Using the Past to Legitimise the Present: The Portrayal of Good Governance in Chinese History Textbooks

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Abstract: This article examines how Chinese middle-school history textbooks are written as a means of legitimising the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), by carefully utilising China's past. The authors identify (or perhaps "construct") a sinified model of good governance in the textbooks that derives from the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, and the subsequent practises of certain revered Chinese emperors. This model is then applied to CCP leaders in the modern-era textbooks in order to cast them as diligently upholding a time-honoured Chinese tradition of legitimate rule. In a broader context, our analysis fits within the ongoing discussions about the continuing legacy of Confucianism in contemporary China and the CCP's efforts to locate itself within this as a way of fortifying its own legitimacy. We also note how some of the themes of good governance contained in the textbooks are closely linked to contemporary government policies and priorities, such as anti-corruption schemes and constitutionalism. The objective in so doing is to propagate the importance of these themes to a young audience.

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Introduction

History has always occupied an important role in legitimising CCP rule, given the limited modes of legitimacy available under the single-party authoritarian system. The harrowing memories associated with the First and Second Opium Wars (Lovell 2011; Weatherley and Rosen 2013), the Second Sino-Japanese War (Mitter 2000), and the Korean War (Hays Gries et al. 2009) are exhaustively documented in the annals of CCP history – and frequently articulated by the state-controlled national media. The aim in so doing is to remind the Chinese public that the CCP liberated China from imperialist subjugation in 1949, and remains the sole defender of Chinese national interests in the context of continued – albeit less frequent – aggressive foreign conduct. As an alternative to this approach, the Party has adopted a more conciliatory stance by emphasising its common historical ties with Taiwan's former ruling party, the Kuomintang (KMT, 中国国民党, Zhongguo Guomindang), as part of a placatory policy on reunification with the island. This has included a recognition of the KMT's achievements during China's Republican era, and the contribution made by the KMT in ousting Japan from Chinese soil by 1945 (Weatherley and Zhang 2017).

Our article endorses the view that China's history is pivotal to the legitimation of CCP rule. However, in a departure from the existing literature, we examine the history contained in Chinese middle-school textbooks and show how it is deliberately designed to bolster the Party's authority. In particular, we illustrate how concepts of "good governance" maintained by the CCP are portrayed as part of a unique Chinese tradition of rule practised for more than four centuries now. This forms part of a wider effort by the Party to present itself as the standard-bearer of traditional Chinese values and ideas in an attempt to strengthen its legitimacy.

As to the structure of the article, after examining the pivotal role that history textbooks play as a medium for political propaganda (irrespective of the underlying political system), and the methods used by the CCP in disseminating such propaganda, it identifies an authentically Chinese concept of "regime legitimacy" as put forward by Guo Baogang (2003, 2010). This comprises four key elements: rule by virtue, popular consent, legality, and equality. We then apply this concept to pre-modern-era textbooks (covering the period from the

so-called Peking Man to the end of the Qing Dynasty), specifically to the selectively cited teachings of ancient Chinese sage kings (Yao and Shun) and revered philosophers (Confucius and Mencius) – as well as the subsequent practises of historically admired Chinese emperors. Finally, we show how key figures in the modern history textbooks (covering the period from the First Opium War into the twenty-first century) – such as Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan), Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping – are depicted as upholding these ancient modes of good governance during their respective political lifetimes.

CCP Legitimacy and the Legacy of Confucianism

The incumbency of the CCP has been characterised by a constant quest to legitimise its monopoly on political power. During the Mao era, attempts to derive legitimacy focused on the doctrine of Marxism, mass participation in political and economic affairs, and the charismatic authority of Mao Zedong – as reinforced by a nationwide cult of personality. The dramatic failure of the Cultural Revolution forced the post-Mao leadership under Deng Xiaoping to jettison these discredited paradigms and move towards a performance-based concept founded on market economic reform and an open-door trading policy with the developed world. While this went some way towards resurrecting the Party's popularity, the reforms spawned a number of unwelcome socio-economic side effects (e.g. spiralling inflation, unemployment, and chronic official corruption). These weakened the Party's legitimacy, culminating in the ill-fated 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and elsewhere in China. Since Tiananmen, the CCP has, as noted already, sought to expand the basis of its legitimacy by appealing to popular nationalism through historical memory, and by presenting itself as the party of stability (稳定, *wending*) (Sandby-Thomas 2011).

There has also been a concerted official focus on pre-modern Chinese traditions, specifically Confucianism – in what Ford terms the CCP's "romance with the Sage" (Ford 2015: 1032). Ford (2015: 1033–1034) further traces this back to the mid-1980s, when the Academy of Chinese Culture was established to see if Confucianism could somehow inform post-Mao socio-economic reform and modernisation. In addition, the Party set up a Chinese Confucius Research

Institute in 1985 while in November 1986 the 7th Five-Year Plan placed the study of modern Confucian thought at the very top of the research agenda for China's social scientists.

