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The politics of education on China's periphery: 'Telling China's Story Well' – or honestly?

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the politics of education as they affect regions and communities on the periphery of the People's Republic of China. Drawing on the articles in this special issue of *Comparative Education*, it analyses tensions related to the attempted imposition of Bejing's homogenising and totalising vision of Chineseness across Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and amongst the mainland's migrant underclass. Also considered here are the politics of comparative educational scholarship, as they relate to a widespread failure to engage critically with the diversity and complexity of Chinese societies. Attributable largely to the West's own 'culture wars', this failure betrays much-touted ethical commitments to social justice and anti-'hegemonic' resistance. It is thus a central purpose of this essay – and special issue – to urge educational scholars to interrogate the politics of oppression and injustice in China and elsewhere 'beyond the Western horizon'.

中国的边缘和教育的政治：实事求是地'讲好中国故事'

本文概观处于中华人民共和国边缘的地区和群体所面临的教育中的政治。基于本期《比较教育》特刊的文章，本文分析了北京试图在西藏、新疆、内蒙古、香港、台湾以及大陆底层农民工群体中强加具有同质化和总体化作用的中国性所带来的紧张。我们还讨论了比较教育学研究中的政治，特别是其普遍未能批判性地研讨中国社会的多样性和复杂性。这一主要归因于西方自身的'文化战争'的失败背叛了其推崇的对于社会正义和反'霸权'抵抗的伦理承诺。因此，本文及本特刊的主要目的是敦促教育学者审视'西方视野之外'的中国及其他地方所存在的压迫和不正义的政治。

KEYWORDS

China; education; politics; coloniality; identity; nationalism; Tibet; Xinjiang; Inner Mongolia; Hong Kong; Taiwan

中国; 教育; 政治; 殖民; 身份; 民族主义; 西藏; 新疆; 内蒙古; 香港; 台湾

Introduction: Why China? What periphery?

At its most basic, 'Comparative Education' involves studying education in contexts other than one's own. It is when we consider the purposes for which this is undertaken that things get more complex. Analysis of education in other societies can illuminate our own ideas and practices, prompting us to question the familiar and taken-for-granted. Much comparative scholarship is also animated by the belief that a better understanding of context can aid efforts to improve education. But it can also serve a more cynical

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agenda: propagating norms that serve the interests of 'hegemonic' actors. The foreign expert may set out less to understand than to judge and 'correct' deficient implementation of externally-derived blueprints. In this version, Comparative Education becomes the handmaiden of 'colonial' efforts to spread ideas, institutions and practices congenial to dominant powers and their local henchmen.

In recent years, 'coloniality' has emerged as a theme central to much analysis of the global politics of educational governance. At its best, this has yielded important work on organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO. Research has highlighted the often malign role in the education 'policyscape' of actors and orthodoxies traceable to the West, notably 'Washington Consensus' neoliberalism. As anxiety has intensified over education's relationship with economic and environmental injustice, critique has sharpened of the putatively Western models and ideas widely held culpable. In the vanguard is a growing corpus of 'decolonial' scholarship, challenging us to reject 'colonial Western modernity' and reimagine education and society 'beyond the Western horizon'.

Beyond that imaginary 'horizon', China looms large. How, then, has the field of Comparative Education engaged with China? The short answer is: poorly. A recent special issue of this journal – 'Comparative Education: Some Futures' – features extensive critique of 'Western' (i.e. Anglo-American) 'hegemony' and its implications for scholarship, but only vague allusions to Asian or Chinese experience and perspectives (see below). Scholarship on China in education journals is often descriptive, apolitical or subservient to Beijing's 'party line' (better work sometimes appears in area studies or anthropology journals). Among Chinese scholars, prudence often dictates reluctance to direct harsh criticism at their country's educational or social realities. Whether out of conviction or self-interest, others willingly channel Communist Party (CCP) propaganda.

And what of foreign scholars? Many feel unqualified to query the arguments or assumptions of Chinese colleagues or students. Others don a prophetic mantle, returning from the East eager to share sagely insights with less enlightened peers. The pieties of postcolonial or 'decolonial' theory further deter critical analysis. If special wisdom resides 'beyond the Western horizon', and 'positionality' or pedigree confer authority, Westerners may be inclined to self-censor, numbing their critical faculties. Even for those with genuine experience and expertise, outspokenness risks a triple penalty: collegial opprobrium, loss of access to China, and poor evaluations from their many fee-paying Chinese students. And when country visits and research collaboration increasingly come with generous Chinese funding, the penalties can be financial as well as professional.

Despite much talk of 'decentring' the West, mainstream educational scholarship remains afflicted by binary thinking on culture and colonialism. The overwhelming focus of 'critical' research on supposedly all-pervasive Western hegemony ironically helps perpetuate the Eurocentrism its practitioners decry. Its marginalisation in critical analysis of 'hegemony', 'coloniality' and educational politics is thus one way in which China is peripheralised in Anglophone research.

This form of peripheral status is enthusiastically embraced by China's Communist rulers. On the global stage, the CCP positions itself as the archetypal victim of imperialism, championing resistance to an inherently colonial West intent on imposing its values on others. At the 2023 BRICS summit, President Xi called for 'inclusiveness', 'peaceful coexistence' and 'harmony between civilisations' in pursuit of his vision of 'a community with a

shared future for mankind' (Xi 2023). Addressing representatives of the G77 group of developing countries in Havana that same month, Li Xi, head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, invoked anti-colonial struggles for 'national independence and liberation', promising that China will 'always be part of the developing world and a member of the global south' (The Economist 2023).

But what, or who, constitutes the China that presents itself as the peripheralised victim of Western hegemony? While preaching diversity and coexistence *among* civilisations, the CCP portrays 'civilisational' entities as internally homogenous, monolithic and essentially unchanging. An emphasis on diversity *beyond* national borders – betokening rejection of universal norms – thus facilitates obliteration of diversity *within* them. As this special issue demonstrates, in the early twenty-first century, that drive for homogeneity and conformity has intensified. In the cultural, ideological and political arenas, growing insistence on the singular quality of a 'Chineseness' framed by notions of 'excellent traditional Chinese culture' obscures or denies the enormous diversity and complexity of Chinese societies.

