

## From Imperialist to Innovator: Some remarks on the use of “the West” in PRC history curricula and textbooks during the 1950s and 1980s\*

N. A. Samoylov<sup>1</sup>, Mariana Muenning<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Petersburg State University,  
7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation

<sup>2</sup> University of Heidelberg,  
2, Voßstraße, Heidelberg, 69117, Germany

**For citation:** Samoylov N. A., Muenning M. From Imperialist to Innovator: Some remarks on the use of “the West” in PRC history curricula and textbooks during the 1950s and 1980s. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies*, 2019, vol. 11, issue 4, pp. 480–492.  
<https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2019.405>

The present paper provides an initial comparison of the image of “the West” in Chinese history teaching materials in the 1950s and 1980s. The focus lies on secondary education, i. e. lower and higher level secondary schools, with an occasional mention of the primary education level and one example drawn from a book directed towards a general readership. School textbooks published in the People’s Republic of China in the 1950s, as well as the accompanying teaching materials, to a large extent, had copied similar textbooks and training programs used in the Soviet Union. This was especially true of textbooks on world history. In the 1950s many Soviet historians visited China and contributed to the development of world history teaching programmes in Chinese universities and schools. It is therefore not surprising that Chinese textbooks on general history sought mostly to emulate Soviet publications. This paper aims to demonstrate the way Chinese textbooks pursued a legitimization of historical materialism by applying it to world (more specifically: western) history. Special emphasis is laid on the Industrial Revolution, which was the driving force behind the development of colonialism. China enters the stage of world history as a victim of Western colonialism, which is seen as the result of capitalism and an expression of worldwide class struggle according to Leninism. It is shown how the West is presented as an aggressor and how Marxism and the Communist Party are seen as legitimate defenders of China. The article concludes with a notable “plot twist” during the Reform and Opening Era, in which the depiction of the Industrial Revolution is altered significantly to give place to the praise of technological progress.

*Keywords:* China, educational policy in PRC, history textbooks, the image of the West, curriculum.

### The system of education in China after 1949

After the victory of the Chinese revolution and the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, an enormous work started in China to reform school and university education. The state began to allocate large funds for the development of public education and the

---

\* The reported study was funded by RFBR and DFG according to the research project no. 17–21-49001 (“Chinese perceptions of Russia and the West during the 20<sup>th</sup> century: changes, continuities and contingencies”).

elimination of illiteracy (some estimate that up to 80% of China's population was illiterate on the eve of the revolution). Although already the Republican constitutions of 1923 and 1946 included a right to elementary education for all citizens and several literacy campaigns were carried out, the PRC must be credited with a much more widespread success of universal basic education and literacy education, especially in the realms of the workers' and peasants' environments. Unified training programs were developed, much attention was paid to the development of textbooks, teaching programs and teaching materials.

At the first stage of the PRC's development, great assistance in the implementation of the new modern educational model was rendered to China by the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, the Chinese specialists studied Soviet pedagogical theory and the experience gained by the USSR in the field of public education. At this time, about 1,000 Soviet professors and teachers worked in China, and more than 10,000 students and specialists from the PRC received training in Soviet universities and institutes.

Cooperation between the USSR and China in the field of education began to develop literally from the very first days of the creation of the PRC. On March 30, 1950, Mao Zedong wrote to Joseph Stalin: "We asked the Soviet government to send 60 professors and teachers to Peking Renmin University and Nanking University. Being in Moscow, I personally sent you a letter on this issue, in which it was stated about the qualifications of teachers. Peking University has now enrolled over 3,000 students and has already started conducting classes. But the curriculum of this university was built on the conception that Soviet professors would teach these disciplines. Therefore, classes of this university cannot be conducted normally without the Soviet teachers. We ask for your order about the quick selection of professors and teachers according to our plan and about their prompt sending to China" [1].

As a result of these events and in accordance with the main provisions of the 1951 reform, the PRC created a centralized unified education system, the financing of which was fully assumed by the state. The leaders of the People's Republic of China paid great attention to the creation of new textbooks and their ideological content. One of the prominent theorists of the socialist education system in China, Lu Dingyi<sup>1</sup> said after the creation of New China: "A textbook should be compiled only by the State, and only so that the content of the textbook coincides with the policy of our State" [2, p. 15]. Thus, textbooks in the People's Republic of China served as one of the tools for implementing the policies of the Communist Party and the new state, fulfilling not only educational functions, but also becoming instruments of political propaganda.

School textbooks published in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s, as well as the accompanying teaching materials, to a large extent copied similar textbooks and training programs used in the Soviet Union. This was especially true of textbooks on world history.

