

A Historical Review of Chinese History Textbooks since 1949: Evolution, Structure, and Ideational Orientation

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive overview of the eleven history textbooks used in the People's Republic of China (PRC) from its founding in 1949 to the present year. Because of the way history textbooks are divided in reference to China's political generations, this overview also divides China's history textbooks into four periods: the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era. Through a literature review, and a comparison of textbook revisions in different editions, the study found that history education in China has gone through three major stages of development: the start from 1949, the new curriculum reform in 1978, and the unified textbook reform in 2017. Since the year of 2019, the scope of history education in China has now expanded from junior high school in the compulsory education stage to higher education levels including senior high school, undergraduate programs, and graduate studies. The subject of history has always existed in Chinese classrooms as a compulsory subject, except for some students who did not choose history as a subject for the college entrance examination after the division of high school into different subjects. The study also found that the shape, structure, and content of Chinese history textbooks have undergone large-scale changes. In addition, the paper summarizes the commonalities among all the textbooks, arguing for the legitimacy of the rule of the Communist Party of China, adhering to the socialist ideology, and cultivating patriotic sentiments to enhance the sense of national identity.

Keywords: Chinese history textbooks, history education, textbook reform, socialist ideology

Introduction

Textbooks hold a unique position in school education, serving as a primary subject of analysis in educational studies and playing a crucial role globally in shaping national identity. In the Asian region, the significance of textbooks is further emphasized as they are considered as tools for the government's official interpretation of history (De Giorgi, 2009). In PRC, history textbooks have always been the embodiment of the national will and the nation's central ideology. The writing of history textbooks is a major event in the long-term strategic interests of the country (Li et al., 2007), deeply intertwined with the strategic interests of the nation.

Since 1951, China's history education system has undergone two major structural changes, and 11 editions of history textbooks have been developed. There are many reasons for the multiple revisions in less than 80 years, but the main reason is to adapt to the political needs of different periods. This analysis is structured around the divisions in Chinese political generations, namely, the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era. By dissecting these textbooks, the paper seeks to elucidate the development and transformation of history education in China, using the textbooks as a lens to understand the state, manner, and evolution of history education in the country.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on history education and textbook studies in China, existing research has often focused on individual periods, specific policy reforms, or single editions of textbooks. Comparatively fewer studies have provided a systematic, longitudinal analysis of Chinese history textbooks across multiple political eras from 1949 to the present.

This study examines eleven officially published history textbook editions and situates their modifications within the broader framework of China's political and educational transformations in an effort to bridge this gap. Using a generational political division—the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era—this study investigates how the structure, content, and ideological orientation of history textbooks have evolved over time. By employing this approach, the study intends to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving role of history textbooks in China's educational system, particularly with relation to the institutional continuity of history instruction, national identity formation, and state ideology.

The Chinese Education System and the Institutional Context of History Education

The history education system in China underwent significant changes over the years. After 1949, education in China was under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MOE). During the Mao Zedong era, education in China was developed on the Soviet model, popularizing Marxist pedagogical theories and emphasizing science and technology, and in 1955 the college entrance examination system was established.

During the Cultural Revolution, the education system was destroyed on all fronts, and students were called to leave the cities and go to the countryside for re-education through labor. The college entrance examination was discontinued and universities accepted only recommended students. Non-scientific subjects such as history were significantly reduced or disrupted. This situation continued until 1977.

In 1985, the Central Committee of the CCP issued the Decision on the Reform of the Education System, which established the principle of implementing basic education under local responsibility and hierarchical management (Ou & Yi, 2018). Since then, education in China has been managed at four levels: central, provincial, municipal, and county. In terms of the school system, there have been a ten-year system, a twelve-year system and a special system during the Cultural Revolution. The current system generally consists of six-years elementary school, three years junior high school and three years senior high school, established in 1986. However, a few regions implement a five-year primary school and four-year junior high school system, such as some cities in Shanghai, Beijing, Shandong, and Heilongjiang. Of these, the three-year senior high school is not part of compulsory education, and the main purpose of the senior high school is to train students to enter university through the college entrance examination. At the senior high school level, depending on the policies of different provinces, history is one of the six optional subjects for the college entrance examination, and students may choose to study it or not.

In 1986 the Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education was enacted, which stipulates that in the People's Republic of China, all children and adolescents between the ages of six and fifteen years old must be subjected to compulsory education, and that parents have the obligation to have their children receive compulso-

ry education¹. Compulsory education has now basically been realized throughout mainland China and is moving towards full free public schooling (Zhang, 2020).

According to the law, compulsory education in China is currently financed through a system of centralized financial allocations, supplemented by a variety of local channels of financing education. Wang (2003) compiled a list of six major channels of financing compulsory education: financial allocations supplemented by the levying of taxes (fees) for education, the collection of tuition fees for non-compulsory students and miscellaneous fees for compulsory students, and the development of school-run industries, support for school financing and donations, and the establishment of education funds. According to the People's Daily, fiscal compulsory education funding in 2021 will be 2.29 trillion yuan². Per-pupil funding for primary schools will be 14,458 yuan³, and per-pupil funding for middle schools will be 20,717 yuan⁴ (Sun, 2022).

History of the Chinese History Education

In the early years of PRC, history courses were introduced in the curriculum of primary schools, advanced primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. The educational system at that time followed the twelve-year system inherited from the period of the Republic of China (Zhu, 2010). In 1951, the system was modified to a ten-year format, replicating the Soviet model⁵. It was later reverted to the twelve-year system. In 1956, China formulated and promulgated the first formal outline for the teaching of history in primary and secondary schools, marking the preliminary formation of the Chinese history education system (Lu, 2003).

