

# **PATHOLOGIES AND DYSFUNCTIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MEDIA CONTEXT**

**THE RETURN OF THE  
PROPAGANDA MODEL:  
EMOTIONS, POPULISM,  
AND POLARIZATION**

**JOÃO CARLOS CORREIA  
(ED.)**



**LABCOM  
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# **FRIENDS AND ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE: REPRESENTATIONS OF HISTORICAL FIGURES IN TEXTBOOKS FOR THE CHINESE POST-80S AND POST-90S GENERATIONS**

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**Abstract:** This paper studies two sets of primary school textbooks of Chinese Literacy created in the context of the Patriotic Education Campaign during the 1980s and 1990s. It aims to unravel the relationship between propaganda and education in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the representations of the 'friends' and the 'enemies' of Chinese people created by the Chinese Communist Party during this time period. I use critical discourse analysis as the main research method. The present study reveals that the concepts of propaganda and education in the context of the PRC are ontologically interchangeable. The main 'heroes' created in this campaign are the Chinese Communist Party leaders, who are portrayed as 'friends' or 'families' of Chinese people. There also exists an ambiguous but positive representation of Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Republic of China and the 'counter-revolutionary' Chinese Nationalist Party. This ambiguity probably occurs due to the unstable political and economic relationship between the PRC and Taiwan during this period. The 'enemies' created in this campaign mainly consist of the nationalist 'counter-revolutionaries' and the Japanese invaders. These two groups share similar representations, even though they appear in different historical contexts. These similarities can be explained by the different narratives and collective memories created about the same historical events by Japan and Taiwan during this period.

Keywords: Propaganda, Education, Populist Nationalism, Collective Memory

## Propaganda and Education in Post-Reform China

The populist nationalism in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the 1990s has generated widespread attention in the international academic community. The Chinese populist nationalism serves as a double-edged sword for the communist government. On the one hand, the rise of nationalist sentiment and pride in the country helps to legitimize the party-state. On the other hand, populist nationalism can also become a danger to the regime when it fails to meet the demands of public opinion (Fang & Repnikova, 2017: 2). For this reason, populist nationalism is used by the party-state when it feels the need to divert the people's attention from some problematic issues. One example was the positive reaction of Chinese government to the 1999 anti-NATO and anti-US protests due to the bombing of the PRC embassy and the death of three Chinese journalists in Yugoslavia, which helped the communist government to calm the tension of the 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Protests of 1989 (Young, 2013: 175). However, when the party-state feels that nationalist sentiments do not match its political agenda, it often attempts to silence public voices. This was the case between the Reform and Opening-up period (1978) and the global financial crisis of 2008 (Zhao S., 2021: 141), when China needed to maintain good diplomatic relations with its neighbors and Western countries in order to sustain its economic development.

Several studies prove that the most active nationalists in contemporary Chinese society are young people, especially the so-called post-80s and post-90s generations<sup>1</sup> (Yang & Zheng, 2012; Zhong & Huang, 2019; Shan & Chen, 2021). Born in a period of economic, social and political transformation, these young people have witnessed the great progress that China has achieved since the Reform and Opening-up. In general, these young people are characterized as being more optimistic and prouder about their country than elder generations, who have experienced periods of chaos and

1. In Chinese 八零后 *balinghou* and 九零后 *jiulinghou*, which literally mean post-80s and post-90s, these represent Chinese who were born during the 1980s and 1990s.

instability, including the Great Leap Forward (1958 - 1960), the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), and the Tiananmen Protests of 1989.

Propaganda and education have a synergistic and interconnected relationship in communist China. Between 1983 and 1995, the Chinese government issued several central policies and guidelines in order to legitimize its regime and maintain future social stability. Thus, a 'Patriotic Education Campaign' aimed at children of the post-80s and post-90s generations was officially initiated. The program of the Campaign includes the revision of textbooks and the introduction of a series of curricular and extracurricular activities, such as watching leitmotif films and visiting sites related to Chinese revolutions, which encourage patriotic sentiment in Chinese schools (Naftali, 2018: 705 and Zhou & Wang, 2017: 169). This propagandistic campaign, which aimed to create and maintain young people's national identity, has remained in Chinese educational and cultural spheres ever since. The implementation of the Patriotic Education Campaign is also considered to be an important cause of the nationalistic sentiment of Chinese youth (Shan & Chen, 2021; Fang & Repnikova, 2017).