Since then, the emphasis on Confucianism has intensified, as the espousal of quasi-Confucian political themes became an important feature of the CCP's legitimacy discourse. This has been done partly to counter the continuing public discontent with some of the socio-economic problems familiar during the 1980s (Bell 2008: 8–9). But it is also intended to reinvigorate the Party itself, which, according to Lieberthal, was lacking an "energizing ideology motivating its members to excel at public service and suffer personal self-sacrifice" (Lieberthal 2004: 323). Former president Jiang Zemin has frequently championed the Confucian principles of "social harmony" and "order" (Lieberthal 2004: 352, 368). Indeed, during his 2002 Report to the 16th Party Congress, he referred directly to the importance of ruling the country by virtue (Jeffreys 2012: 146, 153) – a key Confucian theme in the country's history textbooks, and one that we will examine shortly. Jiang's successor Hu Jintao developed these ideas in articulating his headline theory of "harmonious society" (和谐社会, *hexie shehui*), while Xi Jinping often cites the Confucian classics in explaining China's domestic and foreign policy position (Zhao 2015). As Ford concludes,

> the promotion of the Party's Confucianized political discourse [has become] a propaganda theme of high priority, intimately linked to the CCP's need to develop and maintain a new theory for why it must continue to rule China uncontested. (Ford 2015: 1036–1037)

Legitimacy with Chinese Characteristics

The Party's contemporary focus on Confucianism draws heavily on the celebrated Weberian (1964) notion of "traditional legitimacy." This refers to the application of methods of governing that go back through the ages, and which are familiar to the populace. As Weber puts it, a government enjoys traditional legitimacy

> on the basis of the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past, [and] have always existed. (Weber 1964: 341)

Looking at it another way, the populace feel more comfortable with recognisable ways of ruling than they do with a complete overhaul of the system under which nothing is familiar. But, it is more than simply a question of political habit. Ideas and governance techniques are accepted on the grounds that they embody the accumulated wisdom of successive generations of leaders. As we will see below, the formulation of an ancient Chinese model of good governance in middle-school history textbooks, one that is then applied to the CCP, can be placed firmly with the framework of traditional legitimacy.

Weber goes beyond traditional legitimacy to posit two other theories of legitimacy: "charismatic" and "legal-rational." The defining characteristic of an individual invested with charismatic legitimacy is the popular perception of that person as someone very special, with abilities that no ordinary person possesses. It is with reference to these exceptional qualities that the populace obey the directives of the charismatic leader. Conversely, legal-rational legitimacy refers to the established procedures by which decisions are made, laws are enacted, and office holders are appointed or dismissed. For a regime to be legitimate in legal-rational terms, it must adhere closely to these procedures. The application of legal-rational legitimacy is very apparent in China's middle-school history textbooks, in keeping with the Party's post-Mao emphasis on legal and constitutional reform. By contrast, charismatic legitimacy is much less pronounced – given its association with Mao's discredited and disastrous personality cult.

Another explication of legitimacy is provided by David Beetham (1991), who identifies the "electoral" and "mobilisation" modes of legitimacy. As the term suggests, the electoral mode is applicable to multiparty systems of democracy in which individual consent to rule is given at the ballot box – where there must always be a diversity of choice. By contrast, the mobilisation mode is more applicable to single-party states where individual consent is expressed through the direct involvement of the masses in the implementation of a particular policy or political objective – which is designated by, and ultimately supportive of, the incumbent government. This has particular relevance to the Maoist emphasis on the mass line and the mass campaign (Weatherley 2006: 3–5), but is not mentioned in the history textbooks.

While, in principle, legitimacy is a universal concept, its practical application is the source of debate among some scholars and is often

perceived (rightly or wrongly) as Western in orientation. According to Barker (2001: 43), this is partly due to the continuing influence of Weberian notions of legitimacy – which were originally based on the experiences of Western European societies and partly because Political Science in general is biased toward multiparty democracy. The effect, according to Sandby-Thomas, has been to prioritise Weber's legal-rational legitimacy "as the principal source of legitimacy" (Sandby-Thomas 2015: 98). This, in turn, "raises questions over the sustainability of applying legitimacy in non-Western countries, as it does not take account of specific political values and custom" (Sandby-Thomas 2015: 98). Some Chinese thinkers agree with this point, especially in relation to the Chinese experience. For example, Zhu Yuchao insists that gauging the legitimacy of the CCP by reference to the principles of "democracy" and the "rule of law" is inappropriate because such principles are "not part of China's historical narrative and political discourse" (Zhu 2011: 129). Rather, "we need to reassess the traditional Chinese view of governance legitimacy" (Zhu 2011: 129).

Guo Baogang (2003, 2010) undertakes this reassessment, setting out several different modes of legitimacy based on ancient Chinese thinking and applying them to post-1949 China. Although Guo is not necessarily the most prominent Chinese academic to have published on this subject, his ideas have particular utility for our analysis of Chinese history textbooks and can be usefully divided into the four following categories: rule by virtue, popular consent, legality, and equality. These will each be further explained below, in the context of pre-modern-era and modern-era history textbooks respectively.

History Textbooks as an Instrument of Propaganda

Before we examine the role of history textbooks as a disseminator of political propaganda, it is useful to assess the potential impact of Chinese education in general on the views of the country's students. Studies by scholars such as Tang and Darr (2012), and more notably Kennedy (2009), have shown how the impact can be far reaching, particularly in relation to garnering support for the CCP. Using the "exposure–acceptance model" developed by William McGuire (1966), Kennedy shows how educated Chinese citizens who are polit-

ically aware demonstrate high levels of political support for the Party – although citizens at the highest levels of education are less accepting of political messages, and tend to express lower levels of support for the CCP.