Entering the 1960s, political upheavals affected the education sector, leading to comprehensive disruptions. In 1963, the MOE issued a new curriculum for high school history education, but it's not in operation (Sun, 2008). After 1966, the Cultural Revolution erupted on a massive scale. The educational system was shortened, reducing primary

¹ The Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education, 1986 version (revised in 2015), Article 2. See: http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyfl/202110/t20211029_575949.html

² Based on data from the People's Bank of China, on December 21, 2021, 1 euro was equal to 7.1824 yuan. Therefore, 2.29 trillion yuan was approximately 318.83 billion euros that year.

³ approximately 2,012 euros

⁴ approximately 2,884 euros

⁵ At that time, China completely adopted the Soviet system in the field of education. The compulsory education system copied the Soviet ten-year universal compulsory education system, which consisted of 3 years of primary school and 7 years of secondary school.

education from 6 to 5 years, while junior high school (3 years) and senior high school (3 years) were combined into a 3–4-year secondary school (Sun, 2008). History courses were canceled, and textbooks were discontinued.

After the Cultural Revolution, the study of history was reinstated at the secondary school level. However, history courses were excluded from primary education until today. In 1978, the “Full-time Ten-year School Secondary School History Teaching Outline (Trial Draft)” was drafted, aiming to rectify the distorted and damaged history education system from the Cultural Revolution, and to rebuild it anew (Shi, 2001).

In 1980, the Ministry of Education (MOE) released the “Full-time Ten-year School Secondary School History Teaching Outline (Trial Draft) (Second Edition)” establishing the division between modern and contemporary history (Liu, 2008). In 1985, the decision for an education system reform was made by the Central Committee of China Communist Party (CCP). The MOE was renamed the State Education Commission of the PRC (SEC)⁶ leading to the cancellation of the advanced primary school system in 1986. The basic education system was universally changed to a six-year primary school and three-year junior high school format. In the field of history, a new “Full-time Secondary School History Teaching Outline” was promulgated. After the reform and opening-up, the new compulsory education curriculum standards eliminated history courses at the primary school stage and reorganized junior high school and senior high school history textbooks (Lu, 2003).

From 1988 to 2001, the SEC piloted and then fully implemented the “New Curriculum Reform,” known as “One Outline, Multiple Textbooks.” Various versions of history textbooks appeared, such as the Beijing Normal University Press version, Shanghai Education Press version, and Yuelu Press version. The new curriculum reform has realized the diversification of history teaching materials and the emergence of history elective courses, reflecting the principle of teaching students according to their abilities (Chen, 1999).

In 2017, the MOE incorporated the history subject into the national unified textbook system for primary and secondary schools, restoring the tradition of having history textbooks nationwide written by the People’s Education Press (PEP). At present, China’s history education system is divided into three levels: the compulsory education level,

⁶ In 1998, the First Session of the Ninth National People’s Congress adopted the “Decision on the Reform of State Council Institutions,” which renamed the SEC back to the Ministry of Education.(Lin, 2022)

the general high school or secondary vocational school level and the undergraduate level⁷. Except for the university level, all current history textbooks are written and published by the PEP, who holds a central role in the creation and dissemination of history textbooks, with a single version used nationwide, reflecting uniformity across diverse regions and ethnicities.

Looking back at the history of history education in China, we three major periods of history education are commonly recognized. The first is from 1949 to 1978. History education during this time was in the initial construction period, with a great deal of exploration and tortuous development, and even a brief period of stagnation. Then there was the period from 1978 to 2017, when the school system was fixed with the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education system. The history education syllabus was replaced by the curriculum standards, and the history education system in China gradually stabilized, forming the basic features of the junior high school history special chronology + topic and the senior high school history module + topic. Finally, there is the ministry-edited version of the teaching materials from 2017 to the present, and new requirements have been put forward for history education. The history curriculum in compulsory education requires students to develop the five core qualities of the materialistic view of history, spatio-temporal view of history, historical evidence, historical interpretation, and national sentiment, guided by the Marxist view of materialistic history (MOE, 2022).

Position of History Education

China places great importance on history education, especially the content of textbooks. China's history is crucial to the legitimacy of the CCP's rule (Weatherley & Magee,

⁷ The history curriculum for primary and junior secondary schools falls under the compulsory education stage and currently follows the 2022 edition of the compulsory education history curriculum standards, see: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/W020220420582345700037.pdf>

General high schools currently implement the 2017 edition (revised in 2020) of the general high school history curriculum standards, see: <https://shorturl.at/1lepZ>

The history curriculum for secondary vocational schools currently follows the 2020 edition of the curriculum standards for ideology and politics, Chinese language, and history in secondary vocational schools, see: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/200303/W020200401347866068700.pdf>

The "Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History" course at universities is part of the ideological and political education curriculum. It has been offered in undergraduate and junior college institutions across China since the spring of 2007 and currently follows the 2020 edition of the "Implementation Plan for the Reform and Innovation of School Ideological and Political Theory Courses in the New Era." See: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/jcj_kcjcggh/202012/t20201231_508361.html

2018). History textbooks are often successful in convincing readers to accept narratives that are consistent with China's communist ideology (Du, 2022). Since 1949, Chinese history textbooks have undergone eleven major reforms and numerous local modifications. Chinese scholars widely believe that textbook reforms are politically motivated, aiming to enhance national identity, patriotism, and to safe guard ideological security (Lee, 1996; Hui, 2022), which some scholars argue makes the reforms more political than educational (Yu, 2013; Xu, 2021).