The discussions in the preceding paragraphs lead me to question the extent to which nationalist education and propaganda targeting children in the 1980s and 1990s are significantly influencing public opinion and fostering nationalist sentiments among the Chinese population. Propaganda is a complex concept with no conventional definition. In its most neutral sense, 'propaganda' implies dissemination or promotion of certain ideas (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014: 2). The concept of 'propaganda' in China is a distinct concept from the Western one, although there are similarities between the two. Kingsley Edney (2014: 25) considers that the equivalent term for 'propaganda' in contemporary Chinese is '宣传 *xuanchuan*', which literally means 'dissemination of information'. This term is generally regarded in China as a neutral or even positive concept (Ibid., 22; Li, 2018: 12). Another Chinese term which is synonymous to 'propaganda' is '思想工作 *sixiang gongzuo*', which literally means 'thought works'. This term has a moral component that refers to education and correction of 'erroneous' thinking

(Edney, 2014: 22). The latter term reveals a close relationship between propaganda and education in Communist China. Many propaganda campaigns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are conducted in the name of and by means of ‘education’.

The education system is fundamental to the stability and development of the prevailing power structures. Educating young people through carefully designed and selected school curricula can help ensure the legitimacy of governments and secure the future of a country as a political structure (Williams, 2014). In this sense, education is a distinctly political activity (Apple, 2019: 1). School textbooks have a significant impact on shaping students’ view of the world. According to Podeh and Alayan (2018: 1), during the formative years of schooling, children’s minds are particularly malleable and susceptible. Textbooks have the ability to influence their value system and it is possible that this influence will remain with them for the rest of their lives. The policies of education not only reveal how societies are organized in the present, but also influence the behavior of students in the future.

### **Corpus of Analysis**

This paper aims to analyze the strategies of creating and consolidating collective memory about Chinese revolutionary leaders and the ‘enemies of the Chinese people’ created for the post-80s and post-90s generations through the education system under the framework of the ‘Patriotic Education Campaign’ of the same period.

Jaques Ellul (1973: 110) considers primary education and teachers of literacy to be fundamental to the organization of propaganda in Asia. For this reason, the corpus of the analysis consists of two sets of textbooks for the subject 语文 *Yuwen*, or Chinese Literacy of elementary education, which is one of the most important subjects of the Chinese education system. These textbooks work exactly as Ellul explains: they teach children to read and, at the same time, with a vast selection of texts prepared under CCP’s supervision, promote communist propaganda (*Ibid.*).

The main research question that guides this study is as follows: How are Chinese revolutionary leaders and the ‘enemies’ of the Chinese people represented in primary school textbooks aimed at the post-80s and post-90s generations produced during the Patriotic Education Campaign?

In this paper, I analyze two sets of primary school Chinese Literacy textbooks published between 1984 and 1999.<sup>2</sup> One of the sets is comprised of 10 textbooks for the five-year primary curriculum, while the other is comprised of 12 textbooks designed for the six-year primary curriculum. Although they are printed and distributed by publishers from different provinces, they are all published by People’s Education Press, an official publishing house founded in 1950 under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and is in charge of educational publications throughout China.

Each textbook consists of several units, each containing independent lessons and a review exercise. In the most recent set, there is also an introduction to each unit starting from volume VII (4th grade). The lessons are divided into three categories:

1. 讲读课文 *jiangdu kewen*, key lessons that require the teachers’ detailed explanation;
2. 阅读课文 *yuedu kewen*, reading lessons that are less important than the previous ones but also need explanation by teachers; and
3. 独立阅读课文 *duli yuedu kewen*, individual reading lessons that should not need explanation by teachers.

Lessons in the first category are considered more important than the other two and appear more frequently in exams. Each lesson usually consists of a main text, a vocabulary list, grammar exercises, comprehension exercises,

2. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a new curriculum plan for primary and secondary education was created. Between 1978 and 1981, primary education in the PRC was regularized to a total duration of five years. However, in 1981, given the difficulties in completing the five-year curriculum plan and the premature age at which students were completing primary education and participating in the labor market, consideration began to be given to the possibility of extending the duration of primary education to six years. In the same year, the Ministry of Education implemented a six-year primary education plan in some cities. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, there were two primary education curriculum plans at the same time. See more at the People’s Education Press website: <https://www.pep.com.cn/rjgl/rjls/dsj/>, accessed on 10-09-2021.

and reading or memorization practice. The topics of the lessons are diversified, covering subjects such as: science; history; everyday life; fairy tales and legends; and excerpts from prose and poetry by famous writers. The texts in the lessons are written by a wide range of authors from different countries and historical periods, so they also possess a variety of literary styles.

In the lessons, historical figures are often depicted. These include politicians, scientists, artists, military personnel, doctors, etc. Some historical figures are depicted as children, while others are presented as adults. Some appear in both stages of life. In addition to the more well-known figures with generally positive representations, such as Mao Zedong, Lenin, or Isaac Newton, there are also several types of less individualized historical figures that represent collective historical groups, such as the Chinese Armies and the peasants. Figures with negative representations also appear primarily in the texts as collective groups, so much so that they are often simply referred to as ‘敌人 *diren*’, ‘enemies’. This group includes figures related to religious phenomena; soldiers of the Chinese Nationalist Party (PNC); armies of foreign invaders; corrupt officials and; ‘capitalists’, among others.