Turning now to history textbooks, although some scholars disagree (Vickers and Zeng 2017), it is widely thought that history school textbooks provide an ideal medium for the transmission of political propaganda, primarily because the readership is young and likely to be more susceptible to influence than an adult audience is. This susceptibility is enhanced because the information contained in the textbooks is usually conveyed as an unbiased presentation of the truth when, in fact, the exact opposite is the case – it is often heavily loaded with carefully constructed political messages. According to Apple, the inherent political bias of the history textbook is a universal phenomenon:

> The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selective tradition, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. (Apple 1993: 22)

In China, the "selective tradition" or "legitimate knowledge" woven into its history textbooks derives exclusively from the CCP, renowned for its efforts to control the content and flow of information to suit its own political purposes. This official regulation of textbooks has been a constant ever since the Party first came to power, although the content of these has varied over time. In her study of the Chinese history curricula during the post-Mao era, Jones (2002) shows how historical narratives and teaching goals moved away from the radicalism associated with the Cultural Revolution and towards the more pragmatic and modern perspectives underpinning the reform era under Deng and Jiang. Baranovitch (2010) has detailed the changing representation of China's national minorities to accord with changes in Party policy on this subject. Tse (2011) has identified textbook fluctuations in the portrayal of good citizenship, reflecting a post-Deng soft authoritarianism and a greater reconciliation with human rights and global citizenship.

Irrespective of alterations to content, one of the key objectives of China's history textbooks has always been the same: to legitimise CCP rule. Wang refers to Chinese history education in general as

> an instrument for the glorification of the party, for the consolidation of the PRC's national identity, and for the justification of the political system of the CCP's one party rule. (Wang 2008: 784)

Jones, meanwhile, insists that in China "history is primarily expected to promote acceptance of the political system, the current regime and its policies" (Jones 2002: 548).

The process by which Chinese history textbooks are compiled shows just how closely the Party micromanages the content. At the initial drafting stage, the process is complex and protracted "involving curriculum developers, textbook writers and History teachers in constant renegotiation" (Jones 2002: 548). Also involved at this stage is the state-owned People's Education Press (PEP) in Beijing, which is responsible for publishing the textbooks. Although the PEP has approval rights over the content of the textbooks, it is subordinate to the views of the State Education Department. However the final say goes further up the chain of command to the all-powerful Central Party Propaganda Department, in charge of ideology-related work and the information-dissemination system. The Propaganda Department carefully vets the textbooks to ensure that they conform with the Party's intended political message (Brady 2008). This provides a good example of how the Party continues to control the state in China, notwithstanding the nominal separation of powers outlined in the current state constitution, as amended in 2004.

The study of History is compulsory in China during the three years of middle school, encompassing Grades 7 to 9 (ages 12 to 15). World history is taught at Grade 9, and is not covered in this article mainly because, as Jones notes, there is "far less at stake politically" (Jones 2002: 550) for the CCP. Our focus is, rather, on the portrayal of Chinese history, which is taught in four volumes – two each for Grades 7 and 8. These volumes provide a comprehensive sweep of Chinese history. Volume 1 of the Grade 7 textbook begins about 750,000 years ago and ends with the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–581). Volume 2 runs from the Sui Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty period (581 to the 1800s). We refer to these two volumes as comprising the "pre-modern era." Volume 1 of the Grade 8 textbook runs from the First Opium War (1839–1842) to the founding of the People's Republic of China. Volume 2 covers the post-revolutionary era, ending in the early twenty-first century during the incumbency of

Jiang Zemin. We refer to these volumes as comprising the "modern era."

The most recent editions of these history textbooks were published in 2013, and it is these that we examine below. The 2013 editions are identical to the previous ones published in 2006, suggesting that the Party's intended message about long-standing Chinese models of legitimacy has been consistent for some time now. Although some provincial publishing houses (e.g. Shanghai in 2006) have tried to significantly vary the content of Chinese history textbooks (Kahn 2006), most of them replicate what is published by the PEP in Beijing. In this way, unlike other categories of Chinese school textbooks (e.g. natural sciences and maths), the content of history textbooks is often "set in stone" rather than being subject to any local variation or reinterpretation.

Methods of Indoctrination

In terms of how the political message is disseminated, and as we will see in further detail below, the textbooks are deliberately compiled so that China's pre-modern history acts as a precursor for the modern period. This ensures that, where necessary, students can draw useful comparisons between the past and the present, to form the intended impression that Chinese history is a seamless continuum. So, for example, certain key events from the past are used to foreshadow later incidents. One example in Volume 2 of the Grade 7 textbook is the stinging criticism of censorship during the final throes of the Qing Dynasty (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 101), which prepares students for similar criticisms of the Cultural Revolution era during the Grade 8 course (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 94–95).

More importantly for the purposes of this article, pre-modern modes of legitimacy are carefully prescribed in the early volumes to act as a template for good governance in the modern era. More often than not, this is reflected in the exemplary conduct of certain well-respected Chinese emperors such as Tang Xuanzong and Tang Taizong, both from the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and Han Wendi from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). These and other revered leaders are depicted as setting lofty standards of rule that their modern successors successfully emulated, most notably Mao Zedong and Deng

Xiaoping. The aim in so doing is to present CCP leaders as upholding a centuries-old tradition of virtuous rule.

The use of exemplars drawn from history has a long and established tradition in China as part of what Patricia Ebrey calls the "great man theory of history" (Ebrey 2010: 10), a belief that the development of Chinese civilisation is attributable to the acts of great people rather than to gods or mystical figures. Similarly, Stefan Landsberger has noted that

> through the ages, models have played an important role in this educational process [in China], constantly making people aware of norms of correct behavior and acceptable conduct. (Landsberger 2001: 541)

This has been strongly reinforced in the modern era by the utilisation of the all-encompassing personality cult, particularly in relation to Mao and his short-lived successor Hua Guofeng.