History teaching in China is centrally governed, with the national government setting standards and the provinces implementing them. In the junior high school, general high school or secondary vocational school history is a compulsory subject in the graduation examination for all students. Furthermore, history is also an optional subject in Gaokao for a part of the students. At the university, modern Chinese history as an important part of the ideological and political course is a compulsory course for all undergraduate and specialized students.

The curriculum spans from prehistoric times to contemporary history, presenting multiple historical perspectives, including national, global, and various historical periods. The concept of the 'Middle Ages' is not applied in Chinese historiography.. Chinese history has been divided into four main periods: primitive society until the 21th to 16th century B.C. - ancient history from the establishment of China's first dynasty, the Xia Dynasty to 1840 - modern history from the first Opium War in 1840 to 1949 - contemporary history after the founding of the new China in 1949.

The development of national identity, a patriotic view of historical events, and analytical abilities related to historical learning, such as historical consciousness and critical thinking, are all stressed in the Chinese history curriculum. Digital literacy and media-related abilities in history education, as well as multicultural or inclusive viewpoints, are somewhat underemphasized in the curriculum. The curriculum is primarily disciplinary rather than transdisciplinary from a structural standpoint. Chinese history textbooks cover historical events from a variety of angles, including social, political, economic, and cultural. They comprise listings of significant events, figures, and geographical details, prescribe specific in-depth themes and topics, and often follow a chronological order. In an effort to give thorough treatment of crucial historical material, the curriculum also describes important historical ideas and concepts.

Themes and Focus of Textbook Content

The Mao Zedong era (1949-1976)

The Textbook Editing and Review Committee was established in Beijing on April 8, 1949. The Propaganda Department of the CCP required all committee members to study dialectical materialism and political economy. Later, the PEP was placed directly under the jurisdiction of the CCP's Propaganda Department (Yu, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the PEP authored and published the first set of nationally standardized textbooks in the fall of 1951. This series of textbooks continued the writing norms of the Republic of China (ROC) era, using traditional characters, vertical layout, and a reading sequence from right to left. Subsequently, as the MOE adjusted the educational system from twelve years to ten years and then back to twelve years, the second to fourth sets of nationally standardized textbooks were introduced in the falls of 1954, 1961, and 1963, respectively. Notably, starting with the third set in 1961, the PEP textbooks transitioned to simplified characters, adopted horizontal layout, and changed the reading sequence from left to right⁸.

During this period, history textbooks were divided into advanced primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. According to a list of purchased Chinese history textbooks preserved by Yukari Arakawa⁹, no new editions of history textbooks were published in the 1960s to 1970s. This could be attributed to the impact of the Cultural Revolution. Due to a lack of available literature, we cannot confirm when history textbooks from this period ceased to be in use.

In terms of content, the history textbooks of that time were consistent with textbooks from other subjects, strictly adhering to the guidance of *Mao Zedong Thought*. *Mao Zedong Thought* was first proposed by Wang Jiaxiang in an article titled "*The Chinese Communist Party and the Road to China's National Liberation*," published in the *Liberation Daily* in 1943. In 1945, the 7th National Congress of the CCP established *Mao Zedong Thought* as the guiding ideology of the CCP and incorporated it into the party constitution. In 1956, during the 8th National Congress, this provision was abolished, but in 1969, during the 9th National Congress, it was reinstated. *Mao Zedong Thought*

⁸ Detailed descriptions of early textbooks are taken from the official website of the People's Education Publishing House. See the table in the appendix for details

⁹ See: <http://www.wang-xueping.com/document2009.pdf>

became the sole guiding ideology of China. History textbooks at the time followed Mao's worldview, incorporating anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist ideas while continuing the nationalist ideology developed during the Republic of China. According to Culp (2007), Jones (2005) and Vickers (2009), "the surprising continuity of nationalism from the Republican period right through to the reform era of the PRC persisted. The textbooks focus on the need for a strong national consciousness in order to obtain full sovereignty, to save China from foreign intervention and to make China an independent and strong player in the world community." (Yu, 2013, p. 683).

In international affairs, Mao Zedong underwent a transition from "completely leaning toward the Soviet Union" to "uniting with Third World countries and resolutely struggling against both the Soviet Union and the United States." In the early stages, Mao Zedong engaged in deep cooperation with the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, extensively emulating the Soviet system in terms of institutions. For example, in 1949, the textbook "*Foreign Geography*" in the areas controlled by the CCP faced criticism for not dividing the world into capitalist and socialist camps and not emphasizing that the Soviet Union was the most progressive country in the world. (Yu, 2013). However, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union took a downturn after Nikita Khrushchev delivered the secret speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" in 1956. The CCP led by Mao Zedong criticized Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" as "Soviet revisionism", later escalating to labeling the Soviet Union as "Soviet imperialism". Mao began to portray the CCP as the true inheritor of Marxism. Consequently, he formulated the concept of the "Three Worlds", categorizing the United States and the Soviet Union as the first world, other capitalist countries as the second world, and all other nations as the third world. The CCP aimed to continue spreading revolutionary ideas, leading the third world in resistance against the first world countries.

