Introduction

Let us imagine a 7-year-old Chinese boy entering the first grade in 1904. He (no girls have been admitted to the official schools yet) will have a long day. He devotes at least two hours every day to incomprehensible Confucian classics. Short passages of these he memorizes and recites. His Chinese language readers are simpler, but still assume he had already learned at least a few hundred basic characters at home. The stories in them deal with simple events surrounding school and family. On alternate days, he studies self-cultivation, history, and geography. His self-cultivation textbooks have little stories about good boys, and his teacher spells out the moral demands of filial piety, respect for elders, and patriotism. Many of these lessons correspond with the stories in his readers – not in a one-to-one fashion, but still with an echoing effect. His history and geography textbooks are more objective and focus on recounting facts. In his first year or two, he learns about his local history and geography, and at the more advanced grades moves on to China and the world.

Most students did not go on to upper primary school, but let us say this student did. In upper primary school – let us say he is 13 years old and in grade 7 and the year is 1910 – he is beginning to have a real understanding of the classics. His readers are introducing him to excerpts from the great prose and poetry of past masters. And in addition to the officially prescribed Confucian classics, his school uses a modern self-cultivation textbook. Here he learns some simple definitions of the state and patriotism as well as stories of filiality and neighborliness. He begins to study a foreign language, and chooses Japanese, along with a study of mathematics and science in greater depth. Once a day he lines up with his classmates, and they go outside to practice drills. His Chinese history textbook, over a sequence of four semesters, describes the origins of Chinese civilization, the rise and fall of dynasties, and the triumphs and sorrows of his own Qing dynasty. It teaches him to hope in constitutional reform, for with a constitution the Qing will revive and China will become strong and prosperous again. His geography textbooks teach him about the races and religions of the world, and also a good deal of practical information about the human and physical geography of China. His home province, say, is famous and important for its coal and iron works.

It is quite likely he is reading revolutionary pamphlets and battered copies of smuggled revolutionary newspapers that his classmates are passing around. That is a subject for another book, however. Assuming he rides out the revolution, as most did, and then goes on to middle school, our student might be in grade 12 in 1915, aged 18 and thinking about graduating soon. He reads only excerpts of the Confucian classics in his Chinese classes, which take up the plurality of the school day. He takes classes in ethics ("self-cultivation"), but most of the lessons are about China's political structure and the nature of republicanism, and there is less about filial piety. His history classes say a little less about the glories of old China and more about the coming of the Republic. His geography textbook laments the loss of Chinese territory such as Hong Kong and Macau to foreigners and urges the Chinese people to unite to defend their territory. After graduation from his middle school, there is a possibility he could go on to university – in which case we might imagine him four years later in May of 1919 marching in protest against the Beijing government and the Versailles Treaty, which ignored Chinese interests in spite of the contribution of Chinese laborers to the Allied war effort. The May Fourth movement, as it became known, reshaped Chinese politics. (I believe it resulted in part from the ideas and behaviors instilled in the schools.) Or he may have gone to work as a teacher, a major source of employment for school graduates as the educational system continued to expand.

Let us now imagine a 7-year-old entering lower primary school a few years after the first boy graduated from middle school. In 1920, in first grade, she encounters no Confucian classics. She attends classes with boys, causing her parents some anxiety. She learns how to read simple stories about families, schools like hers, and the flag of the Republic and patriotism. Her language readers also introduce her to the names of tools and clothing, plants and animals, even the flags of different nations. In the introductory self-cultivation class she learns of the importance of respect for elders, generosity, and love of school. Like her readers, her self-cultivation textbook starts with pictures but soon moves on to simple stories. Some of these are about taking care of parents and respecting teachers, and some are about the morality of the Chinese people and the relationship between family and state. Her history book introduces the great sage heroes who first formed China, offers simple stories about the many dynasties, and concludes triumphantly with the 1911 Revolution and the founding of the Republic. Her geography textbook discusses how large is the Chinese territory and how numerous its people.