This special issue

This special issue analyses the politics of education as they affect those marginalised by that official narrative. Our focus is on communities and territories falling within the ambit of 'China' as seen from Beijing, and on tensions related to attempts to impose its homogenising and totalising vision of Chineseness. We are concerned primarily with China's geographical, cultural and political periphery – with those areas and peoples that strain most at the tightening leash of central control. These include Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong and – though it still eludes Beijing's control – the island of Taiwan.

This is an admittedly limited interpretation of marginality or 'periphery'. In political and cultural terms, most Chinese citizens are arguably marginalised in relation to urban, male, educated Han elites. The landmark 2006 volume, *Chinese Citizenship: Views from the Margins*, adopted a broader, sociological definition of 'marginality' (Fong and Murphy 2006). Since then, the situation of many on China's margins, however defined, has worsened. Not only minority nationalities, dissidents and rebels (including Hongkongers and Taiwanese who push back against Beijing's political claims), but also women (Fincher 2021), peasants (Chen 2020) and the urban poor (Wang and He 2019) face hierarchical subordination and denial of agency. In acknowledgement of this more general and pervasive peripheralisation, we include here an article analysing 'gratitude education' directed at rural migrants (Wan and Vickers 2024). Such programmes have gained prominence as the CCP seeks to shore up a profoundly inequitable social order.

This special issue features ten original research articles examining aspects of the politics of education on China's social, cultural and geopolitical periphery. The collection begins with several articles focusing on the ideological content of schooling, starting with Chen's analysis of the new prominence accorded to 'traditional culture' in the curriculum for *Xi Jinping Thought* (Chen 2023a). Following an analysis of the changing portrayal of 'minorities' in history textbooks (Yan and Vickers 2023), Yu and Zhao (2023) then investigate textbook interpretations of 'Confucianism' and their reception by 'minority' students. Unsurprisingly, many of the latter express alienation and resentment at their cultural and social subordination and marginalisation, a finding echoed by Wan

and Vickers' (2024) examination of programmes of 'gratitude education' and their reception.

The educational predicament of minority nationalities is further examined by Bulag (2023), who lays bare the logic underlying the Chinese state's drive for assimilation, with special reference to recent developments in Inner Mongolia. Minorities, he argues, are required gratefully to embrace their own cultural euthanasia for the sake of the greater national good. Leibold and Dorjee (2023) illuminate the role of schooling in this process of cultural elimination (or transformation) by examining 'neo-colonial' boarding schools for Tibetan students.

But it is not just officially-recognised 'minorities' whose cultures and identities are threatened: ethnically Han Hongkongers and Taiwanese also find themselves, literally and figuratively, in the regime's firing line. Analysing Hong Kong's school curriculum, Vickers (2023) shows how the 'One Country, Two Systems' model has been drastically undermined by the 2020 National Security Law, making the region a disastrous showcase for the offer of 'peaceful unification' held out to Taiwan. Meanwhile, on Taiwan itself, identity politics has been transformed both by evolving ROC-PRC relations and domestic political dynamics. Ferrer (2024) examines the shifting official discourse on Tibetan Buddhism as a cultural 'Other', while Kasai (2023) interrogates ideas of multiculturalism reflected in language education policy. Showing how emphasis on 'Chinesenesss' has been displaced by multicultural Taiwaneseness, both also point to significant continuities in underlying assumptions concerning civilisation and nationhood. Taiwanese identity discourse perhaps remains more deeply influenced by Chinese nationalism than many would like to admit.

In our final article, Tobin analyses portrayals of the Uyghurs, highlighting both the 'visual racism' that distorts their representation worldwide, and resistance to it by diaspora communities (Tobin 2024). His argument powerfully challenges China scholars to practice, in their research and teaching, the progressive principles that many profess.

Just as comparative scholarship can render the familiar strange, so it can make the exotic more relatable and comprehensible. In this introductory essay, we therefore confront stereotypes and blind-spots associated with current debates over educational politics globally and within China. These include the intellectually indefensible habit of treating China as peripheral to 'decolonial' critique. Reviewing official discourse on 'Chineseness' within the PRC, we show how claims for the homogeneity, exceptionalism and superiority of 'Chinese culture' buttress hierarchical control and delegitimise dissent. Drawing on contributions to this special issue, we discuss the appropriateness of seeing education in China as part of a 'colonial' state project. Finally, we stress the urgent need for honest, balanced and appropriately critical scholarship on Chinese education.

Centre and periphery in Anglophone comparative education: the place of China

A central problem for Comparative Education today is neglect of history. Scholarship on Chinese education that engages critically with historical, political, sociological and cultural context comes largely from anthropologists who seldom publish in education journals (Vickers and Zeng 2017, 3–11). Notable examples include Fong and Murphy (2006),

Thøgersen (2002), Kipnis (2011), Hansen (2016) and Woronov (2016). Meanwhile, much research on Chinese education skirts issues of politics, ideology or culture. Polity Press' *China Today* series exemplifies this contrast. In *Children in China* (2016), the anthropologist Orna Naftali concludes that 'social exclusion and discrimination of rural or non-Han children … may further deepen the country's current divides' (190); she is sensitive to how politics, culture and economics interact in the educational field. By contrast, the educational consultant, Janette Ryan, in *Education in China: Philosophy, Politics and Culture* (2019), acknowledges problems of inequality, but portrays these as glitches of a system guided by the ancient, ineffable and benign wisdom of 'Confucianism'. In her static, monolithic and binary vision of 'culture', Ryan echoes Ruth Hayhoe, who juxtaposes a harmonious, communitarian, familistic 'China' with a 'Western world … where the individual's satisfaction and fulfilment has tended to be given priority' (Hayhoe 2006, 361).

A fashion in Comparative Education for grand theory and epistemic relativism corrodes attention to historical nuance and complexity. After all, if claims to truth are rooted ultimately in a Nietszchean will to power (as Foucault implied), facts and evidence become largely irrelevant. It only behoves us to ask who makes claims to truth, and for what political purposes. For observers of China, this is reminiscent of the CCP's politicised approach to epistemology, whereby sceptics of the authorised national narrative stand accused of 'historical nihilism' (Costigan 2022). Since that narrative serves unimpeachable political goals, its critics must be hostile agents, enemies of the people. Similarly, in the field of Comparative Education, critics of the current orthodoxy on 'coloniality' and 'hegemony' face intellectual dismissal and *ad hominem* attack.[1] Questioning doctrinaire anti-Westernism, or failing to genuflect before the altars of Indigenous Wisdom and the 'Global South', is widely seen as betokening warped politics, tainted pedigree, or both.