The writing of history textbooks during this period reflected the turbulent political situation. In 1953, before the completion of the high school-level modern world history textbook, the Chinese translation of the Soviet textbook "*Soviet Modern History*" was directly used as the national textbook in China (Yu, 2013). The *1956 History Teaching Outline*¹⁰ depicted the Soviet Union as the leader responsible for countering imperialist countries. This reflected the government's call for the comprehensive study of the political trends in the Soviet Union among the Chinese people. However, in the *1963 His-*

¹⁰ Ministry of Education of China, Chinese History Syllabus for Higher Secondary Schools (Draft), PEP, 1956

*tory Teaching Outline*¹¹, the leader responsible for countering imperialist countries was changed to China, and the Soviet Union was portrayed as an imperialist country similar to the United States.

After 1966, the Cultural Revolution broke out. “Red Guards” were formed in primary and secondary schools to carry out revolutionary campaigns, storming local governments at all levels, and suspending classes in all types of schools throughout the country. On June 30, 1966, the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council forwarded a report from the Party Committee of the MOE, titled *Regarding the Handling Suggestions for Political, Chinese, and History Textbooks for the School Year 1966-1967*. The report stated, “Currently, history classes are temporarily suspended... Whether in primary or secondary schools, students must study the works of Chairman Mao. In primary schools, students in each grade should learn Mao’s quotations, and in junior schools, they can study the ‘Three Old Articles’ (*Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains, In Memory of Norman Bethune, Serve the People*). History classes in middle schools are temporarily suspended” (Wang Benzong & Qizhi, 2020).

When classes gradually resumed, universities only reinstated education in science and engineering. Because the People’s Daily published Mao’s instructions: “It is still necessary to have universities: here I refer mainly to colleges of science and engineering.”¹² Primary and secondary schools extensively incorporated works by Mao Zedong, Mao’s quotations, and other materials that catered to the political struggles of the time into textbooks. Teachers are replaced by politically reliable but academically unqualified individuals. This situation persisted until 1976 (Saywell, 1980).

The Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1989)

The Cultural Revolution thoroughly disrupted China’s education system. After Deng Xiaoping returned to power and effectively became China’s top leader in 1977, he introduced the concept of *liberating thoughts and seeking truth from facts*. This initiative led to a comprehensive rectification in the field of education and science in China, removing the negative impacts of the Cultural Revolution, particularly in the education sector (Chen, 1996). Under Deng Xiaoping’s guidance, China restored the national college entrance examination in 1977. In 1978, several landmark documents were issued, includ-

¹¹ Ministry of Education of China, Full-time Secondary School History Syllabus (Draft), PEP, 1963.

¹² People’s Daily, July 22, 1968.

ing the *Trial Draft of the Full-Time Ten-Year Compulsory Education Program for Primary and Secondary Schools*, which aimed to bring China's basic education back on track.

In the autumn of 1978, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai regions adopted the fifth edition of textbooks from PEP¹³, marking the first appearance of color printing in textbooks by PEP. Based on the trial experience and the nationwide adjustment of the education system to six years of primary school and six years of secondary school, China began using the new sixth edition of textbooks from PEP from the autumn of 1982¹⁴.

However, as the government continued to emancipate thinking, the unified textbook publishing system could no longer meet the practical needs of education in China. In 1982, Beijing Normal University compiled May-Fourth system textbooks for affiliated secondary schools (Yan, 2009). In 1988, based on the maturity of local textbooks and the promulgation of the *Chinese Compulsory Education Law* two years earlier, the State Education Commission formulated the Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbook Compilation Plan. The commission established the National Committee for the Review of Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools, separating textbook writing from the review process and breaking the monopoly of PEP textbooks nationwide. During this period, varying textbooks, including the Beijing Normal University version, emerged under the umbrella term "Eight and a Half Sets", reflecting the diverse landscape of textbooks based on different local school systems. This marked the seventh reform of history textbooks.

Simultaneously, history education was gradually phased out from primary school classrooms and became a subject introduced only in secondary schools. According to a list presented by Yukari Arakawa (2009), the last edition of history textbooks for the Chinese primary school stage was the third edition published by PEP in April 1992. Considering that the compulsory education curriculum outline designated the learning of history to begin in junior high school, it is reasonable to infer that history education in China was phased out from the primary school stage in the 1990s.

¹³ In its introduction, the PEP emphasized that this set of textbooks had done its best to exclude the influence of "left-leaning errors". See: https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843604.shtml

¹⁴ The edition is based on two sets of materials designed for rural and urban areas at the primary level, and two sets of materials for mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology at the secondary level, which are divided into two sets of materials of higher difficulty and basic requirements. See: https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843605.shtml

In terms of content, textbooks during this period emphasized patriotic education. Because of the June 4 Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the CCP leaders worried that the reform and opening up for economic development would allow capitalist ideology to take advantage of the situation. In order to protect the ideology of socialism, the CCP leaders paid more attention to ideological education in history education (Dai, 2007). According to the *Full-Time Primary School History Teaching Outline* issued by the State Education Commission in 1986, history textbooks were expected to “provide students with patriotic, revolutionary traditions, and internationalist education, thereby inspiring students’ patriotic enthusiasm and contributing to the establishment of lofty ideals for a communist life” (Zhang Huanting. et al., 1989: 349-350).