In 1926, aged 13, she enrolls in her first year of a girls' lower middle school (grade 7). The establishment of this school followed the reorganization of the educational system in 1923 – under the old system, she would have been in higher primary school. Her textbooks are mostly written in the vernacular, not classical Chinese. It is easier to read the vernacular, but the teacher insists on a

strange northern pronunciation of many characters. Maths and sciences take more class time, and she decides to learn English as her foreign language. Her Chinese readers have lots of stories about Chinese heroes of the past; there is some fiction and poetry, but also many lessons about the contemporary world, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Edison, and other heroes of the modern world. Her Chinese readers also introduce her to the classical Chinese grammar and excerpts from the ancient classics and original literary works. She does not take separate courses in civics (which has replaced self-cultivation), history, and geography, but rather a big class on the study of society. However, her readings still deal with these topics separately. So in civics units there are many discussions of how to conduct school assemblies, and many details about the institutions of the Republic, even though these are not fully functional. Nonetheless, she learns that by understanding the role of the citizens, she and her classmates will be able to revive China. In history she is introduced to both Western history and more detailed accounts of China's long history. And her Chinese geography lessons talk as much about foreign relations and territorial issues as about China's rivers and mountains. She also learns some sports and takes special classes in home management and needlework.

At age 18, she is in her final year of senior middle school (grade 12). The year is 1931, and the threat from Japan consumes her classmates, her teachers, and even her parents. Nonetheless, they agree that it is important to continue with classes in order to help China. In this, her senior year, she is taking both Chinese and English classes every day, as well as both world history and world geography. These classes stress China's vulnerable position in a world of great powers. She is also studying the Three People's Principles, first thought up by the great revolutionary founder of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen. She learns that the Chinese people need racial unity to oppose the threats of imperialism and Communism (as she knew already). She also learns that the Three People's Principles are based on traditional Confucian morality: not a break with tradition but a culmination. She concludes that Sun's formula is the basis for building a new Chinese nation, but she is not quite sure that Nationalist government is strong enough or dedicated enough to do this. It will require all the people's participation, but the government wants to limit the actions students can take.

After graduation, she too might just possibly go on to university. Constantly dismayed by the failure of the Nanjing government to resist Japanese incursions, in 1935 she joins the mass student protest known to history as the December 9th Movement to Resist Japan and Save the Nation, which she vaguely understands was secretly organized by the Communists in Beijing but which spread to other cities on its own momentum. Or instead of university she may have taken a job as a teacher and helped to promote the New Life movement, the campaign for moral revitalization (and anti-communism) promoted