More thoughtful advocates of 'decolonial' scholarship have voiced misgivings over the crudely binary thinking that bedevils this genre. Keita Takayama has critiqued Rappleye and Komatsu, who mine Japanese tradition for alternatives to the thought of 'Western Enlightenment Man'. Komatsu and Rappleye address (primarily Western) progressives disenchanted with a 'Western modernity' portrayed as hegemonic, inherently colonial and ecologically unsustainable (2020). But while Takayama broadly shares this view of 'colonial Western modernity', he is less convinced by the quest for salvation in Japanese tradition. As a Japanese scholar from a 'left-liberal' background, he is conscious that celebration of the ineffable insights of 'Japanese civilisation' (e.g. Shintoism) has been deployed by ultra-conservatives seeking to shore up a profoundly patriarchal and illiberal social order (Takayama 2020; 2022).

A similarly ultraconservative, authoritarian political dynamic has shaped discourse on 'tradition' in contemporary China. Takayama's reflections on 'De-colonial Turns in the Land of Shinto Cosmologies' were delivered in Shanghai, at a 2019 workshop hosted by East China Normal University (ECNU): *Beyond the Western Horizon in Educational Research* (Silova, Rappleye, and You 2020). Other presenters there variously attacked 'Christian Hegemony' for stymying 'ecologically responsible futures' (Edwards 2020); hailed the 'interdependent' ethos of non-Western societies (Lee 2020); and praised the inspirational ideas of Confucius (You 2020).

Absent from those Shanghai discussions was any critical discussion of Chinese education and society. While the assembled scholars mulled the evils of Western coloniality, Uyghurs languished in Xinjiang's 're-education camps'. As Hongkongers rallied to defend

their civil liberties, Silova exhorted colleagues to 'anticipate other worlds' and animate 'Our *Selves*' (Silova 2020). Edwards' attack on Christianity's 'anthropocentrism' and 'exclusivism' ignored the Franciscan thought prominent in current papal teaching (Pope Francis 2015); China's awful environmental record and the CCP's espousal of 'ecological civilisation' likewise went unremarked (Hansen, Li, and Svarerud 2018). The unifying premise of the ECNU workshop was the inherent malignity of monolithic 'Western modernity', and the redemptive promise of non-Western cultures – notably China's.

Similar assumptions are detectable in this journal's recent special issue on the state of Comparative Education as a field. China features only peripherally in the essentially West-centric accounts of the politics of educational research offered by Brehm (2023) and Klerides (2023). Borrowing Arrighi's Marxist notion of history as a succession of hegemonic 'regimes of accumulation', Brehm argues that the political agenda of education is determined by the dominant economic bloc at any given time. The current orthodoxy, he contends, traces its roots to the human capital theory that emerged at the University of Chicago in the 1950s (364). Despite some postwar tension between this US-favoured 'reformist realism' and the idealistic internationalism of the UN system (embodied in UNESCO), by the 1990s the former held sway, bolstered by a triumphant 'Washington Consensus'.

Brehm rightly highlights both the dominance of human capital thinking in global policymaking circles and its deleterious consequences, but underestimates non-Western agency. In assigning superpowers to Chicago School economists, he implies that non-Western elites needed to be duped or bamboozled into adopting an instrumentalist, disciplinarian and unsustainable educational agenda. The histories of the Soviet Union, Communist China and other Asian states suggest otherwise. Brehm's portrayal of US hegemony in action draws especially on evidence from Latin America. But the narrative of an all-conquering USA is hard to sustain beyond its geopolitical backyard. After all, the CIA-facilitated Chilean coup of 1973 coincided with the USA's ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam. In an isolated reference to China, Brehm cites a 1931 League of Nations-sponsored intervention by British and American technical advisors to argue how 'powerful countries … could interfere in … other countries through international institutions that supposedly uphold a system of sovereign equality' (367). Indeed so, but from a Chinese perspective 1931's most significant foreign intrusion was Japan's invasion of Manchuria – condemned (ineffectually) by the League.

Binary thinking about Western coloniality and non-Western victimhood is epitomised by a 2017 special issue of *Comparative Education Review* (CER) (Takayama, Sriprakash, and Connell 2017). Here as in most decolonial scholarship, non-Western societies feature only as victims. That lack of interest in non-Western agency (notwithstanding rhetoric to the contrary) reflects the priority assigned by decolonial theorists to the West's own culture wars. As the Taiwanese scholar Brian Hioe observes:

> Western leftists … perceive the world narrowly through the lens of the interests of the West and have no desire to engage with local struggles on their own terms. Even in an age characterised by great power competition between the US and China, Western leftists frame this competition as if it is always and only the US that has agency; the notion that there could be other empires in addition to the US - and that they are all bad - proves very hard to grasp for Western leftists … . Criticizing China is somehow seen as letting the US off the hook … (Hioe 2023)

Some decolonialists nonetheless recognise that complete denial of non-Western colonialism or imperialism will not wash. Walter Mignolo, whose influence pervades the 2017 CER special issue, and features in the recent issue of Comparative Education (Klereides 2023), acknowledges China's emergence as a competitor to Western imperialism. But he sees this as occurring within a persistent 'colonial matrix of power', portrayed as an inherently Western creation; even as it strives to master the matrix, China thus remains essentially 'subaltern' (Mignolo 2011, 299). Moreover, like others (e.g. Jacques 2009),[2] Mignolo celebrates China's rise as evidence of the West's moral bankruptcy. Dismissing the liberal Indian scholar Amartya Sen as a limp apologist for 'colonial' neoliberalism (Mignolo 2011, 297), Mignolo hails CCP success in improving livelihoods as a compelling riposte to hypocritical Western hand-wringing about 'human rights, freedom and democracy' (302).[3] Citing Mahbubani's critique of the 'Western mind's' 'rigid, one-dimensional and ideological understanding of the term "freedom"', he stresses that freedom is 'not a universal concept coming from God, but a regional concept invented in certain places, at certain times, and by certain "men"' (297–298).