In the 1950s many Soviet historians visited China and contributed to the development of world history teaching programs in Chinese universities and schools. It is there-

---

<sup>1</sup> Lu Dingyi 陆定一 (1906–1996) was a prominent Chinese politician and one of the organizers of socialist cultural reconstruction in the PRC. Until 1966 he was Head of the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee. In May 1966, when the "Cultural Revolution" started, he was criticized as a member of the "anti-party clique of Peng Zhen — Luo Ruiqing — Lu Dingyi — Yang Shangkun", and spent more than 13 years under arrest. After the new leadership of the People's Republic of China led by Deng Xiaoping came to power, in 1979 Lu Dingyi was reinstated and co-opted into the People's Political Consultative Council of China, becoming its vice-chairman. Later he was a member of the Commission of Advisors to the CPC Central Committee.

fore not surprising that Chinese textbooks on general history sought mostly to emulate Soviet publications.

## The aims of teaching history

What concept of history is to be taught to Chinese students? All curriculum standards clearly state the “aims” (*mubiao* 目标) of history teaching which reveal the official party ideology. Already the first curriculum standard after the establishment of the PRC, the 1950 preliminary curriculum standard for primary school history teaching (*Xiaoxue lishi kecheng zanxing biaoqun (caoan)* 小学历史课程暂行标准 (草案)) [3], explains how, according to historical materialism, history is made by the working people (*laodongren* 劳动人) and driven forward by class struggle (*jiejizhandou* 阶级战斗). The 1950 preliminary curriculum states that history classes in primary school aim at making children...

[...]初步认识历史发展的规律，懂得历史是劳动人民创造的，与阶级斗争是推动历史前进的动力；逐步培养其历史唯物主义的观点与革命的战斗意志。[3, p. 104]

[...][get an] initial grasp of the laws of historical development, understand that history is made by the working people, and that class struggle is the force that pushes history to advance. [Teaching history is aimed at] step-by-step training [of the students'] standpoint on historical materialism and [their] consciousness of revolutionary struggle.

The second main aim is to train the students' patriotic thinking:

使儿童认识中华民族勤劳勇敢的优良传统和创造发明的伟大史绩，以及在世界和平阵营中的地位和责任；逐步培养其爱国主义的思想。[3, p. 104]

Make children know the excellent tradition of labour and courage of the Chinese nation, [its] great historical achievements in creating and inventing and its place and responsibility among the peaceful camp of the world. Step-by-step foster their patriotic thinking.

These two epistemic aims, the Marxist view on history, and patriotism, appear in every single curriculum until 1990 that were investigated for the purposes of writing this paper. The exact wording, however, shifts notably<sup>2</sup>. For example, in the last curriculum that was examined for this paper, the 1990 Full-time secondary school history syllabus (*Quanrizhi zhongxue lishi jiaoxue dagang (xiudingben)* 全日制中学历史教学大纲 (修订本)) states that the study and teaching of history should be guided (*zhidao* 指导) by Marxism (*Makesizhuyi* 马克思主义) [3, p. 540].

While historical materialism and patriotism remain core teaching aims, one development begins after the Cultural Revolution that needs to be addressed here. The 1978 curriculum standard already introduced economics as an important factor in history [4, p. 43]<sup>3</sup>. In the 1980 middle school curriculum [5], an important catchphrase is added: The Four Modernizations *sihua* 四化 (abbreviated from *si ge xiandaihua* 四个现代化):

中学历史教学 [...]提高献身“四化”的自觉性，树立为社会主义、共产主义事业而奋斗的信心和决心。[6, p. 386]

<sup>2</sup> The 1956 curriculum standard, for example, that covered all school levels, is much more encompassing and explicit. 1957 then saw a curriculum simplification, and the 1963 standard reflected a more self-assured image of China [4, p. 41, 42].

<sup>3</sup> Müller points out that for the first time, quotes by Mao Zedong are included in the curricula, providing a façade to a content that thenceforth had ceased to be Maoist.

Middle school history teaching increases the consciousness [of the students] to dedicate themselves to the “Four Modernizations” and fosters their confidence in and determination for the struggle for the cause of socialism and communism.

The inclusion of the Four Modernizations (namely the modernization of industry *gongye* 工业, agriculture *nongye* 农业, defence *guofang* 国防 and science and technology *kexue jishu* 科学技术) marks a watershed not only in education policies that were characterized by reform during the Deng Xiaoping era, but also in the description of the West in the textbooks. The ensuing 1986 guideline, result of the thorough reform of the education system, fully acknowledged the success and innovative power of the capitalist countries [4, p. 43]. The 1988 curriculum, introducing 9 years of compulsory education, clearly presents economy as the most important aspect and can be called anti-Maoist and pro-Deng-Xiaoping. The following pages discuss the hypothesis that in order to legitimize Deng’s politics, the image of the West and its technological achievements were framed more positively, whilst classical Marxism still provided the baseline [4, p. 44]<sup>4</sup>.