The Jiang-Hu era (1990-2011)

During the periods when Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao served as China’s state presidents, the country maintained a degree of political openness, continued economic reforms, and achieved remarkable successes. Textbook policies during this period transitioned from a single standard to multiple ones, improving the quality and diversity of textbooks (Dai, 2007). In May 1985, the CCP issued the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Reform of the Education System” and in June, it decided to establish the State Education Commission abolishing the Ministry of Education. In April 1986, the “Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” was promulgated, implementing a nine-year compulsory education under the leadership of the State Council, with local responsibility and graded management¹⁵. Simultaneously, the “National Textbook Approval Committee for Primary and Secondary Schools” was established to approve the national teaching outlines and textbooks, marking the transition from the unified “one syllabus, one textbook” system to a competitive “multiple syllabi, multiple textbooks” system (Xie, 2000).

In 1990, the State Education Commission issued the *Adjustment Opinions on the Current High School Curriculum* and revised the teaching outlines for eight subjects in secondary schools (Deng et al., 1990). Based on this, PEP revised or newly compiled textbooks for high schools. The eighth edition of history textbooks from PEP underwent a comprehensive revision. The eighth edition consists of five books: Modern Chinese History Volumes One and Two, Ancient Chinese History, and World Modern History Vol-

¹⁵ Ministry of Education of China, 50 Years of Education (1980-1989). See: https://www.edu.cn/edu/jiao_yu_zi_xun/fa_zhan_shi/da_shi_ji/200603/t20060323_156315.shtml

umes One and Two. The first two volumes are mandatory readings, while the latter three are optional.

The history curriculum continued to follow a chronological order but now focused on Chinese history from 1840 to the end of the Cold War. The introduction of this set of textbooks was primarily a response to the significant impact of the 1989 Eastern European upheavals on the Chinese socialist regime. The revised curriculum aimed to strengthen ideological and political education, with the goal of safeguarding the ideological security of socialism. Compared to the old edition, the new textbook changed China's official historical narrative from focusing primarily on domestic enemies, such as landlords and capitalists, to foreign invaders. By making China a victim of Western imperialism (Wang, 2008), Deng Xiaoping constructed a new ideology to replace the class struggle ideology that had been crushed at the end of the Cultural Revolution (Xu & Zhao, 2023).

The new textbooks significantly reduced or rephrased content related to ethnic conflicts. For example, the term *struggle* was removed from the section on the Qing Dynasty's efforts to consolidate the unified multi-ethnic state in the third volume of the old junior high school textbooks. This change aimed to counter the impact of Western ideas about national self-determination. By emphasizing the concept of the "Chinese nation", the revised curriculum sought to strengthen national unity and maintain territorial integrity.

Since September 2001, the new People's Education Press experimental textbooks for compulsory education gradually entered various experimental zones. In September 2004, experimental textbooks based on the high school curriculum standards were introduced. These textbooks are known as the tenth edition of People's Education Press textbooks. The tenth edition innovatively adopts the format of thematic units, replacing the traditional chronological approach to history. The new textbook series consists of three required textbooks and six elective ones. The compulsory courses are composed of History I (with an emphasis on politics), History II (with an emphasis on socio-economic and social life) and History III (with an emphasis on thought, culture, science, and technology). The elective textbooks are also organized by themes, such as Major Reforms in History, Democratic Thoughts and Practices in Modern Society, War and Peace in the Twentieth Century, Comments on Chinese and Foreign Historical Figures, Exploring the Mystery of History, A View on World Culture Heritage, and others (Fan, 2011).

This textbook format has received significant criticism. Some teachers argue that the new edition's historical outcomes are too predetermined, while actual historical facts are

insufficient (Yan et al., 2021). This implies that the historical narrative becomes excessively linear, and revolutionary processes are portrayed as inevitable outcomes of history. “In other words, without presenting the full range of historical facts, such comments on the revolution further politicize historical events in order to shape the political opinions of young people in very specific ways” (Yan et al., 2021, p. 180).

This has created a dilemma for history teachers—while they want to supplement more details, they must strenuously avoid adding details that may generate viewpoints different from the conclusions in the history textbooks. For instance, the textbooks introduce the Boxer Rebellion during the late Qing period as a manifestation of China’s peasant class spontaneously organizing to resist the colonial invaders, showcasing the revolutionary nature of the peasant class in modern China. However, the Boxers were an organization with severe racial discrimination, comprised solely of Han Chinese, with the initial goal of overthrowing the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty. The textbooks, however, only depict the Boxers in the later stages cooperating with the Qing rulers, jointly resisting the invasion of European colonizers. This narrative overlooks the intense ethnic conflict between the Han Chinese and the Manchu during the late Qing, constructing an image of multi-ethnic unity resisting foreign invasion (Yan et al., 2021).

The Xi era (2012-)

Unlike Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping has not adhered to the governance model proposed by Deng Xiaoping of national leaders serving a maximum of two consecutive terms. Since coming to power in 2012, Xi has continuously created political conditions favorable to consolidating power. This includes strengthening ideological and political education, leading to the implementation of new textbook reforms (Xu, 2021).

The purpose of this textbook reform is clear, “inculcating students with CCP-prescribed knowledge, positions, and values” (Xu, 2021: 6). According to the State Council document (2016), this reform involves only three subjects, each having “strong ideological attributes and [was a] concentrated expression of the state’s will and socialist core values.” (Xu, 2021: 6)

In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry of Education abolished the “single curriculum standard, diverse textbooks” policy established in 1988. In 2017, the National Textbook Committee was established, giving this committee more authority than the MOE to decide on textbook-related issues. Simultaneously, the new edition of unified textbooks began to be implemented. By 2020, the new edition of unified textbooks had been introduced nation-

wide for compulsory education, and high schools in 21 provinces and cities had started using the new textbooks (Ren & Zheng, 2020).