Ironically, in dismissing criticism of China's human rights record, post-colonial scholars betray a colonial – and arguably racist – strain in their own thinking. What are we to make of the Chinese citizens struggling for civil rights or political autonomy in Hong Kong, on China's mainland and elsewhere? Decolonial political correctness conditions a widespread failure to critique stereotyped, Han-chauvinist narratives of Chineseness – prompting Tobin, in his contribution here, to accuse many China scholars of complicity in the CCP's 'racist' agenda (Tobin 2024). The decolonial view as articulated by Mignolo aligns with CCP orthodoxy: that Chinese liberals are cultural renegades, 'race' traitors, corrupted by Western individualism. The sinologist Geremie Barmé critiques Western double-think on human rights in China, quoting Simon Leys' observations on the 'Maoist sympathisers' of an earlier era:

> If Soviet dissidents have … received far more sympathy in the West, is it because they are Caucasians - while the Chinese are 'different'? … When Maoist sympathisers use such arguments, they actually echo diehard racists of the colonial-imperialist era. At that time the 'Chinese difference' was a leitmotiv among Western entrepreneurs, to justify their exploitation of the 'natives': Chinese were different, even physiologically; they did not feel hunger, cold and pain as Westerners would; … only ignorant sentimentalists and innocent bleeding-hearts would worry on behalf of these swarming crowds of yellow coolies. Most of the rationalisations that are now being advanced for ignoring the human-rights issue in China are rooted in the same mentality. (Leys, quoted in Barmé 2023)

The decolonial focus on pedigree and positionality is not only implicitly racist, but, as Olúfémi Táíwò argues, effectively denies non-Western agency. 'Corrosive scepticism' of tenets such as 'the sovereignty of the subject and impermissibility of state intrusion upon it without serious justification', Táíwò writes, risks delegitimating struggles against state repression everywhere (2022, 72). Indeed, as Amartya Sen observes of the 'Lee [Kuan Yew] thesis' on 'Asian values', this is precisely the aim of autocrats keen to assert the uniqueness of the 'native' ethical outlook (Sen 1999). 'Claims about the "Europeanness" of Reason, rationality, individualism and so on', Táíwò emphasises, represent a sort of inverse Eurocentrism that denies ethical agency to those lacking a European 'pedigree' (72). The conflation of 'modernity' with Western

'colonialism', he contends, obstructs efforts to invoke 'modern tenets' in support of Asian or African resistance to autocracy (32).

But in their eagerness to signal reverence for 'indigenous' wisdom, some education scholars ignore the dangers of binary thinking and selective criticality (Bamberger and Morris 2023). Simon Marginson of Oxford University hails a 'Chinese' approach to university internationalisation inspired by the concept of *tianxia* (天下, or 'All under Heaven') (Yang et al. 2022). Whereas, in his account, Westerners come to dominate or profiteer, China offers respectful, harmonious collaboration. Drawing a contrast with 'existing practices of globalisation' (Western-dominated, hierarchical and racist), Yang, Marginson and Xu hail 'a *tianxia* higher education order' that is 'open, decentralised and diverse'; fosters 'autonomy, mutual support and harmony'; and 'subordinates hierarchy to equality of respect' (Yang et al 2022, 13–14). Marginson thus lends the Oxford *cachet* to a portrayal of Chinese internationalisation as distinct from, and morally superior to, an 'imperialist' Western version (for the sources of this vision, see Callahan 2008). But as this special issue demonstrates, CCP education policy within China actively opposes precisely the values these scholars associate with the *tianxia* ethos.

Prominent foreign scholars have been conscripted to the cause of 'telling China's story well' (*jiang hao Zhongguo gushi* / 讲好中国故事), with Hong Kong now a major recruiting ground. Marginson is visiting professor at Lingnan University, whose Vice-President, Ka-ho Mok, advocates Hong Kong's educational integration with Guangdong's 'Greater Bay Area'. Daniel Bell, a Canadian philosopher, in 2023 moved to the University of Hong Kong's (HKU) Law Faculty.[4] Bell promotes 'Confucian' ethics and governance over 'Western' democratic individualism; in *Just Hierarchy* (Bell and Wang 2021), he celebrates the meritocratic virtues of a stratified Chinese social order. The Singaporean scholar, Charlene Tan, another fervent Confucianist, also joined HKU in 2021; her recent work proposes a 'Confucian' response to 'Anti-Asian Hate Crime' in the USA (Tan and La Londe 2023) and offers a 'Foucauldian analysis' of research assessment in 'postcolonial' Hong Kong (Tan 2023). In late 2023, Jeremy Rappleye joined HKU's Education Faculty. His celebration of 'non-western' epistemologies aligns well with work by the current Dean, Yang Rui, who in *The Chinese Idea of a University* (2022), lambasts the 'value chaos', 'confusion' and 'cultural conflicts' of the 'Anglo-American' university. For Yang, the deleterious features of this model are rectifiable through a process of 'indigenisation', yielding a distinctively Chinese hybrid. His book was effusively endorsed by Marginson, Ruth Hayhoe (doyenne of Western scholarship on Chinese education), and Gerard Postiglione. The widely-cited work of Postiglione, formerly of HKU, burnishes China's 'minorities' education through questionable comparisons with the West (see below). As Baehr notes, critical scholarship is still tolerated, even welcomed, in Hong Kong, so long as it is directed against the West. Meanwhile, the CCP has become 'a dab hand at taunting Western countries, the USA in particular, with woke commentary, channelling the condemnation of American professors against their own society' (Baehr 2022, 235).

But what 'idea of a university' is actually revealed in current Chinese policy and practice? Under Xi Jinping, already limited scope for academic freedom on China's mainland has drastically shrunk. Hong Kong's transformation since the 2019–2020 protests is even more dramatic. Spearheaded by students initially fearful for judicial autonomy, those protests became a torrent of outrage at corrosion of local civil and political freedoms. Clearly, then, many of Hong Kong's Chinese citizens believe passionately in ideals often

(mis)represented as 'Western'. It is precisely the delegitimisation of these principles that the CCP seeks to achieve by portraying them as 'un-Chinese', and their supporters as stooges of hostile foreigners. Hence the increasingly stringent curbs on teaching 'Western ideas' in mainland universities. In Hong Kong, meanwhile, the 2020 National Security Law mandates 'National Security Education' and enhanced surveillance of teaching and research. In other words, the Chinese authorities envisage universities, in Hong Kong and the mainland, as venues for training technically adept but politically supine worker-citizens.