## Research Design

My main research method is critical discourse analysis (CDA), which has been widely used in Chinese language communication studies in recent years (Qiaoan, 2019: 645). The discourse analysis methods in this paper are adaptations of the methods proposed by Annabelle Mooney and Betsy Evans in *Language, Society & Power* (2015) with some modifications given the specificities of Chinese language and society. The authors create a methodology for analyzing political discourse in Western media that is based on CDA, and try to discover the relationships between political discourses and power differences, as well as the role of the media in creating authoritative and persuasive locutors. Based on these methods, I analyze the strategies of persuasion through 1) the three tactics of persuasion, which include the concepts of *ethos*, arguments of authority, *pathos*, emotion conveyed through the discourse, and *logos*, the argument itself; and 2) the rhetorical analysis,

which covers the use of pronouns and titles, contrast between descriptions of heroes and enemies, metaphors, parallelisms, preconceived ideas, and the existence of intertextuality (*Ibid.*: 45-51).

I divide the various historical figures into different categories depending on their positive/negative representation, nationality, and the political party to which they belong. I analyzed the percentage that each category of historical figures occupies. Based on the historical, social and political contexts of the 1980s and 1990s, I try to understand what types of collective memory are formed about the 'friends' and 'enemies' of the Chinese people and how the Chinese regime intends to persuade the youth of the post-80s and post-90s generations to accept such discourses.

### **Friends of the Chinese People**

In both sets of textbooks, 26.3% of the lessons are about historical figures (91 out of 346 lessons in Set I and 78 out of 296 lessons in Set II). Although these textbooks belong to the subject of Chinese Literacy and not History, one can see the great importance that the textbook editors gave to the 'historical' content of the curricula. Although the two sets of textbooks are issued in different decades, most of the historical figures in the two sets are identical. There are a few texts that are different in the two sets about the same historical figures.

Chinese revolutionary leaders occupy a significant percentage of the lessons (22 out of 91 lessons in Set I and 16 out of 78 lessons in Set II). Within this category, one can divide revolutionary leaders into two groups: leaders of the CCP and 孙中山 Sun Yat-Sen,<sup>3</sup> founder of the Republic of China and the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP). Within the first group, I have chosen

3. Sun Yat-Sen (1866 - 1925) is one of the most important figures of the period of Republican China. At the popular level, he is generally considered the '国父 *guofu*', 'the father of the Republic of China'. Throughout his life, Sun participated in numerous revolutions. In 1894, he founded the Society for the Regeneration of China, the first Chinese society to incite a modern revolution. This society was the precursor to the CNP. In 1911, he participated in the Xinhai Revolution, which overthrew the Qing dynasty government. In January 1912, he was elected as the temporary president of the Republic of China, leaving the post a few months later for 袁世凯 Yuan Shikai (1859 - 1916). In August 1919, he founded the CNP (Elleman & Paine, 2019: 263-274; Mao, 2001).

the two leaders with the most lessons for the present analysis. These are 毛泽东Mao Zedong<sup>4</sup> and 周恩来Zhou Enlai.<sup>5</sup> As for Sun Yat-Sen, since he is the only historical figure of CNP with positive representation and possessing only one lesson, I will conduct analysis with this lesson only. As the communist leaders occupy a larger number of lessons with a variety of themes, I will analyze 30% of the lessons on these. The lessons on each communist leader are categorized by the subjects of the texts. The criteria for selecting the lessons for each subject are arranged in this order of preference:

1. In the case of being the only lesson of a given thematic, this is chosen;
2. If there is more than one lesson in a given theme, I prefer the text with the greatest number and variety of actions and/or interactions between different characters. I adopt this criterion because I believe that texts of this nature create more concrete representations about historical figures and events than texts of a merely descriptive nature;
3. In case several lessons containing roughly the same number of actions/interactions, preference is given to the lessons that appear repeatedly in both sets of textbooks;
4. Finally, in case there are no repeated lessons, key/reading lessons are preferred.

4. Mao Zedong (1893 -1976) was born into a peasant family in a village of Hunan province. He was one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party. He led several communist and anti-imperialist revolutionary movements during the period of Republican China. In 1949, he was elected as the chairman of the PRC central government. After the founding of the PRC, he launched several internal political campaigns, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and commanded several wars, such as the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Sino-Indian War (1962) (see more in: Zhong, 1986; Terrill, 1980).