The current textbook reform places particular emphasis on the reform of history textbooks. According to reports, there are a total of four chief editors for the three subjects, with two of them being chief editors for history. Zhang Haipeng, the chief editor of high school history textbooks, stated, “The key learning content of high school history textbooks focuses on four aspects: first, over 5,000 years of Chinese civilization. Second, more than 170 years of the struggle history of the Chinese people and over 90 years of the struggle history of the CCP. Third, education on national sovereignty and maritime awareness. Fourth, education on national unity and progress” (Zhao & Lin, 2019, p. 1).

In terms of content, the current reform strengthens ideological and political education. The new textbooks highlight “the outstanding role played by the CCP in the nationwide united resistance against Japanese aggression, revealing that the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist path are historical and popular choices, guiding students to recognize that walking the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is a historical necessity.” (General high school history textbook development team, 2019, p. 1). In comparison to the old textbooks, the new ones omit the role of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) during the resistance against Japanese aggression, emphasizing the Kuomintang government’s passive resistance and active opposition to the Communist Party. The existence of the Kuomintang army is downplayed, and the victorious Kuomintang forces are uniformly referred to as the “Chinese army”¹⁶. The CCP’s anti-Japanese battles are expanded from operations in the enemy’s rear to both the front and rear battlefields. In terms of socialist construction, various political movements before the Cultural Revolution are deleted. In the retained content related to the Cultural Revolution¹⁷, the erroneous statement about Mao Zedong’s motivation for launching the Cultural Revolution is removed¹⁸. In summary, the

¹⁶ In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 1), pages 69-72. The troops under the jurisdiction of the Kuomintang are collectively referred to as the Chinese army. However, the units controlled by the Communist Party are specified by their different designations, such as the Eighth Route Army, the New Fourth Army, the Hui People’s Detachment, and the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army.

¹⁷ In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 2), pages 35. The old textbook had a full page on “The Great Leap Forward”, which was reduced to a single sentence and removed the illustrations.

¹⁸ In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 2), pages 36-37. Whereas the old textbook had a whole chapter on the Cultural Revolution, the new textbook has been shortened to two pages, describes Mao’s campaign as “preventing the restoration of capitalism”, discusses only the political struggles at the top level of the CCP, removes descriptions of the destruction of people’s livelihoods, and adds a positive reference to the scientific and technological advances of the period. The accompanying picture has been changed to a festive image of “people celebrating the crushing of the Gang of Four”.

narrative structure is further simplified, negative impacts are downplayed, achievements in construction are highlighted, and the legitimacy of the CCP's rule is reinforced. However, the drawbacks of this discourse have already appeared in the tenth edition of the PEP textbooks, and the eleventh edition continued to expand on this approach: "the new history textbook explicitly emphasizes the superiority of China's centralized political system and its effectiveness at maintaining social stability" (Yan et al., 2021, p. 186).

The new textbooks place greater emphasis on topics and narratives that are intended to resonate with a broad public audience.. The CCP had previously described the Anti-Japanese War of the past eighty years as the Eight-Year War of Resistance, but the new textbooks have changed it to the Fourteen-Year War of Resistance. The coverage of the Nanjing Massacre is expanded, and content about the refusal of the Japanese right-wing government to apologize is added, guiding students to develop anti-Japanese sentiments. In the sections on political history and economic history, both junior and senior high school levels have increased negative descriptions of the United States. Politically, the global development trend is described as multipolar, but the United States is attempting to establish a unipolar world dominated by the United States. Instances of the United States causing regional conflicts after the Cold War are highlighted, such as the U.S.-led NATO bombing of Yugoslavia for 78 consecutive days and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Economically, it emphasizes President Trump's trade war against China and his counter-globalization stance.

The new textbooks have changed the concept of ethnic integration to ethnic blending. The previous notion of ethnic integration could potentially raise concerns about the gradual disappearance of minority ethnic groups after integration. However, the expression "ethnic blending" in the new textbooks reflects the idea that various ethnic groups, after interactions, develop and progress together. This is a departure from previous versions. For example, Yue Fei, an ancient Chinese military general who resisted the Jin dynasty, has traditionally been regarded as a Han Chinese hero. In the new edition of the seventh-grade textbook (Part 2)¹⁹, he is only referred to as an "anti-Jin hero," with the term "national hero" removed. Additionally, the same page includes more positive descriptions of the Jurchen people of the Jin dynasty. In terms of historical evidence, the materials related to ethnic blending are overly simplified and lacking in details, possibly to avoid students forming different opinions after a more in-depth understanding of historical details.

¹⁹ MOE edition seventh-grade history textbook (Part 2) P53.

The new textbooks have also introduced education on national sovereignty and maritime awareness. In addition to continuing to emphasize that Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and their affiliated islands are an integral part of China's territory, the new textbooks have added the South China Sea islands region. In the unit "Silk Road: Communication between Chinese and Foreign Civilizations" in the first volume of seventh grade, it provides a detailed introduction to how, as early as the Qin and Han periods, the Chinese people were active in this region. China was the earliest country in the world to discover, name, and use the South China Sea islands and the corresponding waters, exercising jurisdiction and sovereignty there first, peacefully, continuously, and effectively. This addition is likely in response to recent territorial disputes between China and countries such as the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam in the South China Sea. Consequently, the history textbooks were promptly updated to assert China's sovereignty over the South China Sea islands. Moreover, the new textbooks also assign the entire disputed border region with India to China.