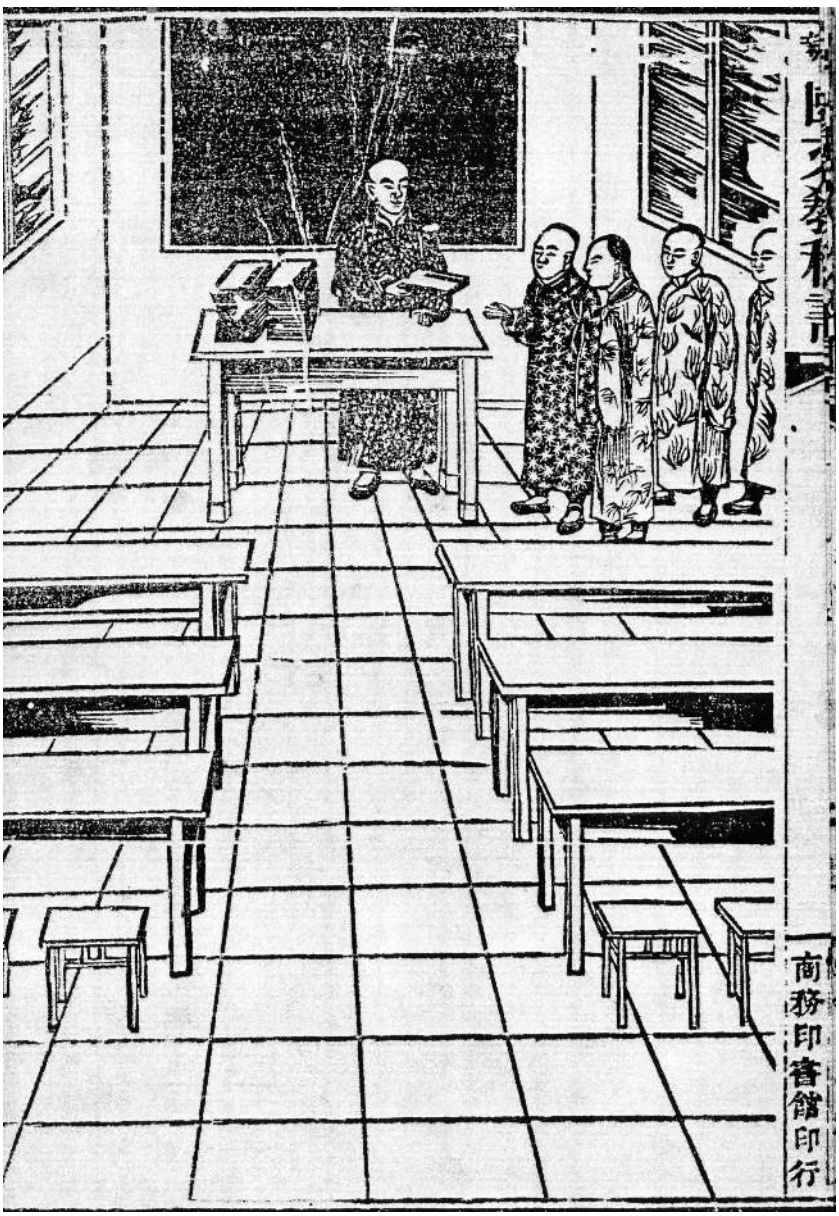

Figure 1 Students receiving their new books at the beginning of the semester. Their hairstyle and gowns indicate that they are boys in the late Qing period. The lesson this woodblock illustrates is called "The School."

by the Nationalist government. Few educated Chinese avoided some sort of civic involvement and political commitment.

This book is written with two types of readers in mind: first, students of modern Chinese history who want to know how textbooks fit into the broader cultural changes of the period; and second, students of education who want to know something about Chinese textbooks, one of many national cases of this peculiar artifact of modernity.

Textbooks are interesting. This counterintuitive notion does not mean that they are all fun to read. Many make the eyelids heavy. But they are an important feature of modern culture. No modern society does without them. A century ago, they were one of the very few widely available sources of knowledge. Today, when moderns are surrounded by a cacophony of sources of knowledge, they are one of the few books many people read cover to cover.

This book is a study of Chinese primary and secondary school textbooks from the beginning of the state school system at the turn of the twentieth century to the demise of the central "Nanjing government" following Japan's invasion of China in 1937. It is a book about what certain people were thinking and writing in a certain textual genre, or more specifically, about what textbook authors, schoolteachers, commercial publishers, and educational officials thought students should learn. By and large these people were themselves members of an educated elite that placed great hopes in education for the future of China. Some of them envisioned a coming era of mass schooling, but places in China's classrooms remained limited. Most peasant and worker families could not afford school fees, or even the lost labor of their children. Thus schooling was largely limited to the children of elites and designed to produce the next generation of leaders.

This book focuses on how Chinese schools conveyed traditional and "new style" knowledge and sought to socialize students to a rapidly changing society in the first decades of the twentieth century. The categories of knowledge covered in textbooks were broad. In fact, textbooks did much to establish those categories in the minds of students: categories such as "geography" and "physics" and the like. School subjects also included language and literature and the Chinese classics. Brought together, these various forms of knowledge promised to teach students not merely how to behave but how the world worked. They explained the operations of the physical and human worlds, not least the evolution of society, the institutions of the economy, and the foundations of the nation-state. Through textbooks among other means, educators sought ways to link these abstractions to the concrete lives of children. Thus this book is also about the effort to spread enlightenment, which is to say true understanding of the world. As this was a world in which modern China was struggling to be

born, nationalism was a major feature of the enlightenment project (but not its only feature) and played a prominent role in textbooks.