5. Zhou Enlai (1898 -1976) was born into a family of officials of the Qing dynasty in Zhejiang province. He studied at Nankai University and later in Japan and France. He was a member of the CCP and the CNP (between 1923 and 1926), and participated in several revolutionary movements and promoted peaceful negotiations between the CCP and the CNP. He was the first foreign minister and the first prime minister of the PRC. During his diplomatic career, he regularized diplomatic relations between China, Japan and the USA. As China's prime minister, he tried to correct Mao Zedong's 'leftist' campaigns by protecting several politicians criticized by the Red Guards and the Gang of Four (see more in: Wilson, 2008).

## Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai: Friends and Families of the Chinese People

The lessons on Mao Zedong focus mainly on three themes:

1. Mao Zedong and his interaction with the people and children (7 lessons);
2. Mao Zedong's frugal and diligent life (3 lessons)
3. Mao Zedong as the founder of the PRC (1 lesson);

In order to understand the collective memory created about Mao Zedong in textbooks, I conduct a discourse analysis of the following lessons:

Lesson Titles	Lesson Information
1. 毛主席在花山 <i>Maozhuxi Zai Huashan, Chairman Mao at Huashan Village</i>	Lesson 24, Vol.10 of Set II
2. 补丁 <i>Buding, The Patch</i>	Lesson 11, Vol.3 of Set II
3. 开国大典 <i>Kaiguo Dadian, The Grand Inauguration Ceremony of the PRC</i>	Lesson 3, Vol.11 of Set II

Table 1: List of lessons analyzed about Mao Zedong.

*Chairman Mao at Huashan Village* tells a story about Mao Zedong, his guardian, and the peasants of Huashan village during the period of China's Second Civil War. According to official information,<sup>6</sup> in 1948, Mao Zedong stayed nine days in Huashan village and his experience with the local people is said to have inspired the author of the lesson.<sup>7</sup> In order to ensure that Mao Zedong can work in a quiet environment without being interrupted, his guardian asks the peasants not to use the mill near Mao's office, but to use the other one further away. When Mao Zedong finds out what has happened, he asks the guardian to call the peasants back, serves them tea,

6. See more in the report 《寻找课本故事 太行山深处阜平小山村如今美如玉 *Xunzhao Keben Gushi Taihangshan Shenchu Fuping Xiaoshancun Rujin Meiruyu, In Search of the Stories of the Textbooks, The Little Village in the Middle of Taihang Mountain Which is Today as Beautiful as Jade*》, available at: [http://travel.china.com.cn/txt/2020-05/11/content\\_76029926.html](http://travel.china.com.cn/txt/2020-05/11/content_76029926.html), accessed on 13-06-2022.

7. The author is 翟志刚 Zhai Zhigang. Although detailed information about this writer is not known, available information points to him being born in 1951, three years after Mao's stay at Huashan village. A biography about this author is available at: <https://www.zibosky.com/shbk/202206/30902.html>, accessed on 13-06-2022.

a beverage that the latter never drank before, and helps them to grind the grain. Thus, the narrative describes Mao Zedong as a caring, selfless leader, and a friend of the people.

*The Patch* is a text about Mao Zedong's frugal life. This lesson discusses the old, patched clothes that Mao Zedong is said to wear to receive guests, not only before, but also after the establishment of the PRC. Although these texts show an obviously propagandistic nature, there are several doubts and criticisms regarding the alleged lifestyle that Mao is said to have lived.<sup>8</sup> Today, disputes about the 'veracity' of the stories about Mao Zedong's frugal life continue, and have prompted counter-arguments from some researchers in the Chinese academic world.<sup>9</sup> The information provided by people who had direct contact with Mao is used as evidences and sources both to try to prove Mao's qualities as well as to disprove them. Regardless of the veracity of the descriptions of Mao's past, these arguments are tools to create an artificial collective memory by official and unofficial propagandists, using history as a prop. These tools aim to persuade people to accept a version of the past that brings political benefits in the present to those who promote these very narratives.

*The Grand Inauguration Ceremony of the PRC* is a text in which appears not only Mao Zedong, but also other first-generation communist leaders<sup>10</sup> who were present at Tiananmen Square on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949. However, Mao Zedong is undoubtedly the main character in this lesson, occupying a large

8. See more in 《关于毛泽东的“补丁衣服”及其解读 *Mao Zedong by Budingyifu jiqi Jiedu, On Mao Zedong's 'Patched Clothes' and its Interpretation*》, an article written by an author with the pseudonym 卸甲一书生 Xiejia Yishusheng and published in 2013, sought to 'disprove' the stories about Mao's frugal life and the example of the patched clothes. The original article can be found at: [http://www.mingjinglishi.com/2013/05/blog-post\\_4701.html](http://www.mingjinglishi.com/2013/05/blog-post_4701.html), accessed on 13-06-2022.