To reinforce the image of exemplary rulers and rule, the textbooks contain vivid visual representations of certain key figures in Chinese history that are carefully constructed to convey the desired message, both good and bad. For example, Volume 1 of the Grade 8 textbook includes a photograph of Mao astride an appropriately powerful-looking white horse, leading a group of soldiers into Shanbei – the symbolic birthplace of Chinese communism (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 89). Mao's pose is quintessentially heroic in classic socialist-realist fashion, designed to strike awe into the reader. The title pages of several chapters in both volumes of the Grade 8 course contain photographs of other high-profile CCP leaders gazing resolutely into the distance, including one of Deng Xiaoping (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 37). Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Chinese Republic and revered in both China and Taiwan, is photographed standing tall and proud in full military dress. Directly below him is a cartoon (traditionally, a derisory form of illustration) of Sun's rival, the self-appointed "emperor" Yuan Shikai – one of the most vilified figures of the modern era. Yuan is pictured reclining smugly on his "throne," so as to illustrate the chasm in moral status between him and Sun (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 38).

As we might expect, the textbooks are laden with poignant quotations from the "great men" of Chinese history. Mao is frequently eulogised by reference to his poetry. In the chapter discussing the Long March (1934–1935), one of Mao's poems is described as "cap-

turing the revolutionary hero spirit of the People's Liberation Army [(PLA)]" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 59). The front page of another chapter is emblazoned with a sample of Deng's calligraphy (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 88). This is relevant because Chinese calligraphy is traditionally used to commemorate the significance of an event, place, or individual (Little 1987). The textbooks also include verses from military marching songs used by the PLA to sustain staff morale (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 55), and pictures of the wild plants that were consumed by PLA soldiers during the Long March to illustrate their determination to survive the hostile surrounding environment at all costs (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 61).

In the same way that the textbooks highlight positive aspects of China's history so as to legitimise the current regime, so do they overlook – or seek to justify – the negatives. This brings us back to the earlier point about textbooks representing the selected tradition of its authors. So, for example, there is no mention whatsoever of the 1989 militiary crackdown in Tiananmen Square. The Great Leap Forward is not ignored. Instead, it is explained away as little more than a tragedy of good intentions that was necessary to "fulfil the people's ever-increasing material and cultural needs" but failed because "the party and the people did not have enough understanding of the stage of development of socialism in our country" and "were impatient for success" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 29). The failure of the Cultural Revolution is conveniently blamed on others. Under the subheading "Chaos and Catastrophe," the authors state that "Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and their cronies colluded to create two counter-revolutionary organisations" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 33). Mao does come in for some criticism, but this is only for his apparent misapplication of the complex laws of Marxism:

> Mao incorrectly believed that there was revisionism in the party centre and that the party and country were facing the risk of a resurgence of capitalism. (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 32)

Pre-Modern-Era History Textbooks

Rule by Virtue

One of the key recurring themes of the pre-modern-era textbooks is the concept of "rule by virtue" (仁政, *renzheng*). By way of background, this idea is linked to the ancient Confucian theory of the "Mandate from Heaven" (天命, *tianming*) according to which rulers were selected by Heaven (天, *tian*) because of their virtuous qualities and were therefore duty-bound to govern in an ethical manner in accordance with the will of Heaven – as reflected by the will of the common people. According to the Confucian disciple Mencius, "Heaven sees with the eyes of its people. Heaven hears with the ears of its people" (Lau 1979: 144). If a ruler failed to fulfil this duty he forfeited the source of his legitimacy and with it his divinely ordained entitlement to rule. Consequently, he could be legitimately overthrown by a new and virtuous ruler, himself now holding the Mandate (命, *ming*). Rule by virtue is also sometimes referred to as "benevolent government" (仁政, *renzheng*).

Guo elaborates on this theory, noting how Confucian government was "primarily an exercise of ethics" (Guo 2003: 4) to such an extent that government officials had to be schooled in the art of benevolence as part of the qualification process. This process set the "gentleman" (君子, *junzi*) apart from the "common" or "small man" (小人, *xiaoren*). Once in office, the gentleman assumed a position of moral authority over the common man and was expected to use this authority by setting a wise and virtuous example. As Mencius wrote,

> the virtue of the gentleman is like wind; the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend. (Lau 1979: 96–97)

In practise, a virtuous ruler was not only required to safeguard the moral welfare of the people but also their material welfare. Guo refers to this as the principle of "benefitting the people" (礼民, *li min*) meaning that "rulers should not tax people heavily, should make sure people have enough food, shelter, and clothing and should control flood and relieve poverty" (Guo 2003: 6). In addition, a ruler "should not be pre-occupied with benefitting himself and indulging in his personal luxury and comfort" (Guo 2003: 6), as manifested by self-sacrifice and plain living.

The foremost practitioners of rule by virtue, according to the pre-modern textbooks, were the historically revered (although not historically verified) sage kings Yao (2357–2256 BC), Shun (2255–2205 BC), and Yu (2200–2100 BC). Under the tutelage of Yao, Shun was renowned for his willingness to work the fields with the common people and more generally for his devotion to the public good. Yu was well known for his introduction of flood control, which alleviated the suffering of his people and contributed to their prosperity. All three kings are lauded in Volume 1 of the Grade 7 textbook for "loving the people" and "sharing the joys and sorrows of the masses" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 14).

