are to be fed. If and when this process goes far enough the value norms and beliefs of those who had access to these books will have changed and in turn the changed value norms and the beliefs of the elite will trickle down to the masses. By the time you look back in, say, three decades you will notice that there has been a sea change of ideology. Thus there is this reverse impact of ELT on ideology. Dr Zhang calls the process the "lily pond effect": the appearance of one lily means eventually the rest of the pond will be filled with

lilies.

Finally I may dwell on something personal, as this book is based on Dr Zhang's doctorate thesis. I was fortunate enough to be Dr Zhang's PhD thesis supervisor. Dr Zhang's superb mastery of English certainly has made my supervision much easier. Dr Zhang had already published a number of papers in refereed English language journals before he completed his PhD degree. Dr Zhang is one of the very few mainland Chinese that I know of who not only intended to return to work at the Chinese institution that had sent him but also spent the final of year of his PhD candidature in China. I consider myself very fortunate to know Dr Zhang and his work, and more fortunate to consider myself Dr Zhang's friend.

Preface

This study takes a political approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) in China. It was prompted by two parallel developments in China during the past twenty years or so: the expansion of ELT and changes in ideology. The study looks into the hitherto scarcely explored political aspects of ELT and finds that ELT has significant impact on both the official ideology and the people's belief system. It fills in a gap in the research of contemporary Chinese politics by revealing the political consequences and implications of ELT. Findings of the study on the one hand de-mythologize the political innocuousness of ELT, and on the other hand throw light on the more general questions regarding the causes and process of ideological change.

The study draws on a number of concepts and analytical tools. The most important one is the model of pure ideology versus practical ideology developed by Franz Schurmann in the 1960s. With some modifications, the model views the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party as made up of possibly conflicting elements, which are located at different levels of abstraction. It also sees ideological change in terms of the shifting of some elements of the ideology from the realm of pure ideology into that of practical ideology or vice versa. Schurmann's model is used here to define both "ideology" and "ideological change", and it serves as

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theoretical framework for the study. Another important concept is that the three mechanisms of positivism, technicalization and marketization are dominant features of ELT (A. Pennycook 1994). In the Chinese context, these mechanisms serve to create an effective channel for the influx of Western ideologies into China, and this influx in turn may pose serious challenge to the Chinese ideology. Finally there is the concept of textbooks as ideological discourse with ideological functions (Elena Lisovskaya and Vyacheslav Karpov 1999). This concept is used in discussing how English-language textbooks serve as impetus of ideological change.

The scope of the research covers three areas of ELT in China: English-language textbooks, English literature, and ELT impact at social level. In each and all these three areas the study finds that ELT has significant impact on ideological change. In the English-language textbooks, with the removal of the more orthodox communist ideological symbols and the insertion of symbols associated with Modernization and Western ideologies, the general trend is de-radicalization in ideology. In literature, challenged by the introduction of Western Modernist writers, the previously dominant Marxist discourse has become practically irrelevant in terms of policy making and policy outcome. At the social level, the study looks into the cases of the Voice of America and George Orwell, and finds that on the one hand ELT functions in breaking Chinese political/ideological taboos, forcing the authorities to adopt a double standard towards heterodox ideas. On the other hand ELT has led to a "lily pond effect" in terms of growing influx of dissenting Western ideologies.

Finally, drawing on findings of this study and taking into account the current pace of development of ELT, the study predicts an even greater ELT impact on ideology in the future.

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2006

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CET	College English Test
CPE	Chinese Pidgin English
ELT	English language teaching
HSK	Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi
JEFC	<i>Junior English for China</i>
NCE	<i>New Concept English</i>
NXGZE	<i>New Xu Guozhang English</i>
PEP	People's Education Press
PRC	People's Republic of China
UNDP	United Nations Developing Program
VOA	Voice of America
WSK	Waiyu Shuiping Kaoshi (Foreign Language Proficiency Test)
XGZE	<i>Xu Guozhang English</i>
YDYE	<i>Yu Dayin English</i>
ZHXAE	<i>Zhang Hanxi Advanced English</i>