### The validity of historical materialism for world history

In the description of world history as a whole, and especially in the description of the West, the curriculum standards and textbooks aim at presenting Marxism and historical realism as being valid party ideology. Already before the establishment of the PRC, since the late 1920s and early 1930s, the influence of Marxism in historiography had grown and given rise to the “Debate on Chinese Social History” or “Social History Controversy”, in which Marxist historians argued vigorously in favour of their view of history [7; 8]. Levenson has summarized beautifully the appeal that communism had to the Chinese intellectuals: Firstly, it rejected “the pre-communist West... which had impinged on China” and secondly, it offered a possibility to evolve from “laggard following in western footsteps” to “head of the queue” together with Russia [9, p. 134]. Communism then became the official ideology after the establishment of the PRC in 1949 [7, p. 330], and initially, “until the mid-1950s... the dominant slogan in China was “learn from the Soviet Union” (*xuexi Sulian*) [10, p. 158]”. While the Soviet Union lost its role of official instructor after the Sino-Soviet Split, the teaching itself remained valid.

As expected in this context, the PRC history textbooks portray Western history<sup>5</sup> according to historical stages described by Marx<sup>6</sup>: The earliest stage is “primitive society” (*yuanshi shehui* 原始社会) that knew no classes and no exploitation (*boxue* 剥削) [11, p. 2]. The next stage, slave society (*nuli shehui* 奴隶社会) first came into being in Ancient Egypt, and started exploiting a particular group of society, namely, the slaves [11, p. 5]. Then, Babylon, India, Greece and Rome are described as slave societies [11, p. 14, 15, 17, 26, 37]. The slave system came to an end with the fall of the Western Roman Empire, according to the textbook, due to an uprising of slaves and attacks from Germanic (Rierman 日耳曼) peoples:

---

<sup>4</sup> The 1988 regulations represented a return to classical Marxist positions.

<sup>5</sup> And Chinese History, too, but this will have to be discussed in a different paper.

<sup>6</sup> The textbook “World history for junior secondary schools” *Chuji zhongxue keben Shijie lishi* 初級中學課本世界历史 from 1959, People’s education press 人民教育出版社. Vol. 1 is used as an example here. The described historical stages according to Marxism are the same in later textbooks [11, passim].

經過严重的階級斗争和外族的入侵以后，羅馬的奴隶制度最后崩潰了。[11, p. 47]

Through serious class struggle and foreign invasions, the Roman slave system finally collapsed.

As the next stage, feudalism (“Feudal system” *fengjian zhidu* 封建制度) in Western Europe (Xi Ou 西歐) [11, p. 48ff] is described, which is then followed by capitalism (*zibenzhuyi* 資本主). The “rudiments of capitalist culture” (*zichanjieji wenhua de mengya* 产階級文化的萌芽) began to appear during the Renaissance (*wenyifuxing* 文藝復興), aided by the import of movable type printing technology from China via the Mongols [11, p. 78–81]. With the rise of capitalism, the modern (*jindai* 近代) period began [12, p. 12]. The last chapter of the volume makes it very clear that the development of capitalism was made possible by the extraction of resources from the English colonies:

海外的殖民掠夺使英国积累了很多財富。对英国的資本主义发展來說，这又是一个很重要的条件。[11, p. 91]

The plundering of the overseas colonies made the English accumulate a lot of riches. This was an important condition for the development of English capitalism.

In the 1956 book on world history *Shijie lishi* 世界歷史,<sup>7</sup> Marxism is introduced as game changer. All revolutions *before* Marx and Engels are labelled “Bourgeois Revolutions” (English Civil War: Yingguo *zichanjieji geming* 英国资产阶级革命; French Revolution: Faguo *zichanjieji geming* 法国资产阶级革命 [13, p. 37]). Only the revolutions *after* “scientific communism” had seen the light of day (*kexue gongchanzhuyi de dansheng* 科学共产主义的诞生, this chapter describes the lives and achievements of Marx and Engels in detail) [13, p. 40ff], namely the 1848 European Revolutions (Ouzhou *geming* 欧洲革命) and the Russian Revolution of 1917, are seen as having originated from the proletariat (*wuchanjieji* 无产阶级) [13, p. 42]. The Russian Revolution also marks the beginning of the contemporary (*xiandai* 现代) period [12, p. 12]. The world history book from 1956 makes it clear in its description of the 1848 revolution in France:

無产階級对资产階級的斗争一天天激烈起来。1848年6月，法国人民发动武装起义，这是無产階級的第一次大会战。[13, p. 42]

The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie became intensified day by day. In June 1848, the French workers started an armed uprising, this was the first war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup>

School textbooks also follow along these lines. They not only label the English and the French revolutions as “bourgeois”, but also all other achievements and upheavals before Marx and Engels, such as the Renaissance or the Reformation [14, p. 7, 14].

## From capitalism to colonialism

How does the history of the West and the birth of Marxism relate to China? As Weigel-Schwiedrzik put it, historians faced the challenge “to bring Chinese history and world history into sync” [15, p. 155]. The Leninist view on Marxism provided the solution to this

<sup>7</sup> This book is not a school textbook in the narrow sense but intended to educate the general public. Its authors Li Gengxu 李廣序 and Wang Zhijiu 王芝九 were prolific textbook authors.

<sup>8</sup> The 1988 regulations represented a return to classical Marxist positions.

problem and made sure that the revolution and the rise to power of the Communist Party “did not merely become another form of the old dynastic change” [15, p. 156].