But with regard to the struggle for civil liberties or academic freedom in China, educational scholars for the most part remain silent.[5] Anglophone education scholars readily (and deservedly) criticse 'Anglo-American' policy and practice, rendering their failure to critique China all the more striking. For some, this clearly stems in part from a sense, as Hioe puts it, that 'criticising China' amounts to letting the West 'off the hook'. Tan portrays Hong Kong academia as threatened by 'external control and dominance' perpetuated by 'the preservation of a research evaluation mechanism inherited from a colonial government', indicating a need to 'advance indigenous and hybrid knowledge in a postcolonial educational landscape' (Tan 2023, 1). Postiglione warns that 'recent developments in the US' show how 'government overreach can damage academic careers and the functioning of universities' (Postiglione 2023). He is writing in a city where press freedom has been extinguished, independent student and teacher unions banned, academics and students imprisoned and others driven into exile. He nonetheless insists, perhaps with Vickers and Morris (2022) in mind, that 'talk of a "mainlandisation" of academics in Hong Kong is baseless and only hurts the intellectual vitality and dedication of the academic enterprise'.

Such scholarship exemplifies the growing dominance in educational studies of a cult of anti-Westernism that brands as heretical criticism of China and other non-Western societies. In his valedictory article, the late Bob Cowen (2023) warned educational comparativists against 'vague visions of grand projects'. 'Our classic flaw', he observed, consists of a 'failure to notice the political framing of many of our epistemic choices, agendas of attention and action, and institutional identities' (Cowen 2023, 1). When it comes to the narrative of 'coloniality' or 'hegemony', however, the problem is an all-too-explicit, narrow and reductive 'political framing'. The selective focus on 'colonial Western modernity' is for many the ultimate 'grand project'. In the previous special issue of this journal discussing the future of Comparative Education (59.3), all the contributors focus on the influence of the West. Although Cowen (2023), Klerides (2023) and Brehm (2023) briefly raise questions as to the potential future impact of China's rise, they refrain from offering even tentative answers. However, as Cowen notes, 'the future is now'; there is already ample evidence of the CCP's political agenda for education. The failure of Anglophone comparativists to accord China the same critical scrutiny as 'the West' thus speaks to a chronic malaise in our field.

Race, culture and class in discourse on Chinese nationhood

What, then, is this political agenda that educational scholarship on China typically obfuscates? The focus of political loyalty in the CCP's increasingly securitised vision of education is a monolithic, Han-centred, neo-traditionalist vision of 'China', of which the

Party is the ultimate embodiment. Long-gone is the socially revolutionary agenda the regime once claimed to embrace. Presiding over one of the world's most unequal societies, the CCP now justifies inequality by invoking meritocracy, and distracts from it by stoking resentment of foreign enemies and domestic traitors in the name of 'national security'. The Communists are, in effect, following the same playbook as India's Hindu nationalists (and nationalist-populists elsewhere) in using 'identity politics to replace social issues with more symbolic ones' (Jaffrelot 2021, 33). Faltering in its delivery of prosperity, the CCP, like Modi's BJP, stresses that 'class divisions are a mere illusion, as their nation needs to get united against the Other' (33). This symbolic turn involves what Chen, in this special issue, terms 'the culturalisation of politics', whereby political issues are projected as a manifestation of 'national' culture conceived in essentialist and reductionist terms (Chen 2023a).

The parallels with India – ironic in view of Sino-Indian hostility – extend to demonisation of minorities and prosecution of a 'War on Terror' directed specifically against Muslims (Clarke 2021; Jaffrelot 2021; Tobin 2020). In China, the cycle of violence intensified after the Tibetan protests of 2008 and unrest in Xinjiang the following year. Long haunted by the spectre of the USSR's collapse, CCP leaders increasingly concluded that faith in the power of economic development to reconcile restive minorities to Chinese rule was misplaced. Meanwhile, the global financial crisis of 2008 was widely seen as discrediting 'Western' liberalism. Those arguing for the inherent superiority of an illiberal 'China model', along with a more forceful approach to recalcitrant minorities and dissident Han, were emboldened and empowered.

One consequence has been a shift away from a 'multicultural' vision of Chineseness towards a more explicitly Han-centric, assimilatory one (Yan and Vickers 2023). The extent of this transformation should not be exaggerated: 'minorities' have always been depicted as backward and deficient in the qualities associated with modern nationhood. But whereas assimilation was once seen as the inevitable, gradual consequence of minorities' willing embrace of modernisation, today a stronger dose of 'thought reform' is mandated to purge the toxin of foreign-inspired separatism. This is the essence of calls since around 2010 for a 'second generation *minzu* policy', replacing emphasis on respect for China's diversity with calls for reinforcing consciousness of a singular, unitary Chineseness.

As contributions here by Bulag (2023) and Leibold and Dorjee (2023) underline, this change in emphasis is revealed in discourse on the *Zhonghua minzu* (中华民族) or 'Chinese race-nation'. Deployed by nationalists for over a century, this slippery term denotes an idea of China encompassing not only the Han, but all the peoples of the former Qing Empire. Long eschewed by CCP propagandists due to its association with KMT-sponsored Han supremacism, the term was resuscitated in the 1980s by the anthropologist Fei Xiaotong. As Bulag explains (2023), the *Zhonghua minzu* for Fei represented the culmination of a teleological process whereby minority 'ethnicities' were absorbed into a single Chinese nation. 'Diversity' could still be tolerated, even celebrated, in its proper place: the museum. But under Xi, tolerance has eroded as confidence in the regime's performance legitimacy has faltered. Rather than portrayed (let alone celebrated) as a feature of Chinese nationhood, diversity is now represented as an existential threat (Tobin 2024). This shift is starkly evident in the linguistic arena, with bilingual education for 'minorities' effectively abandoned, and Mandarin monolingualism forcibly imposed.

Also targeted by the CCP's *kulturkampf* is diversity amongst the Han themselves. If the situation of minorities is widely overlooked in educational scholarship, even more so is that of non-Mandarin-speaking Han. Dealt with only obliquely here (Kasai 2023; Vickers 2023), this issue is highly salient in both Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong and largely Hoklo-speaking Taiwan. The 'political and cultural subordination of non-Mandarin groups' within the Han draws almost no attention from international observers of Chinese education, who tend to accept the stereotype of a culturally monolithic, 'Confucian' China (Chen et al 2023, 2). But just as minorities find themselves peripheralised in relation to the Han, so do Cantonese, Teochew, Hoklo, Shanghainese and others vis-à-vis Mandarin-speaking northerners (Carrico 2023; Xu 2021).