9. In 2014, 龙剑宇 Long Jianyu, a researcher at the Center for the Study of Maoist Thought at Xiangtan University and deputy director of the Comrade Mao Zedong Memorial Center, located in Shaoshan, the hometown of Mao Zedong, published an article entitled 《驳对毛泽东生活起居的质疑 *Bo Dui Mao Zedong Shenghuoqiju de Zhiyi, Counter-Arguments as to the Accusations the Everyday Life of Mao Zedong*》 at the Marxist Academy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In this article, Long tried to 'alert people' to the intention to 'destroy and defame Mao Zedong's character and spirit', and criticized the arguments in the article we mentioned above. However, it should be noted that Long Jianyu is himself the deputy director of the Memorial Center and also a researcher at the Center for the Study of Maoist Thought at Xiangtan University, so I do not consider him to be a source with an independent view on the matter.

10. These are 刘少奇 Liu Shaoyi (1898-1969), 宋庆龄 Soong Ching-ling (1893 - 1981), 李济深 Li Jishen (1885 - 1959), 张澜 Zhang Lan (1872 - 1955), 高岗 Gao Gang (1905 - 1954), Zhou Enlai, 林伯渠 Lin Boqu (1886 - 1960) and 董必武 Dong Biwu (1886 - 1975), among other historically less important ones.

part of the narrative and being depicted in the center of the illustration. As the protagonist, Mao Zedong is described as being the charismatic founder of the PRC and as someone who led the inauguration ceremony, which is said to have been witnessed by 300,000 people. In this text, 刘少奇Liu Shaoqi, Mao Zedong's political rival who was imprisoned and tortured to death during the Cultural Revolution, is not mentioned, although his figure appears in the illustration of this lesson. The silence about Liu Shaoqi in the narrative in a historical period when his political status had already been restored after Mao's death suggests that the conflicts between Liu and Mao are possibly a collective memory of a past that the CCP wants to conceal and eliminate from younger generations, since such memories may contribute to the instability of the present government and raise an alternative perception of Mao Zedong.

There are a total of nine different lessons on Zhou Enlai in the two sets of textbooks. These cover the following topics:

1. Zhou Enlai and his frugal and diligent life (3 lessons);
2. Zhou Enlai as a charismatic prime minister (3 lessons);
3. Zhou Enlai and his relationship with children (3 lessons).

Each of the three lessons selected for analysis corresponds to one of the three topics about Zhou Enlai. The correspondence between the lessons and the topics can be found in Table 2:

Lesson Titles	Lesson Information
周总理的睡衣 Zhou Zongli de Shuiyi, The Pajamas of Prime Minister Zhou	Lesson 2, Vol.5 of Set I Lesson 16, Vol.5 of Set II
难忘的泼水节 Nanwang de Poshuijie, The Unforgettable Songkran Festival <sup>11</sup>	Lesson 8, Vol.4 of Set II
一张珍贵的照片 Yizhang Zhengui de Zhaopian, A Precious Photo	Lesson 25, Vol.9 of Set I

Table 2: List of lessons analyzed about Zhou Enlai.

11. The Songkran Festival is the largest festival celebrated by the Dai people, who live mainly in Yun-

*The Pajamas of the Prime Minister* is a text that describes Zhou Enlai's frugal life by using the example of his old, patched pajamas. Through the perspective of a young nurse watching Zhou's wife mending this single set of the prime minister's pajamas, Zhou's frugal life becomes convincing, as we can see through the following excerpt: 'A young nurse holds the pajamas of Prime Minister Zhou with both hands. Seeing the delicate, scattered seams of the patches, her eyes fill with tears.'

Although also a relevant political figure in Communist China's history, and even regarded as one of the Eight Eminent Grand Officers of the CCP, Zhou's wife, 邓颖超 Deng Yingchao (1904-1992), is not referred to in the text by her government title, but by 'Grandma Deng'. If Zhou Enlai's wife is 'grandma Deng', this means that her husband is 'grandpa'. In this way, a closeness is created between the government leader and the common people.

The second lesson in Table 2, *The Unforgettable Songkran Festival* is an account of celebrations in 1961 of this festival among the Dai people, an ethnic minority of China in Yunnan province, at which Zhou Enlai was present. In this lesson, Zhou Enlai is described as a charismatic leader adored by the Dai people. The image of Zhou Enlai described in this lesson is quite different from the usual one of him as prime minister, something that makes a great contrast to the collective memory that the students have of him, at least according to descriptions and illustrations of Zhou in other lessons in the textbooks. Here, Zhou appears dressed as a Dai man and mingles with the crowd. He also plays a traditional Dai musical instrument. These descriptions suggest that he had a close relationship with this ethnic minority group from the border area of China.

At the end of the lesson, the year that Zhou Enlai participated in the festival (1961) is repeated twice. This was not the first time he participated in the *Songkran* festival. There are several records of Zhou Enlai wearing the attire of the local people and participating in the same festival in 1960 in Myanmar (then Burma) during his official visit to the country (Wilson,

nan province and other countries in Southeast Asia, mainly in Thailand. It is a Thai national holiday.