Education in ethnic minority areas has also been impacted by recent changes to Chinese history textbooks. For instance, schools in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region are now obliged to utilize central government-published textbooks instead of those written in regional ethnic languages. Official statements state that all subjects taught in ethnic languages using centrally issued textbooks will be evaluated in Mandarin beginning with the junior high school graduation exams in 2023 and the senior high school exams in 2025. Additionally, by 2025, the regional government hopes to have an 85% Mandarin proficiency rate across the entire territory. These modifications show a move toward textbook content standardization and a rise in the usage of the national language in official evaluations. In Inner Mongolia, earlier textbook editions were either made for use in ethnic minority languages or were available in those languages. The central government-mandated curriculum content, which includes sections on national unity, ethnic regional autonomy, and historical narratives that highlight common growth among ethnic groups, is preserved in the new textbooks.

Findings and Discussion

By reviewing the eleven editions of Chinese history textbooks before and after, this study identifies that the reasons for the evolution of textbooks primarily include changes in the educational system and the political needs of different periods. However, de-

spite these changes, due to the continuous control of textbook review authority by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the various editions of history textbooks still share some commonalities.

Extensively discusses the legitimacy of the CCP's rule

The modern history perspective in Chinese history textbooks is distinct from the Western perspective. In the West, modernity is generally defined as the historical period after the Middle Ages, roughly beginning with the end of the European Renaissance in the 16th century. In China, however, the starting point of modern history is considered the Opium War in 1840, and the establishment of the PRC in 1949 marks the beginning of modern history. This division is based on the initiation and substantial conclusion of China's colonization by Western imperialist countries. Over these 110 years of history, the Chinese Communist Party has constructed a logically coherent and seamless chain of evidence to argue for the modern historical perspective that only the CCP can save China.

Starting with the Opium War in 1840, the isolationist state of the late Qing Dynasty was broken by the British Empire. Subsequently, eight imperialist countries including Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria-Hungary successively invaded China, forcing the late Qing government to sign unequal treaties and cede or forcibly lease Chinese territory. These historical facts compelled the Chinese people to embark on modernization, seeking national independence and fulfilling the historical tasks of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. During the process of modernization, various social ideologies entered China, and almost every political system underwent experiments, all of which were deemed failures. The late Qing Dynasty experimented with constitutional monarchy; Yuan Shikai and Zhang Xun attempted to restore the monarchy twice after overthrowing the Qing Dynasty; during the Beiyang government, parliamentary and multi-party systems were implemented; and during the Nationalist government, a presidential system was adopted. All these political systems were phased out by history, and only the Chinese Communist Party established the new China, completing the historical mission of anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, and the salvation of the Chinese nation. While the length and emphasis on historical events may vary in different versions of history textbooks, the overall design of chapters and the narrative process remain consistent. This is the modern historical perspective conveyed to students.

All versions of history textbooks have upheld the ideological framework of socialism

During Mao Zedong's era, the CCP engaged in large-scale communist construction practices, which not only failed to rapidly achieve the goals of communism but also caused significant damage to China. In the post-Mao period, Deng Xiaoping, to safeguard the ideological security of the CCP, introduced the theory of the primary stage of socialism. This reframed Mao's practices as the exploration period of socialist construction and divided it into three stages: positive outcomes in exploration, the coexistence of successes and mistakes in exploration, and exploration entering the wrong path. Historical textbooks during Deng's era referred to Mao's period as "in the early stages of socialist construction (Zhong, 2014, p. 23)", emphasizing the challenges faced by the CCP during this exploratory phase, acknowledging both successes and mistakes but downplaying its destructive and negative impact on China. In subsequent history textbooks, the correctness of *Mao Zedong Thought* is separated from the mistakes he made in his later years (Jin & Chen, 1992). *Mao Zedong Thought* was explained as the correct early ideology led by the CCP collectively, and Mao's mistakes in his later years were attributed to his failure to adhere correctly to *Mao Zedong Thought*. Furthermore, the historical evaluation of Mao emphasized that it should be based on the principle that the merits outweigh the demerits.

Following this, Deng Xiaoping introduced the concept of the "theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Deng, 1984), which included Deng's own theory and subsequent political concepts proposed by the highest leaders of the CCP. This theoretical framework reflects differences from *Mao Zedong Thought* but still emphasizes that China's ideology remains socialist, representing the inheritance and development of Marxism-Leninism and *Mao Zedong Thought*. The significance of Chinese characteristics lies in the continuous discovery and establishment of the latest achievements in adapting Marxism to China's conditions. This ensures that it can provide scientific guidance for the development of the party and the country's cause in different historical periods.

The latest edition of the textbooks explicitly states that since the 18th National Congress of the CCP, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The party has engaged in theoretical innovation, establishing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, providing scientific guidance for the development of the party and the country's cause in the new era. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is an integral part of the theoretical framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

All versions have cultivated patriotic thinking and emphasized national unity

The patriotic concept constructed by the CCP is an abstract macro concept. The country notion of CCP's Patriotism narrative does not refer to a specific political regime but encompasses all geographical concepts formed in the process of modern China's territorial development. Thus, in ancient China, dynasties frequently changed, but the concept of China remained constant. China is depicted as an uninterrupted entity, and other minority regimes that existed within modern China's territory in early history textbooks are considered part of the China concept. For example, Han ethnic regimes were often overthrown by minority groups, including the Mongols and Manchus, who conquered China entirely. However, historical textbooks tend to emphasize the narrative of ethnic integration while downplaying aspects of ethnic conflict. The Yuan and Qing dynasties actively adopted Han culture and assimilated into the Chinese nation.