Later Chinese emperors are also applauded for their virtuous qualities. Tang Xuanzong (685–762), mentioned earlier, is acknowledged for his contribution to culture, education, and economic wealth, and credited directly with "practising benevolent government" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 14). Sui Wendi (569–618), founder of the Sui Dynasty (581–619), is praised for ensuring that there were enough food supplies to last for at least 50 years. Both he and Tang are described as "fully exerting themselves to make the country prosperous" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 3).

The virtuous traits of self-sacrifice and plain living are accorded to revered Chinese rulers. Emperor Yao is commended for choosing a simple and prudent existence, during which he "wore clothes of coarse hemp and ate plain rice and soup of wild vegetables" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 14). Tang Taizong (598–649) is praised for "rejecting luxury and abiding by simplicity," despite being better known among historians for his military and economic prowess (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 8). We are also told how, for a long time, Tang steadfastly refused to spend money on renovating his palace even though it was chilly and damp and was making him unwell (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 8). When Tang was finally persuaded to commence the renovations, he was considerate to his workforce so as not to be compared with notorious tyrants such as King Jie of the Xia Dynasty (1728–1675 BC) or King Zhou of Shang (1105–1046 BC), both of whom are borne out of Chinese legend – but are treated in the textbooks as historically verified.

Han Wendi (202–157 BC) is also applauded for refusing to exploit his position of power by showering himself in luxury. Han ruled for more than two decades "without adding to his palace or gardens"

(Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 67). Although he did once consider "building an open-air platform which would have cost a large sum of money," he realised that "the amount of money would be equal to the incomes of ten ordinary families" and concluded that "if in inheriting the palace of the former emperor I already feel ashamed, how could I still think of building a platform?" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 68). In a similarly prudent vein, Han refused to have an expensive tomb built for himself, requesting instead "that the tomb was simple and he did not allow the use of gold, silver or other such decorations, only clay tiles could be used" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 67). Han also insisted on dressing modestly. "His clothes were rather coarse, and even his beloved wife was not permitted to wear long skirts which reached the floor" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 67).

Just as frugal and self-sacrificing emperors are praised in the premodern-era textbooks, so are those with profligate tendencies vilified. Sui Yangdi (569–618), second emperor of the Sui Dynasty, is derided as the epitome of self-indulgence in ordering the construction of the Grand Canal on a whim just so that he could view a flower in Yangzhou, which apparently wilted in protest at his tyranny rather than let him admire it! Moreover, in carrying out Sui's orders to build the canal, countless numbers of his subjects perished (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 2). Emperor Qin Shihuang (260–210 BC), famed for uniting China under the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC), is roundly condemned for enforcing the construction of the Great Wall at tremendous human cost (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 62). Qin's lavish burial tomb is contrasted to the simple one constructed for Han Wendi (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 68).

Leading on from this, both Qin and Sui are lambasted for their abuse of the people; Qin for "increasing the people's burden" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 62), Sui for "exhausting the people and draining the treasury" – for which he is described as an "unprincipled tyrant" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 7). King Jie, whose despotism brought about the collapse of the Xia Dynasty, is described as being loathed by his subjects. As well as his cruelty, Jie had wildly extravagant culinary demands – the satisfaction of which required the service of hundreds of people from all over the country. Jin Huidi (259–307) of the Jin Dynasty (265–420) is criticised for dismissing the needs of his people by asking glibly "if the people have

no rice to eat, why not let them eat porridge?" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 108).

Popular Consent

Popular consent is a natural correlative of rule by virtue, in that a ruler who governs in accordance with such principles is likely to acquire this consent. According to Guo, a benevolent ruler strives constantly to attain the consent of his subjects "not by way of expressed public opinions but through winning the heart and minds of the people" (Guo 2003: 5). This formed a key tenet of the Mencian theory of "the people as the basis of the state" (民威邦本, *minwei bangben*) which held that governmental authority derived not from coercive laws or strong military control but from the people themselves. In order to understand the people and obtain their consent, a ruler needed to listen to their wishes and govern accordingly. As Mencius wrote:

> There is a way to get the kingdom – get the people and the kingdom is got. There is one way to get the people – get their hearts and the people are got. There is one way to get their hearts – it is simply to collect for them what they like, and not to lay on them what they dislike. The people turn to benevolent rule as water flows downwards, and as wild beasts fly to the wilderness. (Legge 1970: 300)

The importance attached to popular consent is more expressly stated in the modern-era section of the Chinese middle-school history syllabus, as we will see shortly. That said, we can see from the previous section on rule by virtue that benevolent leaders were clearly concerned with acquiring the support of the common people by governing in a considerate manner, while tyrannical ones had no such concerns. For example, King Jie is claimed to have "lost the people's hearts" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 21) as a result of his barbaric rule.

More clearly defined in the pre-modern textbooks are the consequences of failing to secure the consent of the people. The textbooks show how dynasty after dynasty was overthrown for losing the support of the people through failing to address their material and spiritual needs. These rebellions are often portrayed in a positive manner by applying terms such as "uprising" (起义, *qiyi*) as opposed to the more negative term "upheaval" (动荡, *dongdang*) – later used to de-

scribe the calamitous Cultural Revolution. The term "struggle" (斗争, *douzheng*) is also used, because of its positive association with class struggle or that against imperialism – being commonly referenced in the modern-era textbooks. Even uprisings that were unsuccessful are portrayed as justified if they were inspired by popular feelings of discontent towards those in charge. This is especially the case with the Taiping Rebellion (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 14) against the oft-denigrated Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), not least because the Qing relied heavily on foreign military support in defeating the rebellion in 1860.