Lenin’s theory of imperialism as “the highest stage of capitalism” (1917) is the omnipresent viewpoint of the curriculum standards. Lenin’s theory describes how monopolists and great powers export finance capital, dividing the world among them to colonize and exploit both the world and its resources.

The 1952 Chinese Modern History Textbook (*Benguo jindaishi keben* 本國近代史課本) describes:

十九世紀的最後十年，資本主義國家的經濟事業發展到極點，進入了帝國主義的階段。 [16, p. 96]

In the last ten years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the economy of the capitalist countries developed to its extreme point and entered the imperialist stage.

This Leninist view stays constant in the textbooks. While this article focuses on the 1950s and 1980s, this example is drawn from a 1973 world history textbook to show this consistency:

各资本主义国家进入帝国主义阶段

Each capitalist country entered the imperialist stage.

帝国主义是垄断的资本主义 [17, V.1, p. 236]

Imperialism is capitalism with a monopoly.

Who are these capitalist countries? In the curriculum standards, it becomes very clear that the term “West” (*xifang* 西方) appears in connection with capitalism (*zibenzhuyi* 资本主义), imperialism (*diguozhuyi* 帝国主义) and colonialism (*zhiminzhuyi* 殖民主义). In all curriculum standards, the West is described as capitalist, imperialist and colonialist — or, actually, the other way around: capitalism, imperialism and colonialism are described as western: *xifang zibenzhuyi* 西方资本主义, *xifang diguozhuyi* 西方帝国主义, *xifang zhiminzhuyi* 西方殖民主义. This reflects not only the Leninist connection between capitalism and colonialism, but also the “socialism-versus-capitalism-dichotomy” [7, p. 331] in the entire world and the role of the West as an aggressor, as a danger to China.

Speaking of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the higher level primary school history textbook mentions “the severe crisis of China being cut apart by the imperialist countries” (中国被帝国主义國家瓜分的严重危机) [18, p. 38] or, in discussing the Opium war, the 1953 senior secondary school textbook on Chinese Modern History speaks of the famous “Attack against China by the Great Powers” (*lieqiang dui Hua qinlüe* 列強對華侵略) [19, p. 83].

If we ask who is the victim of the Western capitalist great powers, we find a significant addition in the 1980s when China’s economic reforms were underway and aided significantly by the Japanese: The 1980 Curriculum standard mentions how Western capitalism “invaded” Japan (西方资本主义的入侵), [3, p. 431] meaning forcing the country to open up to Western trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But the general tone stays similar to the 1950s. The curriculum continues to give keywords on how the Western colonizers proceed further and further in their attack on Asia (西方殖民者进一步侵略亚洲), invading China, Iran and India (对中国的侵略, 对伊朗和印度等国家的侵略) [3, p. 432]. A page later, the curriculum standard requires the teacher to dedicate two hours to explaining how “important capi-

talist countries enter the stage of imperialism” (主要资本主义国家进入帝国主义阶段) and fight over the division of the world among them (瓜分世界的斗争) [3, p. 433].

Already the 1952 textbook on Modern History is very clear that the Industrial Revolution not only called for colonialism because of its need for resources and capital, but also was made possible by it. It explains how capital was accumulated owing to the hard work and the high degree of labour division amongst the workers in the handicraft industry and the extraction of resources from the colonies. With the invention of machinery, industrial production saw the light of day [20, p. 7].

What leaps to the eye is that the economical angle, the mode of production, are discussed, while the degree of technological innovation that happened during the industrial revolution is underemphasized, if not expressly downplayed. In the 1958 “Modern World History”, the hardships of the workers, being exploited by the bourgeoisie, are at the forefront of attention [21, p. 2, 3]. A comparison to the description of the Industrial Revolution in the 1980s follows below.

### National liberation struggle as class struggle

In the Marxist-Leninist concept of history, the fate of suffering English workers and exploited colonies are woven together. Both the proletariat and the colonies want to rid themselves of their bourgeois (in case of the workers) and Western imperialist (in the case of the colonies) capitalist (in both cases) oppressors. Following the October revolution, these colonies’ and semi-colonies’ liberation struggle link up with the struggle of the proletariat in the West and Russia, and a worldwide “revolutionary frontline” is created.

十月社会主义革命后，殖民地和半殖民地的民族解放运动进入了一个新的时期。十月革命“建成了一条从西方无产者经过俄国革命到东方被压迫民族的新的反对世界帝国主义的革命战线”<sup>9</sup>，被压迫民族的革命不再是旧的资产阶级和资本主义的世界革命的一部分，而是新的无产阶级社会主义世界革命的一部分。亚洲、非洲、拉丁美洲的民族解放运动风起云涌，蓬勃发展，动摇了帝国主义的后方，使帝国主义殖民统治陷入危机。[6, p. 435]

After the October socialist revolution, the liberation movement of the people in colonies and semi-colonies entered a new era. The October revolution [Stalin:] “built a new revolutionary frontline opposing world imperialism from the Western proletariat via the Russian revolution to the oppressed nations in the East”.<sup>10</sup> The revolution of the oppressed nations is no longer a part of the old world of the world revolution of bourgeoisie and capitalism, but a part of the new world revolution of proletarian socialism. The liberation movement of the people in Asia, Africa, Latin America raged tempestuously, developed vigorously, shook Imperialism behind the frontline, and made the imperialist colonial control enter a crisis.