In early history textbooks, the ancient history section generally presented the perspective of the Han ethnic group. The narrative at that time focused on unity among different ethnicities based on the theory of class struggle, emphasizing the existence of oppressed and oppressor classes in every ethnicity and the need for unity among the oppressed. Despite abandoning the theory of class struggle during the Deng Xiaoping era, the government did not reject the historical narrative that had developed from this theory during Mao's era. While subsequent top leaders of the CCP continually introduced new ideological concepts, the fundamental understanding of history remained unchanged. The trend in textbook revisions reflected an enhancement of national unity and a tendency to conceal ethnic conflicts.

Especially after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the CCP reaffirmed the importance of socialist ideological security, blurring the concepts of the CCP, PRC, and the Chinese nation into a single category. In the Xi Jinping era, Xi proposed the Chinese Dream concept of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which represents the latest form of merging patriotism and national unity discourse.

Conclusion

This article has methodically analyzed the development of Chinese history textbooks from 1949, showing how the political environments of various Chinese eras have influenced these textbooks. History teaching in China has mirrored changes in

political goals and educational policy from the Mao Zedong to the Xi Jinping eras. According to the analysis, the CCP's leadership in national independence, industrialization, and defense against foreign aggression have all been highlighted in Chinese history textbooks (Xu, 2021; Lee, 1996). Additionally, a robust intellectual framework of socialism has been offered in the textbooks, which have evolved from Mao Zedong Thought to the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adapting Marxist concepts to the historical and social circumstances of China.

The cultivation of patriotic sentiment and the emphasis on national unity have been persistent themes in these textbooks. The CCP's narrative of patriotism encompasses a broad conception of China as a continuous historical and territorial entity, ethnic integration and unity are emphasized, but previous ethnic conflicts are rarely discussed (Hui, 2022).

In conclusion, the history of Chinese history textbooks is not just a record of educational changes but also a reflection of China's political and ideological shifts over the past decades. It underscores the vital role of education in shaping national identity and ideological alignment, demonstrating the intricate interplay between education, politics, and societal values in China. This study illustrates the interaction between education, politics, and societal values by highlighting the important role that history education plays in forming national identity and ideological alignment.

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Appendix

Table 1 Overview of successive reforms of the compulsory Chinese history textbooks

Version	Year	Leader	Publisher	Characteristics
1	1951	Mao Zedong	PEP	Transitional textbook from the early years of the founding of the Republic of China. It continues the writing standards of the Republic of China period, using traditional Chinese characters, vertical layout and right-to-left reading order. The applicable school system is the twelve-year system.
2	1956	Mao Zedong	PEP	Revised in accordance with Mao Zedong's instructions on education at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1953.
3	1961	Mao Zedong	PEP	Revised to coincide with the change in the academic system to a 10-year system. Simplified Chinese characters are used, horizontal layout is adopted, and the reading order is changed to left-to-right.
4	1963	Mao Zedong	PEP	In accordance with the instructions of the Central Government's "Education Revolution", the ideological errors of the "Great Leap Forward" were overcome, and the school system was changed to a twelve-year system in line with the revision.
5	1978	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	It is based on the Ten-Year Compulsory Education Program for Full-Time Primary and Secondary Schools (Draft for Trial Implementation). The textbook endeavors to eliminate "leftist" influences in order to correct the errors of the "Cultural Revolution".

6	1982	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	In conjunction with the revamping of the new 12-year school system. That is, a general nationwide change to six years of elementary school and six years of secondary school. This textbook focuses more on rational segmentation between junior high school and senior high school.
7	1988	Deng Xiaoping	“Eight and a half”	The textbook system for primary and secondary schools in China has been transformed from a national customized system to a validated system. Diverse textbooks can be published throughout the country, breaking the nationwide monopoly on PEP textbooks.
8	1990	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	It has been reorganized in accordance with the “Opinions on the Adjustment of the Current High School Curriculum”. The subject curriculum takes the form of both compulsory and elective courses. The structure of the curriculum consists of two parts: subject courses and activities.
9	1993 and 1997	Jiang Zemin	PEP	Primary and secondary school textbooks were published in 1993 on the basis of the Compulsory Education Full-time Primary and Junior Secondary School Teaching Program (Trial Draft), and high school textbooks were published in 1997 on the basis of a revised version of the Full-time General Upper Secondary School Curriculum Program (Trial) and the syllabi of each subject (for trial use). This constitutes the first set of teaching materials for compulsory education.

10	2004	Hu Jintao	PEP	People's Education Publishing House new version of the experimental textbook for compulsory education. The format of thematic units has been innovatively adopted to replace the traditional method of teaching chronological history. The new textbook series consists of three compulsory textbooks and six optional textbooks. The compulsory subjects are History I (focusing on politics), History II (focusing on socio-economics and social life) and History III (focusing on ideology, culture, science and technology).
11	2020	Xi Jinping	PEP	A new edition of the unified textbooks for compulsory education has been introduced nationwide. This edition uses only Chinese as the language of the textbooks.

The information in this table was compiled from the official website of the People's Education Publishing House: https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843601.shtml