Equality

An ongoing debate among some sinologists is whether or not equality was compatible with traditional Chinese political thinking, specifically Confucianism. In an attempt to establish a Confucian theory of human rights, Sim (2004) and Kim (2015) identify passages from the Analects and Mencius as clear evidence of a Confucian belief in equality. Others are less convinced. Lin Zexu and Ge Quan (1988) point to the entrenched moral and legal hierarchy of the Confucian social order as evidence of a Confucian antipathy towards such notions of equality.

Guo sides with the pro-equality school, suggesting that intrinsic to the idea of benefitting the people was the conviction that such benefits should be distributed on an equal basis. Indeed, Guo (2003: 6) goes as far as suggesting that equality was so deeply embedded in Confucianism that the fair distribution of wealth was synonymous with the Confucian understanding of good governance and social justice. Guo points to Mencius's support for the Zhou Dynasty's (1046–256 BC) communal land system, which was used to facilitate the egalitarian allocation of this resource. He also cites the Tang Dynasty's equal field system, which assigned land to every adult (including women), and the espousal by Xu Xing (circa 315 BC) of "social equality," drawing therein no distinction between scholar and manual worker or between ruler and ruled.

Although the fair distribution of economic wealth features more commonly in the modern-era textbooks, there are a number of critical references to wealth inequality in the pre-modern-era ones too. There is a strong condemnation of how the gap between rich and poor was apparent even as far back as the Dawenkou stone age period

(approximately 3500–2500 BC), as evidenced by the excavation works that took place in 1959 (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 10). The economic system of the Xia Dynasty (circa 2070–1600 BC) is derided for its inequality and described as "a tool of the slave owners oppressing the common people and slaves" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 20).

A slightly different approach to equality, to which an entire chapter is devoted in Volume 2 of the Grade 7 textbook, concentrates on equal access to the imperial examination system. This is praised as a breakthrough in meritocratic government, allegedly creating employment opportunities for people from all social backgrounds "giving talented and learned people the opportunity to enter into government posts of every rank and improving education and culture" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 19). Although there were similar exams in as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), the imperial examination system became a major pathway to office in the mid-Tang Dynasty and is portrayed in the textbooks as a key innovation bestowed upon the people by virtuous Tang emperors – who modified and perfected the exams to ensure fairness and impartiality. This commitment to equality is illustrated in one part of the chapter when Tang Xuanzong is described as incandescent with rage on discovering that the talentless son of a senior official had been allowed to pass the exams purely because of his wealthy heritage (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 18–19). Another part of the chapter features lyrics from a popular Tang song describing candidates from all class backgrounds filing out of the exam hall. This is accompanied by several pictorial illustrations of the scene too (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 18–19).

Legality

According to Guo (2003: 5), legality refers to the promulgation of a comprehensive set of laws. A ruler who governs in accordance with such laws is legitimate because he is deemed to be strong, well-organised, and competent. Guo draws an analogy with "rule by law," in that law in Chinese thinking was "considered to be a means to strengthen a ruler's power" (2003: 5). This is different from the earlier-mentioned rule of law, in which "the ruler is also restrained by law" (Guo 2003: 5). Guo's understanding of legality has strong echoes of the legalist approach adopted by successive Chinese dynasties, who relied heavily on detailed legal codes. These codes became "Confu-

cian-ised" over the years, incorporating the familial and moral hierarchy inherent in the Confucian social order such that the individual was treated by law in accordance with his or her position within this hierarchy (Bodde 1981).

There is a strong focus in the pre-modern syllabus on legality. Notwithstanding criticism of Qin Shihuang's brutality and extravagance, he is commended for his success in "unifying the six states" and "establishing the first centralised, feudal state in our nation's history" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013a: 56). Ming Taizu (1328–1398) is praised for the comprehensiveness of his legal and institutional reforms on founding the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), through which he

> reformed administrative structures and strengthened monarchical power, established three government departments directly under the control of the centre divided into civil, penal and military, abolished the imperial secretariat and established six departments which answered directly to the emperor. (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 88)

The laws and administrative institutions of several other dynasties are described in depth, without much evaluative comment. However, their frequent and detailed inclusion suggests their importance as a mode of legitimacy in the pre-modern-era textbooks.

There is also admiration for those rulers who adhered to the legal procedures that they put in place. One notable example is Genghis Khan (favourably represented in the textbooks), who unified the Mongolian tribes after "he was properly elected at a great council of Mongolian aristocrats" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013b: 66). This draws parallels with Weber's legal-rational theory of legitimacy.

Modern-Era History Textbooks

Turning now to the portrayal of good governance in the modern-era history textbooks, it would be wrong to say this representation is entirely derived from the ancient Confucian models that we have examined above. As we might expect, there are a number of references to the historical "inevitability" of Marxism – being asserted from the very beginning of the modern-era course. The progression of Chinese society is measured using Marx's six stages of development, and the textbooks refer frequently to the "exploiting" and "ex-

ploited" classes in classic Marxist fashion. In the chapters on nineteenth-century China, there are references to the "natural evolution" of Chinese capitalism. Perhaps ironically, orthodox Confucian-style movements such as the "Pure View school" (清意, *qingyi*) that sought to resist this phenomenon are criticised for attempting to forestall the apparently inexorable tide of capitalism (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 30).