A drive for greater cultural uniformity to secure loyalty and reinforce control is hardly a new strategy for China's Communists: Mao's Cultural Revolution aimed at just this. But whereas Maoists sought to obliterate 'old culture' and fashion an ostensibly egalitarian (if politically stratified) 'New China', today Xi's CCP embraces 'outstanding traditional Chinese culture'. This Confucian-based narrative of tradition and culture, as Yu and Zhao (2023) argue here, reinforces a cultural hierarchy that non-Han and religious minorities find questionable. Among the traditional virtues now endorsed is what the Fudan University philosopher Tongdong Bai calls a 'hierarchy built on mobility', justified by merit (Bai 2020, 87). 'Inseparable from this mobility', Bai avers, is the principle of 'paternalism': the established dominance of male, Han, urban elites is thus implicitly portrayed as meritocratically defensible. And as patriarchal authoritarianism has intensified, Xi Jinping has become the focus of a 'hypermasculine personality cult' (Fincher 2021, 165). Tobin's article for this special issue shows the highly-gendered nature of state propaganda relating to the Uyghurs; here, ethnic and male chauvinism intersect (Tobin 2024). Along with minorities and peasants, women too must thus learn their place in the 'family-state under heaven' (*jiaguo tianxia* / 家国天下): as submissive brood-mares for a 'rejuvenated' (and ethnically homogenised) Chinese race.

Urban, educated 'Han Man' thus constitutes the gold standard by which merit is assessed and status assigned in a stratified social order. Social stratification has always been embedded in the fabric of Communist China, even during the Mao era. This was evident in the household registration (*hukou* / 户口) system's division of the population into 'urban' and 'rural' tribes, the former enjoying vastly superior public services (including schooling). As the urban-rural divide widened into a chasm from the 1990s, pseudo-eugenicist notions of 'quality' (*suzhi* / 素质) were increasingly invoked to rationalise growing inequality. Bai asserts that 'hierarchy by pedigree', or feudalism, 'collapsed very early in China', to be superseded by Confucian meritocracy (87); but the *hukou* system ascribes status by birth. Bai's argument, however, indicates recognition that meritocracy constitutes a more defensible basis for inequality than ascription. This is reflected in reforms to the system for conferring urban residency, including access to schooling, that assess migrants' 'social contributions' and 'quality'. The consequence has been described as a shift towards a system of 'meritocratic apartheid' (Wan and Vickers 2022).

For this system to succeed in securing social and political 'stability', its fairness must be recognised not just by the winners, but also the losers. In her analysis of boarding schools in rural Jiangxi, Rachael Murphy observed that a central objective was to disseminate an urban, educated template of Chinese citizenship (Murphy 2004; see also Hansen 2016). In propagating the norms of urban, Han modernity, standardised schooling demonstrated

to rural residents their inferior 'quality'. Kipnis' ethnography of Shandong schools suggested that meritocratic norms were widely accepted as fair (Kipnis 2011); he found little evidence of the anti-school masculinity common amongst many working-class Westerners (Willis 1978). However, research on vocational education has exposed disillusionment amongst disadvantaged urbanites, with many youngsters consigned to the vocational stream internalising their identity as 'failures' (Woronov 2016).

Just as rural Han youth are removed from their villages to be socialised in urban norms, so boarding programmes serve the same purpose amongst 'minorities' in Tibet and Xinjiang. Boarding schools for Tibetans have in recent years increasingly adopted a monolingual and effectively monocultural curriculum (Leibold and Dorje 2023). Meanwhile, the curricula for those subjects most directly associated with political socialisation – History, Chinese, Politics and Morals/Civics – have since 2017 been rigidly standardised under the direct supervision of the Beijing authorities (Yan and Vickers 2023). The legitimation of the social order as a meritocratic 'hierarchy built on mobility' is now, more explicitly than ever, premised upon conformity to ethical and political norms derived from a conservative-authoritarian interpretation of 'Chinese tradition'.

To secure that conformity, underprivileged and peripheralised recipients of this standardised, though still highly stratified, system of educational provision are exhorted to manifest 'gratitude'. Minority nationalities, migrant workers, Hongkongers – all have been targeted for 'gratitude education' (Vickers 2023; Wan and Vickers 2024). In directing the attention of disadvantaged or marginalised groups towards benefits bestowed by a paternalistic state and other benefactors – schools, families, philanthropists, 'society' – gratitude education aims to shore up the *status quo* and deflect demands for more generous public welfare. Unapologetically hierarchical, it is tied to promotion of the archetypal Confucian virtue of filial piety. Expressing gratitude to one's social (and political) superiors is thus a core component of the 'outstanding traditional Chinese culture' from which all citizens are expected to derive pride and 'confidence' (Chen 2023b; Xinhua 2023). At the capstone of this hierarchy is the nation itself, embodied by the Party leadership, to whom unflinching, enthusiastic loyalty is mandated by the 2023 Patriotic Education Law (NPC 2023).

Inculcating grateful devotion to a meritocracy of wise Confucian patriarchs has become essential to legitimating a regime Bai represents as 'for the people' and 'of the people', but not 'by the people'. The superiority of China's system of governance is said to lie in its capacity to save the people from themselves. Amongst those potentially requiring such salvation are Taiwan's residents, if 'because of the push by some demagogues', they 'falsely believe that independence would be good for them' (Bai 2020, 212). In that context, Bai argues, Confucian 'humaneness' mandates preventing Taiwan from following a path that would render it 'a pawn of Japan and the United States' (212). But as Ferrer (2024) and Kasai (2023) demonstrate here, the factors that have fostered 'nativisation' and the embrace of a 'multicultural' Taiwanese identity (complex and contradictory though it is) cannot be reduced to any malign, US-orchestrated 'anti-China' conspiracy. Dismissal by mainland elites of Taiwanese democracy thus says more about their own predicament under CCP rule than about reality across the Strait.