2008: 214). The year 1961 was a landmark year in several aspects of the PRC's history, and the repetition of the year in this lesson was not a mere coincidence. In 1961, the Chinese and Burmese government forces allied and defeated the People's Volunteer Army of Yunnan, an anti-communist battalion supported by the Taiwanese Nationalist government. They were active in the border area of China and Myanmar where the Dai people lived. Given this historical context, the description of the Dai people's warm reception of Zhou Enlai and the interaction between the communist leader and the main ethnic group of this region during the festival is intended to suggest the illegitimacy of the various attacks by the Anti-Communist People's Volunteer Army of Yunnan. In this way, the editors of the textbooks sought to promote the idea of unity and recognition between the Dai people and the CCP government.

The last lesson in Table 2, *A Precious Photo*, tells a story supposedly experienced by Zhou Enlai and a girl named Zhou Guihua on a visit by the former to a small village at the foot of Lu Mountain<sup>12</sup> on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1961. The text can be divided into two parts. The first is about the interaction between Zhou Enlai and the girl on the way to the Guanyin bridge. The second part describes Zhou Enlai's visit to Guihua's house, which includes a dialogue between Zhou Enlai and the peasants of the village. This text intends to create a charismatic representation of Zhou Enlai from a child's point of view. Zhou Enlai is described by his gestures and discourses as a caring elder to the children and a close leader to the people.

According to this lesson, Zhou Enlai's visit to the village took place in 1961, the last year of the Great Famine of 1958-1961. During this period, due to the Great Leap Forward Movement, the establishment of the communes, natural calamities, and sanctions by the Soviet Union, countless Chinese

12. 庐山 *Lushan*, situated in Jiangxi province, is one of the best known mountains in China. It was a famous mountain during Imperial China for its Buddhist and Taoist temples. In the Republican era, it was the site of several political events, including the negotiations between the CCP and the CNP to establish the Second United Front in the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. After the establishment of the PRC, Lushan continued to be an important site for Chinese politics. In 1959, 1961 and 1970, three conferences among Chinese Communist leaders of the highest positions were held there. The 1961 conference possibly represented the historical context of Zhou Enlai's visit described in this text.

starved to death. This historical context is not made clear in the lesson, which mentions only subtly about the Great Famine. Without full historical context, this story describes Zhou Enlai as a leader concerned about the people, as he uses expressions to describe the serious situation of the village people's lives caused by the political situation, although he does so in a subtle way, as it would not be acceptable for the PRC government to break the silence about the political situation of this historical period to the students of the 1980s and 1990s.

In this lesson, when they realize that Zhou Enlai is aware of the famine situation, the peasants feel more relieved and start to describe the situation they experienced in previous years. After listening to the peasants, Zhou Enlai makes a speech that has the dual purpose of encouraging the peasants and justifying Mao Zedong's actions:

In one or two years, we have suffered calamities, and on top of that, someone is choking us. Indeed, our life is difficult. But as long as we follow Chairman Mao and work hard in order to try to be self-sufficient, the situation will improve day by day. You need to work hard, plant many cereals, raise many pigs, feed many chickens and ducks. In this way, we will overcome the obstacles together!

This speech points only to natural calamities and outside forces ('someone', certainly referring to the Soviet Union) as constituting the causes of the Great Famine of this period.

The narratives of the textbooks intend to construct quite similar collective memories about the two Chinese communist leaders. Both are represented as living a frugal and diligent life. Likewise, both are 'friends' or even 'grandparents' of the Chinese people. They are further described as excellent leaders who have led China onto a better path. Finally, both are charismatic, which makes them to be easily loved and admired by the common people. Still, there are differences in the representations between the two leaders. Mao Zedong has more texts about his experiences with the

people and soldiers during times of revolution, so he is mainly depicted as a political leader. There is a greater number of texts about interactions between Zhou Enlai and children compared to Mao Zedong, and the former is mainly depicted as ‘father’ or ‘grandfather’ of the Chinese people.

This difference in representations is possibly related to the roles that the CCP has intended to assign to each of the two politicians in the post-reform era. Mao Zedong was a communist leader who had ebbs and flows throughout his political career, the decline of his authority after the Great Cultural Revolution and the loss of importance of the liberal faction vis-à-vis the conservative faction within the CCP meant that the CCP needed to restore its importance to the younger generation, especially after the Tiananmen Protests. For this reason, the textbooks mainly emphasize his role as the founder of Communist China and Mao’s work as the leader of the CCP. His mistakes and political conflicts with other communist leaders are omitted and silenced, and the difficulties that the Chinese people faced during his mandate are justified by natural causes or the action of foreign hostile forces.