Rule by Virtue

Notwithstanding these and other references to Marxism, the influence of Confucianism is considerably more palpable in the modern-era textbooks. Starting with rule by virtue, like his virtuous predecessors from the imperial period, Mao is depicted as devoting himself wholeheartedly to the welfare of the Chinese people. For example, in an effort to secure peace with KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) prior to the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War, Mao is portrayed as risking life and limb for his country. Indeed, the people were so moved by Mao's commitment to their welfare that they "cried hot tears" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 89). Jiang Zemin is portrayed as working tirelessly for the welfare of the people, albeit in a very different context. He is quoted as saying:

> Based on our economic development, we must work hard to improve the income of those in both the city and the countryside and constantly improve the people's conditions in regards to food, clothing, housing, transport and utilities, perfect the social security system, improve health and well-being and increase the quality of life. (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 113)

The Party as a whole is portrayed as ruling virtuously, particularly in its considerate treatment of "wrongdoers." Examples include sparing Chiang's life following his arrest by the CCP in December 1936 (known as the "Xi'an incident") and (allegedly) allowing former landlords their fair share of land during the Land Reform Campaign of 1947–1951 (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 12).

The Confucian traits of self-sacrifice and plain living are very apparent in the modern-era textbooks. Mao is described as having endured extreme poverty and adversity in his quest to liberate China from the chains of imperialism. The physical adversities of those who participated in the Long March are repeatedly emphasised and in-

clude a poem by Mao that begins "the Red Army does not fear the hardship of the Long March" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 59). Conditions under the CCP's Yanan revolutionary base are described as "extremely difficult," with Mao and the CCP Central Committee "commanding the whole operation from the gloom and cold of dug-out caves" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 59).

Like Mao, Deng Xiaoping is presented as selfless in forfeiting personal luxury for the good of the people. One chapter contains an anecdote in which Deng repeatedly refused to burden a frail rickshaw driver sent to collect him as he arrived in Nanjing in 1945, with the Red Army having taken the city from KMT troops. Instead, Deng insisted on helping the old man push the rickshaw until Deng was "dripping with sweat." The rickshaw driver was so moved by Deng's actions that "hot tears filled his eyes" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 97). Another passage claims that Sun Yat-sen prevented an elderly merchant from kowtowing to him in accordance with ancient custom, insisting that "the president is no more than a servant of the people and must work for all the people of the nation" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 107).

The emphasis on self-sacrifice in the modern-era textbooks can be linked to government policy, specifically the Party's efforts to combat official corruption. One of the cornerstones of Xi Jinping's incumbency is his anti-corruption drive, initiated in 2012 to crack down not just on high-profile cadres but also the local level that they exist on (so-called tigers and flies), who often incur the wrath of local residents by flaunting their wealth in driving expensive cars or living in fancy accommodation. Xi's campaign is the biggest ever launched by the CCP, and has reportedly led to the indictment of over 100,000 people – including over 120 high-ranking officials (China Power Team 2017). It has also been a useful tool for removing Xi's political opponents, which in turned helped to clear the way for the constitutional changes made in March 2018 that abolished the two-term limit on the Chinese presidency.

Popular Consent

The importance of popular consent and the people's will features heavily in the modern-era textbooks. Mao's decision to attend peace talks with Chiang in 1945, despite the likelihood that they were a trap,

is praised as representing the wishes of residents of Chongqing (where the talks took place):

> The citizens of Chongqing from every walk of life wrote to the Xinhua Daily to express their delight and their hopes for the peace talks. (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 89)

We are also told how the masses "urgently sought land reform" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 12), an aspiration to which the CCP were receptive and duly implemented. Party leaders are shown as striving hard for closer relations with Hong Kong (Deng) and Taiwan (Jiang) based on "the fervent desire and will of all Chinese people" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 69). This issue is presented in a highly subjective and emotive manner, by using expressions such as "the pain of being separated from one's own flesh and blood" and featuring pictures of heartfelt reunions between relatives from the mainland China and Hong Kong or Taiwan (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 67). To add weight to this, there is a photo of people in Hong Kong celebrating the return of the territory to China in 1997 (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 61). In addition there is a song expressing the Macanese people's wish to be reunited with the mainland, ending with the line: "Mother, I want to come back, Mother!" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 62).

The failure to secure popular consent is associated with illegitimate rulers in the modern-era textbooks. We are told time and again how the KMT's inability to unite China during the Nanjing Decade (1927–1937) and its defeat during the Chinese Civil War were due to a woeful neglect of the people's will. Some CCP leaders are even described in this way. The rapid demise of Hua Guofeng is attributed to his reliance on the "Two Whatevers" (两个凡是, *liangge fanshe*), which "attracted the discontent of everyone across the country" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 18). Other vilified communist figures such as Lin Biao and Jiang Qing are described as acting contrary to the will of the people (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 33).

But the significance of popular consent in China goes beyond modes of legitimacy contained in Chinese history textbooks. In the absence of nationwide multiparty elections, the CCP is constantly at pains to insist that it came to power through a wave of popular support and derives its legitimacy by acting in accordance with the will of the people – often phrased as though this is part of its historical mission. For example, the Preamble to the 1982 constitution asserts that:

> After waging hard, protracted and tortuous struggles, armed or otherwise, the Chinese people of all nationalities led by the Communist Party of China with Chairman Mao Zedong as its leader, ultimately in 1949 overthrew the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, won the great victory of the new-democratic revolution and founded the People's Republic of China. (National People's Congress 2004)

The modern-era textbooks serve to reinforce this oft-repeated perspective.