Nevertheless, prevalent views of Taiwan also speak to the susceptibility of many, not least the young, to nationalistic blandishment. 'Zero Covid' (and its chaotic abandonment), spiralling youth unemployment, unaffordable housing, intense educational competition,

and state surveillance: all have depleted reserves of confidence in and gratitude towards the CCP, prompting some disillusioned youngsters to opt out or 'lie flat' (*tang ping*). At the same time, many remain receptive to a narrative of a rising China thwarted at every turn by hostile foreigners and enemies within: as a 2023 essay puts it, 'patriotism derived from individual experience allows this individualised generation to find a possible path out of meaninglessness and feelings of inferiority' (Fu and Gui 2023). The strategy of doubling down on chauvinist triumphalism and demonisation of 'the Other' thus makes sense from the vantage point of Beijing, as the CCP, like national-populist regimes elsewhere, strives to 'replace social issues with more symbolic ones'.

Colonialism with Chinese characteristics?

Paternalism, hierarchy, ethnic chauvinism, political oppression and forcible cultural transformation of peripheral populations: there is much about current CCP ideology and policy that looks distinctly colonial. Several contributors to this special issue brand Chinese policy as 'colonial' (Tobin 2024; Vickers 2023) or 'colonial-style' (Leibold and Dorjee 2023). Nor is there anything very original in seeing China as an imperial state practising colonialism on its territorial margins. Writing of eighteenth-century efforts to 'transform and guide' border peoples, Rowe observes that 'Chinese assumptions of a "civilising mission" in the southwest differ little from those of Europeans in, for example, nineteenth-century Africa; indeed, in this as in other respects, the Chinese got there first' (Rowe 1994, 420). In her article here, Ferrer characterises the Republic of China's Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission (蒙藏委員會), lineally descended from imperial Qing institutions for border governance, as a vehicle for 'internal orientalism' (Ferrer 2024). Such views are no longer particularly controversial in Taiwan, where portrayal of the island as an arena for successive waves of colonialism – Dutch, Chinese and Japanese – has become mainstream (Shei 2021).

Scholarly disagreement nonetheless persists over the usefulness of colonialism as a framework for understanding the situation today in peripheralised regions such as Tibet, Inner Mongolia or Xinjiang. Clarke reviews the debate in the 1990s between Dru Gladney and Barry Sautman over whether Xinjiang, as Gladney contended, 'fits the internal colonialism model' (Gladney 1998, 4; quoted in Clarke 2021, 8). Sautman, while acknowledging that many factors render 'China proper' and Xinjiang 'like métropole and colony', insisted that conditions in the region 'result from complex historical, geographic and political factors' rather than 'exploitation and ethnic domination' (Sautman 2000, 240–243; 261; quoted in Clarke 2021, 8). In assessing these arguments, Clarke stresses the need to recognise the distinction between '*types* of colonialism', specifically 'colonies of settlement' and 'colonies of exploitation' (9). In effect, he suggests, the Party has 'created the conditions under which its rule in the region can no longer simply be categorised as a form of exogenous minority rule based either on settlement or exploitation/extraction *alone*' (9). A combination of developmentalism, Han immigration and intensifying re-education amount, in Clarke's account, to a drive for the 'cultural or physical removal of the indigenous Other' in order to appropriate their homeland (11). The ultimate objective, he concludes, is 'cultural genocide'; a verdict emphatically endorsed here by Tobin (who is inclined to omit the qualifying term 'cultural') (2024).

However, in his article for this special issue, Uradyn Bulag contests the 'Western framing' of CCP policies towards minority nationalities as 'genocidal or necropolitical' (Bulag 2023, 1). While recognising the existential threat to minority cultures and identities, he emphasises that, for the CCP, these are more than mere inconvenient obstructions to its nation-building project. The Party requires not just the removal of these communities; for legitimation of its ideological vision, it demands that they '*voluntarily* relinquish their identities and rights in order to identify with the Chinese nation' (Bulag 2023, 3, emphasis in original). In other words, the CCP needs minorities to connive in the dissolution of their own distinctiveness by publicly performing 'self-sacrifice' in the cause of the 'Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation'.

For Bulag, the tragedy of recent developments within China, and their representation in the West as 'genocidal', lies above all in the discrediting or abandonment of the 'multicultural' vision of Chinese nationhood that the CCP formerly championed (however inconsistently). In its attempt to 'transform a Party-State into a Party-Nation', the regime is today embracing a vision Bulag terms 'retrotopian', in the sense that it harks back to the civilisational glory of pre-modern China and its supposedly irresistible attraction for 'minorities'. This celebration of 'outstanding traditional [Han] Chinese culture' is disastrous for non-Han nationalities, since 'it sees no intrinsic value in minorities apart from their "fusion" through a self-sacrificial death drive into the Chinese nation' (Bulag 2023, 23).

However disingenuous or partial the CCP's earlier, Soviet-inspired avowals of multiculturalism, they at least constituted a pledge or standard against which its actions could be judged. It is for this reason that contributors to this special issue resist the Party's attempts to reframe 'minority nationalities' as 'ethnic minorities'. The terminology in Chinese (少数民族) has not changed, but in official English translations and academic research, 'nationalities' are increasingly represented as 'ethnicities' and compared with minoritised ethnic groups in Western societies. As Bulag observes, the drawing of parallels with 'Western style multiculturalism' serves CCP efforts to '"depoliticise" its nationality policies' (23); a project that Western scholars assist by invoking comparisons with immigrant minorities or indigenous peoples in contexts such as Canada, Australia or the USA (e.g. Postiglione 2009). Describing Mongols, Tibetans and Uyghurs as 'nationalities' rather than 'ethnicities' at least signifies some recognition of the status and dignity of these peoples.

The challenge to international scholarship on Chinese education

As we noted at the outset, comparative scholarship on education is often animated by a desire to question or critique the familiar or taken-for-granted. In this respect, it has an invaluable role to play in informing educational debate and promoting cross-cultural understanding. But for the critique to be relevant and useful, scholars must acknowledge the flaws and failings not just of their own societies, but of others, too.

Anglophone scholarship on education in Chinese societies frequently breaches this principle. A central purpose of this special issue is to provide a corrective to the portrayal, widespread in the field of educational studies, of China as a sagely Confucian realm, offering salvation from the alienating individualism and rampant capitalism of the modern West. That view ignores or distorts the far more complex and troubling reality of a hugely diverse society (or societies), riven by inequality, atomising and alienating competitiveness, and often vicious chauvinism (of both ethnocultural and gendered

varieties). In this context, it is not so much education's role in promoting 'skills' formation, economic growth and social mobility that demands our attention (important though these functions are), let alone the red herring of countering 'Western hegemony'. In China today, education is above all a cultural and political battleground where the regime strives to eliminate resistance to the forging of a homogenous nation of 1.4 billion souls, united in obedience to the Communist Party. Muslims, Tibetans, Mongols, feminists, uppity peasants, disaffected workers, liberal dissidents and defenders of autonomy for Hong Kong or Taiwan – all must be disciplined or eradicated; taught their proper place in a hierarchically-ordered imperium.

