

PATRIOTISM ON THE EDGE: PATRIOTIC EDUCATION IN CHINA-RUSSIA CROSS-BORDER GOVERNANCE

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SUMMARY

This paper touches the important issue of the role of patriotic education in China's peripheral areas of Heilongjiang. Being in North-East China which borders Russia is recognized as the "bridgehead" that is responsible for navigating cross-border governance. In this context, the patriotic education is part of Heilongjiang's policy. This paper starts with the introduction to the concept of frontier governance and then places the patriotic education within the provincial policies. By offering a deductive approach this paper analyses the document on "The Patriotic education in the New Era", then actions of Heilongjiang and the policy in the border city of Heihe. The paper addresses the critical question of how far China can go with patriotic education in the peripheral areas that borders Russia?

INTRODUCTION

Discussing the patriotic education in China most scholars overlook the central level, while it is critical for the future of the country's unitary status, is the patriotic education in the border areas like Heilongjiang. The province responsible for the frontier government (*bianjiang zhili* 边疆治理) was based mainly on the coordination of relations between different ethnic groups. These frontier regions were the equivalent of "ethnic regions" and the major theme was how to resolve contradictions and conflicts between ethnic

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groups. In more recent years, China's objectives for its role in its neighbourhood have shifted. The growing importance of imported resources, raw materials and increasing energy dependence on the foreign markets have also shifted China's interactions with its neighbours. They added a more explicit economic and energy-related dimension. In the case of China's North East, the city of Heihe where the first part of the northern section of the pipeline starts. Taking the strategic location of Heilongjiang, Hu Jintao (2006) named the province as the "bridgehead" a critical place. On the other hand, the importance of the bridgeheads and patriotic education is rooted in the geographical position of Heilongjiang as it is located between the Chinese and Russian orthodox civilization. In the above-presented context, the provincial government of Heilongjiang and the city of Harbin by implementing patriotic education not only promote nation-state but also play the critical role in securing China's position vis a vis Russian civilization.

THE PARTY NEW-OLD DOCUMENT

Being aware of the new turbulent times ahead of China in September 2019 the Central Committee issued the document "Patriotic education in the New Era" calling for the promotion of happiness among the people, and guiding citizens to follow the 'China path'. By referring to the non-material factors the Party positions itself as the spiritual motivation that helps the people to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Above all, the document symbolizes the New Area that is marked by the reign of Xi Jinping and the deeper centralization processes and loyalty to the party.

As the dominant power the party emphasizes that the national unity is a matter of 'life and death' (lifeline) for the Chinese nation, the unity is characterized by the social bonds of equality, joint work, mutual help and harmony. As addressed in the document "still more should be done to achieve national cohesion". In other words, it followed Sun Yat-sen who always used to be described as 'a heap of loose sand'. The deeper cohesion is only possible by broadening patriotic front, identity with the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics, protect the sovereignty (openly fight against attempts to break up the state and undermine national unity) and build a state, national/ethnic unity and social stability". As was said, the new patriotic education campaign should promote *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era* in every corner of

the country's enterprises, farms, government agencies, campuses, communities, military bases and the Internet so that the party's innovative philosophy takes root and gains benefits.

To elaborate further, portraying itself as the progressive force the party called to use new technologies to promote the patriotic behaviours by Weibo, WeChat, social media, video websites and mobile applications. In this context, the platform of "Xuexi Quanguo" guides netizens opinions and control netizens "not to harm to the name of the state and deny the wrong words about outstanding Chinese traditions and culture". Interestingly enough the application was designed by Alibaba Group.

Apart from using the new technologies, the central government calls all level of bureaucracy to take the main responsibility. As said in the document "the committees and the government should bear the political responsibilities of leadership, put patriotic education on the list of priorities, incorporate it into the ideological work responsibility system, increase position building and management". By using very general terms the document encourages the local elites to establish a system of joint conferences, increase guidance and joint coordination, study and solve existing issues and problems.

Moreover, the document failed to debate China's civilization as part of the patriotic education but mentioned Chinese culture as the vehicle for promoting the patriotic behaviours. The likely explanation here is that the central government in the very diverse country might only use the history of the Communist Party and the official narratives of the years of humiliation to secure China's unitary status. The excessive mentioning of the Chinese culture that is not unitary, complex and the very diverse for example, Lingnan in Southern China is regarded by the central government as counterproductive in building the one China's nation.

HEILONGJIANG'S PATRIOTIC EDUCATION BASIS

Heilongjiang as the bridgehead plays an important role in managing ethnic minorities issues. Chinese identities had long been mixed in Manchuria during the Qing period, the then being occupied by Japan and Russia became the melting point of a different civilization. By reproducing their own local history, the provincial government utilizes the

anti-Japanese and anti-Russian patriotic resistance as the core point in the provincial patriotic education, while the socialist movement and red history are seen as secondary. As presented by Tracey Lu (2014) the museums in China are categorized into three groups: social science, humanities and arts and technology and science. The first group is divided into several subcategories: national and local museums of revolution, individual martyrs, sacred places of the CCP, minorities' cultures, eco-museums, private museums on the Cultural Revolution of migrant workers.