Themes such as enlightenment, nationalism, and citizenship are familiar in many studies of modern China, and they shape much of this book as well. Yet whereas histories of modern China emphasize crisis and even collapse, textbooks highlight a story of rebuilding. If, broadly speaking, the textbooks I examine in the following pages reflected the intellectual zeitgeist, they also reveal a multiplicity of voices and even dissent. Perhaps more importantly, they reveal the ever-changing boundaries of what counted as basic and necessary knowledge. Not incidentally, the production and "consumption" of textbooks in China were part of global currents of technology, capital, and ideas. By studying Chinese textbooks in the late Qing period (1902–1911), the early republican period (1912–1927), and the Nanjing Decade (1928–1937), we can trace the major questions of each era as its debates were reformulated for the consumption of children. Who is Chinese, and what does it mean to be Chinese? What are the rights and duties of citizens? What is the correct attitude toward the past? How can social problems such as poverty be ameliorated? How can imperialist pressures be resisted? How much of traditional Chinese culture should be continued or modified? This last debate informed the changing content of "moral education," where norms, skills, and knowledge meshed confusingly together.[1] All these debates remain living questions today.

We can read textbooks through the lenses of the histories of pedagogy, of consumption and reading, and of textual and cultural production. My study largely focuses on the latter questions – how textbooks were written to convey "messages" that we often also see in journalism, novels, dramas, and other cultural expressions of the period. Historical and literary studies have told us much about this period; in this book, I hope to add not only detail – important as textbooks are in their own right – but a better sense of the subtle interplay of ideas and social forces in the making of modern Chinese culture. From the Qing, to the early Republic, to the Nanjing Decade: although by the mid-1930s the government exercised unprecedented control over textbooks, a close look at their content reminds us that state-building remained a troubled, tumultuous, and contested process.

In this book I discuss four basic types of textbooks: Chinese language readers, morality and civics textbooks, history textbooks, and geography textbooks. I have looked at but a small fraction of the vast number of textbooks approved for the state school system in this period. Textbooks could be enormously profitable for publishers, and many attempted to get into the business; individual schools and teachers also sometimes printed their own textbooks. The industry was dominated by a few major publishing houses, as I discuss in Chapter 1,

[1] Zheng Hang, *Zhongguo jindai deyu kechengshi*.

and I have consulted their major textbook series. Using library collections in China, I have also read some less popular textbooks: I cannot say if these were representative, but they at least show some of the sheer variety of textbooks on the market.

My study covers those textbooks that deal with social and cultural topics, whereas it neglects the sciences. Science education was enormously important, especially at the secondary level where educators sought to train the engineers, agronomists, and researchers of the future, but textbooks in chemistry and mathematics were not directly designed to form *citizens*; even biology textbooks did not speak to the social Darwinism that infected history and geography textbooks (in the following pages I do discuss hygiene, which was treated as an aspect of civics rather than biology). I also neglected teaching materials that were not published as textbooks. I largely neglected textbooks used outside of the state system (private schools and missionary schools) and also the textbooks written expressly for girls. Finally, as suggested earlier, I have tended to read textbooks as pronouncements about socialization and knowledge rather than through the lens of pedagogy and official educational policies.[2] This book is thus not an institutional history, nor a study of student culture.[3]

What I have still done, I hope, is present an overview of the main substance of the education received by most students, exclusive of the sciences. Textbooks are documents of some interest in their own right. They open a window on the tumultuous transformation of the early twentieth century in society and politics and – of special concern in this book – intellectual life. On the one hand, they display a multitude of voices with reference to these changes. And they show how knowledge changed over time. On the other hand, textbooks tended to exclude the most radical and the most conservative views, leaving behind a general perspective best understood as "mainstream reformist." At least until the Nanjing government was able to impose greater uniformity after 1928, textbooks were primarily shaped by the great publishing houses and market forces, individual authors, teachers and principals, and local educational officials, although textbooks were certainly shaped to meet official curricular goals.