What, then, accounts for the widespread failure of educational scholarship to address these issues? We noted various factors at the start of this essay, including allegiance to the CCP regime, fear, pecuniary considerations and, crucially, anti-Western decolonial dogma. Important in explaining the latter is what Lin terms 'beaconism', or idealisation of alien societies by academics disaffected with their own (Lin 2021). Citing Hollander (1981), Lin observes:

> intellectuals who are 'critical of their own society [are] highly susceptible to the claims put forward by the leaders and spokesmen of the societies they inspected in the course of [their 'political pilgrimage', and are therefore] inclined to give every benefit of [the] doubt to these social systems and successful in screening out qualities that might have detracted from their positive vision'. (2021, 93)

As Lin stresses, this tendency is cross-cultural, evinced as much by Chinese liberals who 'screen out' Donald Trump's egregious faults as by progressivist Westerners fantasising about the Soviet Union, Mao's Cultural Revolution or a *Tianxia* vision of university internationalisation.

However, scholars ensconced in Western universities do not face the pressures or barriers with which their China-based counterparts must contend. With the latter increasingly compelled to 'tell China's story well', it falls primarily to those overseas to tell that story honestly. Allowing analysis of Chinese education to be refracted through 'the ethno-tribalist fantasies of the decolonial left' betrays that duty (Shatz 2023, 8). Blanket condemnation of the 'colonial West', far from furthering truly critical scholarship, plays into the hands of authoritarians intent on suppressing human rights and civil liberties. Walter Mignolo, '*the* leading theorist of decoloniality', in 2021 created a furore amongst Indian opponents of the BJP by endorsing a book on 'coloniality' that was 'outright Hindu supremacist' (Mochizuki 2023, 4). Scholars who visit Shanghai for decolonial musings on educational research 'beyond the Western horizon' risk treading a similar path.

The legacies of Western colonialism, including the eurocentrism of much Anglophone scholarship, deserve to be rigorously challenged. That challenge should extend to dogmatically eurocentric narratives of power and coloniality in the modern world. Professing a commitment to critiquing political oppression, chauvinism and social injustice should imply determination to expose those evils wherever they are to be found. Respecting the dignity and agency of Chinese and other non-Western peoples means seeing them as responsible actors inhabiting societies as diverse, complex and flawed as those of Europe or America. In other words, educational scholarship needs to pay fuller attention to history and politics as processes in which non-Western peoples are active participants, for better and for worse, not merely dupes or victims of a monolithic 'West'.

The Asian Education Podcast

Special series on *The Politics of Education on China's Periphery*

To accompany the special issue of *Comparative Education* on 'The Politics of Education on China's Periphery' (Issue 60.1, 2024), a special series of *The Asian Education Podcast* has been recorded. *The Asian Education Podcast* is a resource for researchers and others interested in education in Asian contexts and from Asian perspectives. While the interviews are pitched especially at scholars and students of education and Asian Studies, they are also readily accessible to a wider audience.

Each episode in this series features Edward Vickers (and occasionally co-presenter Gairan Pamei) in conversation with one or more contributors to the special issue. (An exception is the episode on Hong Kong, for which Ed interviewed Queenie Lam.)

The episodes relate to the following articles in the special issue of *Comparative Education* (60.1). Links to each episode are provided below:

1. Sicong Chen, 'The culturalisation of politics in contemporary Chinese citizenship education' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2209396): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-1
2. Yan Fei and Edward Vickers, 'Balancing unity and diversity? Shifting state policies and the curricular portrayal of China's minority nationalities' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2213139): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-2
3. Tianlong Yu and Zhao Zhenzhou, 'Confucianism in Multicultural China: 'Official Knowledge' vs Marginalised Views' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2273641): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-3
4. James Leibold and Tendor Dorjee, 'Learning to be Chinese: colonial-style boarding schools on the Tibetan plateau' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2250969): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-4
5. Edward Vickers, 'The motherland's suffocating embrace: schooling and public discourse on Hong Kong identity under the National Security Law' (this episode is a conversation between Ed and Queenie Lam on education and academic freedom in Hong Kong) (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2212351): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-5
6. Alessandra Ferrer, 'Internal Orientalism on Taiwan: The ROC's Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission and its Portrayal of Tibetan Buddhism' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2296191) https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-6
7. Haruna Kasai, 'The politics of 'multiculturalism' in language education: an analysis of curriculum guidelines in Taiwan' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2245690): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-7
8. David Tobin, 'Visualising insecurity: the globalisation of China's racist "counter-terror" education' (https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2298130): https://asian-education.typlog.io/episodes/2-8

The ***Asian Education Podcast*** is produced by Kyushu University's UNESCO Chair on Education for Peace, Social Justice and Global Citizenship (https://www.ku-unescochair.com/en/), in association with the Comparative Education Society of Asia (https://cesa.jp/).

Notes

1. See Vickers' critique of the application of 'postcolonial' theory in educational research (2020) and the counter-thrust from Stein et al. (2020).
2. Jacques is the former editor of the now-defunct journal, *Marxism Today*.
3. Mignolo implies that Sen's elitism (manifested by his Cambridge affiliation) robs him of authority to speak for the 'global South' (Mignolo himself currently holds a Chair at Duke University, USA). Moreover, claims about the CCP's success in improving popular wellbeing are inflated. Despite impressive GDP growth figures, the proportion of China's national income accounted for by wages or household consumption is exceptionally low (Dikötter 2022, 295).
4. Whose pro-democrat former Dean, Benny Tai, now languishes in a Hong Kong jail.
5. In an October 2023 seminar at the Manchester China Institute, Benjamin Mulvey and Boya Li discussed China's restrictions on academic freedom, challenging the academic tendency to explain them away in cultural terms (see https://events.manchester.ac.uk/event/event:h22f-lniy2hll-d925w8/rethinking-the-intellectualstate-relationship-academic-freedom-in-china; accessed December 18, 2023).

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