This shows that not all agents in Western society were seen as aggressive, the Western proletariat was on the same level with the colonized people. Stalin’s quote represents a Leninist position, the choice of Stalin’s words might have been an attempt to set oneself apart from the Soviet Union where de-Stalinization had been realized and with which China’s relations were marked by the Sino-Soviet Split. Not only the proletariat in Europe received the “scientific communism” with the establishment of Marxism in the

<sup>9</sup> Sidalin Quanji [Complete works of Stalin]. Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 1956, vol. 4, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> Note that although the PRC had split its ties with the Soviet Union, Stalin was still an authoritative figure in China. De-Stalinization had in fact been one of the reasons for the split.

19<sup>th</sup> century, but also the victims of Western colonialism. Their struggle for liberation makes Imperialism enter a crisis [6, p. 435].

## Relevance for China

But how can this concept of history be used to legitimize the rule of the CCP? The task of early PRC historians was “to link the victory of the “new democracy” led by the CCP to the world socialist revolution” [22, p. 20]. By simply following the chronology of world events, an implied connection between events in China and in Germany is created. The higher level primary school textbook “History” (*Lishi* 历史) from 1956 shall be discussed as an example here. The book begins with the description of the First Opium War in which the capitalist country England forces the Qing Empire to open its ports for trade, validating again how imperialism is caused by capitalism [18, p. 1–9]. Then, abruptly, the next chapter is dedicated to Marx and Engels, their friendship, their teachings, and how they instructed the workers of the whole world (!) in revolutionary methods and how they were concerned about the fate of China and the Opium war [18, p. 9–11]. The next chapter discusses the Taiping Revolution and stresses that it was an egalitarian peasant uprising [18, p. 11–16].

The insertion of Marx and Engels between the “disgraceful” (*kechi* 可耻) [18, p. 3] treatment of China by the capitalist, imperialist aggressor England and the Taiping uprising creates an implicit connection or influence. This method is employed in a number of textbooks.

It goes without saying that the curriculum standards and textbooks provide a number of further examples of how Marxism and, since 1921, the communist party have aided the Chinese people in their struggle for a better future. These, however, will be left for future research to be analysed.

## Reforms

Already before the official establishment of the PRC, Chinese intellectuals have been drawn to Marxism because it “did not place China in a position of permanent disadvantage but posited a future surpassing even in the achievements of the West” [22, p. 20, 21 after 9, p. 134]. While this had already been the pronounced aim during campaigns like the Great Leap Forward, the “Reform and Opening” (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) policy attempted — and to a large extent, as can now be seen in the long run, succeeded — at realizing this aim with specialized education, especially in the science and technology sectors.

As mentioned above, the inclusion of the “Four Modernizations” into the curriculum standard of 1980 marks a watershed in PRC education policy. As Vickers and Zeng describe, after Mao Zedong’s death, “the radical Maoist tide” was to be reversed, and the College Entrance Examination (*gaokao* 高考) that had been halted during the Cultural Revolution was re-established in 1977 [23, p. 36]. Pepper points out that hand in hand with the economic reforms, and political opening in view of a competitive world, Deng Xiaoping established the new line that intellectuals should no longer be stigmatized by their bourgeois background [10, p. 488]. Deng called for better educated and specialized cadres because he saw “education and expertise as prerequisites for modernization” [10, p. 489]. Higher education was rebuilt, and it was tried to raise the quality of schooling by



focusing on “key point” schools, usually in the urban centres (while a number of rural schools that did not meet quality standards were closed) [23, p. 36].<sup>11</sup>

This fundamental change in education is reflected by a slight change in the history textbooks’ image of the West: Western industrial and technological achievements came to be portrayed more positively.

As described above, the textbooks of the 1950s provided a view on the Industrial Revolution that focused on how the bourgeoisie acquired wealth and exploited the workers. Technological innovations are only mentioned in passing.

In the 1980s, this narrative changes considerably. For example, in the textbook “World History” (*Shijie Lishi* 世界历史) from 1988, we see pictures of machines and a multiple page long description of inventions. While they are not glorified in the narrow sense, the textbook describes how influential these inventions were and gives them a considerable amount of space. The exploitation and the suffering of the workers is not in the focus of the narrative. In both the 1950s and the 1980s, the need for more production output is mentioned as a driving force for the industrial revolution, but in 1988, scientific and technical innovation play the main role, not the workforce of the workers or the extracted resources from the colonies:

为了增加商品的生产，必须对生产技术加以改进，由此产生了工业革命。这场革命是从发明和使用机器开始的。[24, p. 50]

In order to increase the production of goods, the production machinery had to be improved, this is how the industrial revolution came about. This revolution started with the invention and employment of machines.