A year after the central document was issued Heilongjiang government named 22 places for the newly drafted patriotic education and the total number of provincial patriotic bases reached 152. As was mentioned in the central document the local patriotic events need to be accompanied by classical and revolutionary music to introduce the legends and noble achievements of the heroes struggling to save the country. In this regard, the government in Heilongjiang mimics the central government. Two illustrative examples are the locations: Yang Zirong Martyrs Cemetery (杨子荣烈士陵园) and Ma Jun Memorial (马骏纪念馆) opened in 1970 and 1995 respectively. The first place is dedicated to Yang Zirong, who was born in Muping, Shandong in 1917. During the anti-Japanese War Yang joined the Eight Route Army governed by Lin Biao and became a soldier. After 1945 he took up the important task of suppression of bandits in Northeast China. The second and even more recognized revolutionary hero Ma Jun was born in Heilongjiang, Ningan in Hui family. As described by the Chinese sources he was closely affiliated with Zhou Enlai and his wife Deng Yingchao and as early as 1921 he became a Communist Party member in Heilongjiang. After his studies in Moscow he was executed by Guomindang in Ritan Park in Beijing. As illustrated by the museums webpages both are important bases for "patriotism and revolutionary tradition education for government agencies, enterprises, rural party branches, garrison commanders, young people, especially primary and middle school students".

Apart from promoting the Communist Party heroes the most illustrative is the museum of Unit 731. As reported by the New York Times "The Japanese Army regularly conducted field tests to see whether biological warfare would work outside the laboratory" and Unit 731 served as the testing field for the Japanese bioweapon. By promoting patriotic

education in such a place, the Heilongjiang government is responsible for strengthening young people's faith, and look towards the future by remembering the history. Usually it is delivered by special shows: the Northeast Anti-Japanese War, the Anti-Japanese War and local music bands playing heart-warming patriotic songs.

DIFFERENT NARRATIVES, SAME HISTORIES: STORIES FROM SINO-RUSSIA BORDER

The cross-border governance between China and Russia has a long history, especially with interactions in the post-Opium Wars period that brought mistrust and had a heavy impact on common perceptions. An illustrative example comes from the Museum of the Aigun Treaty in Heihe that covers the history of the Sino-Russian border issue specifically covering the Aigun Treaty and the Treaty of Nerchinsk. The museum has wax figures of the people who signed both treaties, and a monument of a Chinese hero who defended China in the late 17th century during Kangxi Emperor's reign. More to the point, in its reading of history, the Heihe museum failed to address the Blagoveshchensk massacre in 1900. In this context, it has shown that the government's intent is positive when it comes to the Russian people, and to remember that history should not be the basis for revenge, but for a better future as the museum, slogan says. On the flip side, the negative feeling towards 'the Other' might put pressure on the government itself, which may then behave more assertively and aggressively. One of the positive images of the Chinese-Russian relations is the Museum of Chinese Emigrants to Russia in Heihe and is affiliated with the Heihe Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese. At the same time, Heihe business is highly dependent on the cooperation with the Russian Far East. Moreover the "political correctness" on the Chinese side is illustrated in the Museum of Zhenbao dao/Damanskyi conflict in 1969. The museum's description by Baidu only once named the story "Sino-Soviet Union clashes". This silence shows that the Chinese government was not eager to antagonize its natural resources provider – Russia. In reality, during the conflict approximately 248 Chinese troops were killed on the island, while 32 Soviet border guards were killed, 14 wounded.

In this regard, the Russians are less politically correct. They celebrate the Cossacks for their role in securing lands that were once Chinese but, since the middle of the 19th century, have been firmly part of the Russian Far East. The view from Primorski Krai

continues to portray the border as a "dyke holding back millions of Chinese" and leaves the region in conflict with Moscow over how much the border will become a common area for cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Apart from promoting pro-Chinese behaviour, shaping historical memory is partly flamed by anti-foreign feelings. In this regard, the Heilongjiang government needs to skillfully manoeuvre between China's economic interests and shaping patriotic feelings. Russia as the natural resource provider, the cordial relations between the central government and Putin and Xi Jinping in particular need to be taken into consideration by the provincial government. Moreover, the fact that the city of Harbin with its Central Street reminds of the city in 19th century Russia and you can hardly buy the Chinese souvenirs is not insignificant. In the micro-scale, the mistrust across the border plays the important role in bilateral relations along the Amur/Heilong River and the government needs to be careful not to cross the line. As said in the paper Chinese are more nuanced in showing the history and more politically correct, while Russian presents Kozaks that conquered the Qing's territory portrayed themselves as the owner of the territory.

Nevertheless, Chinese companies investing in dozens of projects in the Russian far-east needs to limit their unfashionable rhetoric and cannot be too patriotic. Otherwise, their business might be undermined by the local people and the more ultra-Chinese approach will create domestic distrust in Russia, hindered day-to-day cooperation, and the development of China and Russia's economies at the local level.

Taking into account the current status of Sino-Russian cordial relations at the central level, the patriotic the government in Heilongjiang needs to limit anti-foreign sentiments in navigating its patriotic education. As said at the beginning, due to the need for Russian resources in China, the authorities in China's peripheries cannot use a wide range of mechanism dictated from Beijing.

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