This representation of Mao as the leader of the Chinese people is complemented by the narratives about Zhou Enlai, a politician with consistent and stable performance throughout his career. The textbooks represent Zhou Enlai as a charismatic figure close to the people and extremely hard-working. In contrast to Mao, his role as a political leader is not the most emphasized, and his contributions as a foreign minister are not mentioned. The textbooks talk about Zhou’s celebration of the *Songkran* festival together with the Dai people of China, but remain silent about his participation in the same festival in Myanmar as a successful act of diplomacy. This choice makes Zhou Enlai’s contribution to the country not stand out from Mao’s, but rather complement it. Similarly, Zhou Enlai is also represented in the textbooks as someone who sought to justify Mao’s mistakes.

## 2. Sun Yat-Sen, the Father of the Chinese Nation as a Courageous Child

In both sets of textbooks, I encountered across several texts that narrate stories of the members of the Chinese Nationalist Party as a collective figure and as ‘enemies’ of the people. However, it is possible to find one positive text about the founder of this party which is considered ‘anti-revolutionary’ by the CCP. I am referring to lesson 12 of volume 4 of Set II. This lesson, entitled 不懂就要问 *Budong Jiuyao Wen, Who Doesn’t Know, Asks*, tells an episode from Sun Yat-Sen’s childhood which took place during the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911), and does not mention the later events for which Sun Yat-Sen is best known. Sun, who at the time of the story is still a child, studies at a private school where traditional neo-Confucian teaching methods are still being practiced. The teacher merely teaches how to read the texts and requires his pupils to memorize them, even if they do not understand the meaning of the texts. Sun Yat-Sen, however, asks the teacher to explain the meaning even though he is aware that he may be punished for such a request. At first, the teacher gets angry. In the end, however, he agrees with Sun and explains the texts thoroughly to the students.

In this lesson, although the description of Sun Yat-Sen is very different from the accounts about the ‘anti-revolutionary nationalist enemies’, neither his relationship with the CNP nor his adult biography is explained, which makes Sun seem like an amorphous figure with no relationship to the CNP.

The omission of information and silence on Sun Yat-Sen’s full biography in the 1990s could be associated with the PRC’s ambiguous position towards Taiwanese governments in the last two decades of the 20th century. After establishing official diplomatic relations with the U.S. in 1979, the PRC government presented the *Open Letter to Taiwanese Countrymen* for the fifth time.<sup>13</sup> This letter, which opposed Taiwan’s independence, attempted to end military confrontations across the Taiwan Strait in a peaceful manner and promote economic and cultural cooperation between mainland

13. See more at 《2019年第一天, 让我们重温《告台湾同胞书》! On First Day of 2019, Let's Remember the Open Letter to Taiwanese Countrymen! 》, a report by *China News*, published on January 1, 2019, available at: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/tw/2019/01-01/8717289.shtml>, accessed on 17-11-2021.

China and the Island. The government of the Republic of China in Taiwan practiced martial law until 1987. In this way, it was able to control all aspects of Taiwanese society in the form of a political dictatorship. 蒋经国 Chiang Ching-Kuo (1910 - 1988), son of 蒋介石 Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1975) and governor of Taiwan between 1978 and 1988, initially refused bilateral cooperation and introduced the so-called ‘三不 *sanbu*’ or ‘Three No’ policy towards mainland China: no contact, no negotiation and no compromise.<sup>14</sup> This policy was practiced until 1987, when martial law and the state of emergency ended. In this way, the all-too-negative image of the CNP in the textbooks of the 1980s becomes understandable.

However, in the 1990s, the establishment of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits by Beijing government and the Strait Exchange Foundation by its Taipei counterpart promoted economic and cultural communication between mainland China and Taiwan. It is possible that this was a reason for the addition of the text on Sun Yat-Sen to Set II. However, due to the unstable political relations between the governments of Beijing and Taipei, the narrative about Sun Yat-Sen at this time was rather ambiguous.

### **Enemies of the Chinese People**

In both sets of textbooks, unlike the ‘friends of the people’, who occupy a large percentage of the texts, the ‘enemies’ appear only in some narratives about the ‘friends’ of the texts as secondary figures. There are in total eight categories of ‘enemies’: 1) Members of the CNP; 2) Japanese invaders; 3) American Army; 4) German Nazis; 5) Capitalists and Landowners; 6) Anti-Revolutionary Foreign Governments; 7) Historical Figures Associated with Superstitions and 8) Warlords.<sup>15</sup>

14. See more at 《兩岸「新三不」出現? 專家分析: 大家都接受 *The Rise of ‘New Three-No Policy’ between China and Taiwan? Expert Analysis: Everyone Can Accept*》, published by *China Times* on May 10, 2020, available at: <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20200510001599-260407?chdtv>, accessed on 17-11-2021.

15. In Chinese, 军阀 *junfa*. During the period of Republican China, the term referred to military figures who benefited from foreign support and who dominated various parts of China, where they exercised autonomous authoritarian regimes.