Apart from providing detailed technical descriptions of machines and the constant innovations added to them, the book also discusses innovations in transportation, especially the development of railways [24, p. 51, 52]. Only in the short concluding section it mentions that the Industrial Revolution did also intensify the opposition (*duili* 对立) and struggle (*zhandou* 战斗) between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie [24, p. 53].

## Modern History in a Chinese textbook from the “Four Modernizations” period

In the following, the contents of a school textbook on world history, which appeared in China in 1984 at the beginning of the period of reform and opening policy and was used in high level secondary schools, are discussed in some detail. At that time, attention to the West in China was growing, and this trend is well seen in that textbook. First of all, this refers to the chapters on revolutions and the development of scientific and technological progress.

At the same time, the general line of presentation of the main stages of world history stayed unchanged. The largest place in the textbook is devoted to the events of Modern and Contemporary History: class struggle, revolutions, and the genesis and development of Marxism. In addition to the history of Europe and the USA, certain events from the history of Japan, Latin America, African countries (bourgeois revolutions and the national

---

<sup>11</sup> Vickers and Zeng pursue the question of how equality on the one hand and economic success on the other hand had to be negotiated. They show that in Post-Mao China’s education system, the latter was obtained at the expense of the former, quite contrary to other Asian countries.

liberation movements) were added. Interestingly, the structure of the textbook and even many illustrations almost completely coincided with the materials contained in similar textbooks published in the USSR at that time.

In the chapters on the development of Western science and culture, there were sections (with portraits) devoted to Dante, Shakespeare, Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei [25, p. 136–139]. The chapter devoted to the history of Russia in the 18th century covered in detail the reforms of Peter the Great [25, p. 152–155] (the illustration showed the construction of St. Petersburg) and the Peasant War led by Yemelyan Pugachev (with a detailed map of the uprising) [25, p. 157–158].

The events of the English bourgeois revolution [25, p. 141–150], the Great French Revolution [25, p. 178–200], and the War of independence of the USA [25, p. 168–177] were set out in great detail.

A separate chapter was devoted to the activities of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the emergence of Marxism [25, p. 218–232]. The chapter was illustrated not only by portraits of Marx and Engels, but also portraits of their predecessors, the utopian socialists Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen.

The second part of the textbook deals with the events of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and, naturally, focused on revolutions and civil wars, as well as the spread of Marxism throughout the world. Thus, the whole world history looks like a history of opposition between progressive forces and capitalism. To these materials the authors added historical episodes from the struggle of the peoples of Asia and Africa against the colonial policy of the Imperialist powers.

In this context, the key events of the second period of the Modern History (*jindaishi* 近代史) are: the Revolution of 1848 in France, the Civil War in the USA, the Meiji Revolution in Japan, as well as the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the national liberation movements in Korea, Mexico and African countries. A large section is devoted to the development of capitalism and the identification, as well as justification, of its contradictions, while at the same time the scientific and technological achievements of Western countries in that period were emphasized. And naturally, special attention was paid to the labour movement in Western countries, the spread of Marxism, the activities of the First and Second Internationals and, of course, the Paris Commune. In addition to the portraits of Marx and Engels, the pages of these sections of the textbook presented schoolchildren with portraits of the German Social Democrats August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, as well as the young Lenin. The textbook gives little coverage of the events of the First World War [26, p. 121–129], its causes and nature being considered in the context of inter-imperialist contradictions.

The bigger part of the Contemporary History (*xiandaishi* 现代史) section is devoted to the Great October Revolution and the Civil War in Russia, the building of Socialism in the USSR and consideration of the contribution of the Soviet Union to the victory of the Anti-fascist coalition in World War II. The Western powers in the textbook appear as the opposite of the socialist world. It is written about the attempts of the Western powers to redistribute the World after the First World War. A large place is devoted to the economic crises in the capitalist countries and the labour movement. It tells in detail about the November Revolution in Germany in 1918 [26, p. 184–188] (accompanied by portraits of the leaders of the left wing of the German revolutionary movement Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg) and the Hungarian Soviet Republic

(with a portrait of its leader Bela Kun). The course of the Spanish Civil War is described in detail.

In this textbook we can see an interesting selection of visual images that are always important in school textbooks to affect the memorization of historical material by students. It seems essential that the authors of the textbook included only portraits of the “positive” characters from the point of view of the main ideological attitudes. Images of “negative” persons were missing. For example, on one of the pages [26, p. 210] one can see a photo of a group of nameless Italian fascists, but there is no portrait of Mussolini.

A large separate section of this part of the book is devoted to the achievements of Western countries in the field of science and technology during that period. Thus, the 1984 “World History” textbook is an excellent example illustrating curriculum changes, and in particular, attitudes toward the West, at the start of the Four Modernizations policy. Clearly noticeable are new trends in the presentation of the material while maintaining all the basic ideological attitudes.