Equality

Equality is flagged as an important feature of good governance in the modern-era textbooks, as it is in the pre-modern-era ones too. Particular praise is heaped on the CCP for the success of the Land Reform Campaign, which aimed to ensure that every family was allocated land of roughly equal fertility. The campaign is also credited with ending exploitation, enhancing the material quality of people's lives, and directly involving poor and landless peasants in its implementation. This is illustrated not just in the written text but also pictorially. For example, photographs of downtrodden peasants from the pre-land reform era are carefully juxtaposed against those seemingly overcome with joy in the wake of the campaign as they each receive the title deeds to their new land (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 12). Similar praise is accorded to the CCP's drive towards further rural collectivisation during the 1950s, as family plots were merged into larger collective units and later communes. A model commune in Anyang county is singled out for acclaim as being both productive in its output of grain and egalitarian in its subsequent distribution (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 23).

The Party is commended for its more recent contributions to equality in areas such as employment, health insurance, and social security. This conveniently ties in with its ongoing attempts to counter the massive inequality created during the last three decades of economic reform, although unsurprisingly the textbooks do not say anything about the abandonment of the socialist principles of equality during the current reform era. For example, there is an optimistic mention of how under the new system, people, the work unit, and the state "share the burden three ways" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 114). Equality of education under the CCP is also applauded,

most notably the national standardisation of Grade 9 education in the year 2000. This is accompanied by an anecdote about poor rural children from Shanxi Province, who had previously wished for nothing more than the "sunlight of education to fall on them" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 98).

Legality

Turning finally to legality, as with the pre-modern-era textbooks, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of legal institutions and governing structures. Acclaim is given to some of the pivotal laws implemented during the early post-revolutionary period, including the 1954 Constitution – described as "the first constitution in our country's history to truly reflect the interests of the people" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 21). There is also support for the promulgation in 1950 of the New Marriage Law and the Agrarian Reform Law (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 12), both of which are portrayed as hugely significant in transforming the lives and improving the rights of Chinese citizens.

Mao's rise to power is littered with references to the formal measures that sanctioned his ascent, including his appointment to the Party's Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) at the 1935 Zunyi Conference (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013c: 60) and his election as Chairman of the Central Committee in 1949 (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 2). This draws further on Weberian notions of legal-rational legitimacy, with Mao's political ascent being achieved within the established legal parameters of the day. By contrast, three entire chapters of Volume 1 of the Grade 8 textbook are devoted to the many "errors" committed by Mao and other Party leaders during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, when the power of his cult of personality was used to undermine the Party's formal decision-making procedures.

Deng Xiaoping is credited with the introduction of much-needed reforms to the legal system, in the wake of the often lawless Mao era. These reforms included a new constitution in 1982, new civil and penal codes, as well as legal reforms in education, employment, social security, and the environment (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 40). Deng is commended for "using law to govern the country" and implementing "socialism with Chinese characteristics, with the constitution as the nucleus," which meant that "in political life, economic life,

and social and cultural life, the law could be relied on" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 40).

The importance attached to laws and legality is also apparent in the praise given to international treaties and agreements to which China has acceded, and in particular to those which China has played a leading role in. Examples include Jiang's chairmanship of the 2001 APEC Conference (which resulted in the so-called Shanghai Consensus) and the creation of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation in the same year, which is described in glowing terms as "the first international organisation named after a Chinese city" (Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe 2013d: 83).

Conclusion

We have seen in this article how Chinese middle-school history textbooks portray the CCP as the standard-bearers of a distinctive Chinese tradition of legitimate rule. This tradition is based on ancient theories espoused by Confucius and Mencius, and practised over the centuries by benevolent sage kings and virtuous emperors. Just to be clear, the link between past and present is not referred to explicitly in the textbooks. Nowhere does it say in emphatic terms that the CCP is the inheritor of a glorious Confucian legacy of good governance and simply continuing where its predecessors left off. There are at least two reasons for this. First, as noted at the beginning of the article, it is an unwritten rule that the content of history textbooks should maintain a veneer of objectivity, rather than overtly seek to persuade the reader of the author's own (possibly revised) version of events. Second, the CCP is, after all, a communist party that came to power on the back of a strong anti-Confucian rhetoric. In effect, they are meant to represent a "new" China that got rid of the old ways of doing things rather than just continued with them.

But the obvious overlap between traditional and modern modes of legitimacy is clearly more than just a coincidence or accident. The use of quasi-political themes has, as outlined, been key to the CCP's legitimacy discourse for some time now; there are other examples of this too, for example "human rights." In articulating an official Chinese position on human rights since the early 1990s, the CCP has repeatedly been at pains to emphasise the historical and cultural context of the concept – often as a defence against Western critics of its

human rights record (Information Office of the State Council 2016). This has precipitated a lively academic debate about the true philosophical roots of Chinese human rights thinking, with some academics identifying a Chinese theory of rights with Confucian characteristics as was revealed. A similar pattern has occurred in relation to Chinese democracy, particularly since the publication of the CCP's white paper on democracy (Information Office of the State Council 2005).

In September 2015, PSC member Wang Qishan broke a long-standing taboo by openly discussing the question of the CCP's legitimacy at a high-profile international conference in Beijing. During his speech, Wang insisted that "the CCP's legitimacy lies in history" (Ruan 2015). Since then, there have been increasing suggestions that the CCP is preparing a white paper on legitimate governance. It seems likely from what we have seen in this article and from Wang's speech that such a concept will be firmly rooted in China's past.

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