Members of the CNP and Japanese Invaders are the two categories of enemies that stand out in both sets. In fact, the number of texts related to these two categories is much larger than the remaining six categories, occupying about 65% of the lessons in Set I and around 59% of the lessons in Set II. The descriptions of ‘enemies’ are, in most lessons, much less detailed compared to those of ‘friends’. Many appear in the texts only with the reference of ‘*diren*’, ‘enemy’, and are not identified specifically. In this way, the majority of the ‘enemies’ are perceived by the students as collective figures rather than individual historical ones.

### **1. Chinese Nationalist Party, the main enemy of the Chinese people**

In the two sets of textbooks there are a total of 16 different lessons that mention the CNP members as ‘enemies’. Some texts refer only once to the term ‘enemies’ and do not offer any further information about them. Others have some more detailed descriptions. The Nationalists appear primarily as antagonists in order to highlight the heroic virtues and actions of the Communists. The members of the two parties are described as being complete opposites, the Communists are selfless, brave, fighting and honest while the Nationalists are selfish, coward, lazy and corrupt. The Communists’ struggles are always legitimate and beneficial to the Chinese people and the Nationalists’ violent actions show only their greed and cruelty. These opposing representations between the Communists and the Nationalists in the textbooks are intended to explain to the students the reasons for the CCP’s victory in China’s Second Civil War (1946-1949), an event which is very distant from the students who constitute the target audience of the textbooks. Due to the unstable and changing political situation and diplomatic relationship of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s, the creation of the negative collective memory about the CNP among the Chinese youth was essential for the recognition of the legitimacy of the Communist regime in mainland China and the acceptance of the unification policies of Taiwan, which at the time the textbooks were written was ruled by the ‘illegitimate’ Nationalist Party.

## 2. The Japanese Invaders and the Memory of its Atrocities to the Chinese People

Japanese invaders are the second most frequently mentioned enemies in both sets of textbooks, which appear in nine different lessons. The most detailed representations of these enemies are found in the lessons about heroic children fighting against these invaders during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). The narratives about the Japanese enemies are very similar to those of the Nationalist ones, they are also represented as corrupt soldiers, as they resort to bribery. They are also portrayed as cruel and violent towards the people, as they not only rob and destroy people's property, but also abuse and torture civilians. Moreover, the Japanese invaders are further represented as ignorant, given that they always fall into the ambushes of the communist armies.

Despite having much less visibility in Set II than in Set I, the Japanese invaders are still the most frequently represented foreign enemies. Their presence is very different from that of other foreign enemies, such as the American army or the Nazis, who have few substantive representations. This can be explained by the fact that in the 1970s the PRC regularized its diplomatic relations with Japan, the then West Germany, and the United States. In the following two decades, although there were moments of conflict, the PRC's diplomatic relations with the three countries were relatively stable. There is, for example, a great ambiguity when these textbooks talk about the U.S. participation in the Korean War. In the lessons relating to it, the Americans are referred to as 'enemy', and there is no reference to their nationality. The Germans, on the other hand, are always mentioned as '德国法西斯 *deguo faxisi*', literally 'German fascists'. In this way, it seeks to distance this collective group of 'fascists' from the common people of Germany.

The same does not happen to Japanese enemies. This difference can be explained by the attitude that the Japanese government has adopted towards the violent actions that Japan carried out in the countries it invaded and colonized. The official editors of Japanese history textbooks in the 1980s and

1990s tried to omit the war crimes committed during the imperialist period and to whitewash the history of Japanese invasion and colonization, which caused several disputes between Japan and the countries it occupied in the past. It is possible that this more visible presence of the Japanese invaders compared to other foreign enemies in the textbooks is related to this traumatic memory of the past, which continues to affect the relations between China and Japan to this day.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the discourses adopted in the 1980s and 1990s regarding historical figures and aimed at students are closely related to the social instability that the PRC was facing internally after the Great Cultural Revolution and the June 4 Incident in 1989, and externally after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. During this period, the legitimacy of the communist regime was constantly challenged by internal and external factors, so the communist leaders felt that it was urgent to create a positive collective memory about the first-generation communist leaders. The most problematic political relations that the PRC had in this period were with Taiwan, ruled by the CNP, and with Japan, which denied the violent actions committed during its imperialist expansion. For this reason, lessons dealing with the CNP and the Japanese invasion occupy the largest percentage of the texts related to revolutions.

Thus, the relationship between education and propaganda in the context of post-reform China becomes clear. As Chinese Literacy is a main subject of compulsory education, it is charged with the function of disseminating the CCP's propagandistic political agenda. In this way, children's thoughts and behaviors are manipulated in the name of education, thereby cultivating a new communist 'morality' in post-reform China.

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