## Conclusion

Chinese textbooks on world history in the first years after the formation of the People’s Republic of China were created according to Soviet models. Periodization of history, the definition of socio-economic formations, special attention to the class struggle — all this corresponded to the basic tenets of historical materialism. The confrontation between China and the West in the 1950s also influenced visions of the future presented in Chinese textbooks on world history. As a result, the concept of a world history advantageous to the CCP had emerged and it was taught at school.

Marxism as party ideology in general was validated in school curriculum and Communist Party rule was legitimized with it. In history textbooks, national cohesion was stimulated by a dangerous enemy: the West. The image of the West during the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in those textbooks was negative. The West played the role of a capitalist, imperialist aggressor.

In the 1980s, during the Four Modernizations, a more positive image of the West appeared in China and was added to history curricula and textbooks. Scientific innovation during the Industrial Revolution now merited a praise. In the 1980s, European history was instrumentalized to achieve a legitimization of the Chinese Reform and Opening policy. As policy of the PRC was being altered, the concept of history was likewise modified. The Deng-Era projection of a Chinese future was technocratic and modernized or even westernized. Therefore, a new interpretation of global history and a more positive image of the West appeared in Chinese textbooks.

## References

1. A letter from Mao Zedong to J. V. Stalin with a request to send Soviet teachers to universities in Beijing and Nanking. [March 30, 1950]. *Kitayskaya Narodnaya Respublika v 1950–ye gody*. Sbornik dokumentov: in 2 vols. Ed. by V. S. Myasnikova. Vol. 2: Drug i soyuznik novogo Kitaya. Eds Ye. R. Kurapova, V. S. Myasnikov, A. A. Chernobayev. Moscow, Pamyatniki istoricheskoy mysli Publ., 2010, p. 42. (In Russian)
2. Samoylov N., Li Suian. Image of the Soviet Union in the Chinese textbooks in 1950s. *Vestnik of Saint-Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies*, 2012, no. 4, pp. 14–22. (In Russian)
3. 20 shiji Zhongguo zhongxiaoxue kecheng biao zhun jiaoxue dagang huibian: Lishi juan [Collected twentieth century curriculum standards and teaching outlines for Chinese secondary and primary school: history]. Ed. by Kecheng jiaocai yanjiusuo. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001. 5, 5, 554 p. (In Chinese)

4. Muller G. Teaching the 'others' history' in Chinese schools — The state, cultural asymmetries and shifting images of Europe (from 1900 to today). *Designing History in East Asian Textbooks — Identity politics and transnational aspirations*. Ed. by G. Muller. London, Routledge, 2011, pp. 32–59.
5. Quanrizhi zhongxue lishi jiaoxuedagang (xiudingben) [Full-time secondary school history syllabus (revised)], 1990. *20 shiji Zhongguo zhongxiaoxue kecheng biao zhun jiaoxue dagang huibian: Lishi juan*, pp. 539–606. (In Chinese)
6. Quanrizhi shinianzhi xuexiao zhongxue lishi jiaoxue dagang [Full-time ten-year school system secondary school history syllabus], 1980. *20 shiji Zhongguo zhongxiaoxue kecheng biao zhun jiaoxue dagang huibian: Lishi juan*, pp. 386–439. (In Chinese)
7. Wang Edward Q. Encountering the World: China and Its Other(s) in Historical Narratives, 1949–89, *Journal of World History*, 2003, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 327–358.
8. Dirlik A. *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–37*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978. X, 299 p.
9. Levenson J.R. *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958. xix, 223 p.
10. Pepper S. *Radicalism and education reform in 20th-century China: The search for an ideal development model*, Cambridge University Press, 1996. IX, 610 p.
11. Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe. *Chuji zhongxue keben Shijie lishi [World history for junior secondary school]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1959, vol. 1, 2, 98 p. (In Chinese)
12. Muller G. World history education in the PRC between textbooks and television: some observations on recent developments. *Tian ren gu jin: Huaren shehui lishi jiaoyu de shiming yu tiaozhan*. Ed. by Li Xiangyu. Macau, Aomen ligong xueyuan, 2014, pp. 8–22. (In Chinese)
13. Li Gengxu, Wang Zhijiu. *Shijie lishi [World History]*. Beijing, Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1956. 71 p. (In Chinese)
14. Wang Zhijiu. *Chuji zhongxue keben: Shijie lishi [Textbook for junior secondary schools: World History]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1957, vol. 2. 120 p. (In Chinese)
15. Weigel-Schwiedrzik S. The Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius (批林批孔) and the Problem of “Restoration” in Chinese Marxist Historiography. *The Challenge of linear time*. Eds V. Murthy, A. Schneider. Leiden, Brill, 2014, pp. 155–180.
16. Ding Xiaoxian. *Chuji zhongxue Benguo jindaishi keben [Chinese modern history textbook for junior secondary schools]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1952, vol. 1, 2. 144 p. (In Chinese)
17. Beijingshi jiaoyuju jiaocai bianxiezhu (ed.). *Beijingshi zhongxue shiyong keben: Shijie lishi [Beijing city trial textbook: World history]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1973, vol. 1, 5. 267 p. (In Chinese)
18. Ma Jingwu, Li Gengxu, Wang Zhijiu. *Gaoji xiaoxue keben: Lishi [Higher level primary school textbook: History]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1957, vol. 3. 65 p. (In Chinese)
19. Song Yunbin. *Gaoji zhongxue: Benguo jindaishi [Higher level secondary school: Modern history of China]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1953, vol. 1, 3. 226 p. (In Chinese)
20. Wang Zhijiu. *Gaoji zhongxue keben: Shijie jindaishi [Higher level secondary school textbook: Modern World history]*. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1952, vol. 1, 2, 3. 250 p. (In Chinese)
21. Zhejiangsheng zhongxiaoxue jiaocai bianji weiyuanhui (ed.) *Chuzhong lishi di si ce: Shijie jindai xiandaishi [Lower level secondary school history volume 4: Modern and contemporary world history]*. Hangzhou, Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1958, vol. 4. 88 p. (In Chinese)
22. Martin D. A. L., *The Making of a Sino-Marxist World-View: Perceptions and Interpretations of World History in the People's Republic of China*. New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1990. XII, 138 p.
23. Vickers E., Zeng Xiaodong. *Education and Society in Post-Mao China*. London and New York, Routledge, 2017. xii, 395 p.
24. Shou Jiyu, Yan Zhiliang, Chen Qi. *Chuji zhongxue keben: Shijie lishi [Lower level secondary school textbook: World history]*. Hubei, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988. 200 p. (In Chinese)
25. *Gaoji zhongxue keben: Shijie lishi [Higher level secondary school textbook: World history]*. Ed. by Shou Jiyu. Vol. 1. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1984. 238 p. (In Chinese)
26. *Gaoji zhongxue keben: Shijie lishi [Higher level secondary school textbook: World history]*. Ed. by Yan Zhiliang. Vol. 2. Beijing, Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1984. 300 p. (In Chinese)

Received: June 20, 2019  
Accepted: September 26, 2019

Authors' information:

Nikolay A. Samoylov — Dr. Sci. in History, Professor; n.samoylov@spbu.ru  
Mariana Muenning — MA; mariana.muenning@zo.uni-heidelberg.de

# От «империалиста» до «новатора»: замечания по поводу использования образа Запада в образовательных программах и учебниках истории в КНР 1950–1980-х годов

Н. А. Самойлов<sup>1</sup>, М. Мюннинг<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет,  
Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9

<sup>2</sup> Гейдельбергский университет,  
Германия, 69117, Гейдельберг, Воссштрассе, 2

**Для цитирования:** *Samoylov N. A., Muenning M. From Imperialist to Innovator: Some remarks on the use of “the West” in PRC history curricula and textbooks during the 1950s and 1980s. // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Востоковедение и африканистика. 2019. Т. 11. Вып. 4. С. 480–492. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2019.405>*

В настоящей статье рассматриваются соответствующие разделы и упоминания о «Западе» в китайских учебно-методических материалах 1950–1980-х годов. Школьные учебники, изданные в Китайской Народной Республике в 1950-х годах, а также соответствующие им учебные материалы в значительной степени копировали аналогичные учебники и учебные программы, использовавшиеся в то время в Советском Союзе. Это особенно касается учебников по всемирной истории. В 1950-х годах многие советские историки посетили Китай и внесли свой вклад в развитие программ преподавания мировой истории в китайских университетах и школах. Поэтому неудивительно, что авторы китайских учебников по всеобщей истории стремились подражать советским публикациям. В статье продемонстрировано, как в китайских учебниках и образовательных программах осуществлялись легитимация исторического материализма и применение его к мировой (точнее, западной) истории. Особое внимание уделено промышленной революции, которая рассматривается в качестве движущей силы развития колониализма. Китай в Новое время выходит на историческую сцену как жертва западного колониализма, который, согласно марксистско-ленинскому учению, является результатом развития капитализма и отражением всемирной классовой борьбы. В статье показано, что Запад был всегда представлен в китайских учебниках истории как агрессор, в то время как марксизм и Коммунистическая партия рассматриваются как законные защитники Китая. В заключительной части статьи анализируется существенный «поворот сюжета», имевший место на рубеже 1980-х годов, в эпоху Реформ и Открытости, когда описание и оценки промышленной революции в школьных учебниках КНР существенно изменились в силу необходимости показать успехи технического прогресса.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, образовательная политика в КНР, учебники истории, образ Запада, учебная программа.

Статья поступила в редакцию 20 июня 2019 г.,  
рекомендована к печати 26 сентября 2019 г.

Контактная информация:

Самойлов Николай Анатольевич — д-р истор. наук, проф.; [n.samoylov@spbu.ru](mailto:n.samoylov@spbu.ru)  
Мюннинг Мариана — магистр; [mariana.muenning@zo.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:mariana.muenning@zo.uni-heidelberg.de)