[2] For pedagogical approaches to history textbooks, see, for example, Carol Morgan, ed., *Inter- and Intracultural Differences*; Volker R. Berghahn and Hanna Schissler, eds., *Perceptions of History*; and Hilary Bourdillon, ed., *History and Social Studies.*

[3] Institutional histories of Chinese education are numerous; some are cited in Chapter 1, where I briefly discuss the curriculum. The political role of students has received much scholarly attention, but examinations of student culture are still a neglected topic; for the late Qing, see Sang Bing, *Wan-Qing xuetang xuesheng yu shehui bianqian*; and for the republican period, Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*. Scholarship on textbooks has just begun to emerge in the past few years. Much of this work has unearthed valuable information about the lives of authors and publishers, the processes of editing and publishing textbooks, the role of government, and so forth; I know of no work that follows the approach I am using here of simply "reading" textbooks.

The historian Ying-shih Yü has emphasized the radicalization of Chinese intellectuals across the twentieth century.[4] But at a time when primary school graduates were considered intellectuals, we must also note that as far as we can tell, most educated Chinese believed what they were taught: China needed to reform its institutions, to steer a course between Westernization and sound moral traditions, and to promote and deserve the loyalty of its citizens. Proud revolutionary notes were sounded in republican-period textbooks but calls for radical or totalistic upheaval were rare.

The truly radical aspect of textbooks lay in the epistemological shifts associated with social Darwinism, utilitarianism, and the reification of the nation-state. Textbooks are tools of socialization comparable to other tools in certain respects, such as parental discipline, peer pressure, and today mass media, social media, and advertising. Textbooks, like parents, may display a cynical intent as well: do as I say, not as I do. Textbooks are also a purgative, first taken and then regurgitated. What is retained from them – how much is "returned to the teacher" – is another question. But through simple stories and direct exposition, repeated often, textbooks make their mark on whole societies. The narrativization of knowledge is emphasized in the pages below. Narrativization is a powerful way of making meaning through the construction of stories – with characters that students may identify with – about daily life, right and wrong, and the actions of great men and even nations.

Textbooks are designed to transmit knowledge, not produce new knowledge. But they may reflect new discoveries quickly or slowly as the case may be. As the following chapters show, Chinese textbooks were often very quick to reflect the new discoveries of intellectuals studying the West or working on problems of Chinese history and geography. Chinese textbooks were thus part of the global circulation of knowledge, refracted through Chinese intellectuals' sense of their nation's needs and functioning as a kind of mediator between cosmopolitan knowledge production and vernacular culture. They reveal what was largely accepted as knowledge at the time, both that which was traditional in nature and that which was unprecedented. Much moral education and a good deal of historical identity as taught in modern textbooks were directly derived from ancient classics. Yet many principles basic to understanding the world were essentially new – racial categories and social Darwinism most prominent among them.

It is true that from the point of view of child development, textbooks are a very small part of the story. Their impact is easily outweighed by the role of parents, community, various school activities, religious institutions, and popular culture. However, textbooks are central to political socialization and knowledge formation in all modern societies, precisely because they represent

[4] Ying-shih Yü, "The Radicalization of China."

the best opportunity for state elites to shape children. In the West, compulsory and universal education – and its textbooks – spread with the democratization and industrialization of the nineteenth century. Put cynically, elites wanted youth who could read, do simple math, and follow instructions. A two-tiered educational system (classical education for elites; mechanical training for the masses) made this clear. Put idealistically, elites wanted youth who could become responsible citizens, protected by their education from the tricks of demagogues, and able to become economically productive members of society. Universal schooling for boys was becoming well developed in the North Atlantic world by the mid-nineteenth century, and peripheral regions (central and southern Europe, South America) were not too far behind. In Meiji Japan, a national school system was in place by the 1880s. In this light, China's educational reforms of the late Qing were not too far behind either. The great accomplishment of modern Chinese textbooks was to create a new textual community whose members were able to communicate with one another across dialects and regions. What the classics and the examination system did for late imperial China, textbooks did for the early twentieth century. Students became citizens as they learned the language of nation and civic responsibility.

Chapter 1 describes the construction of the state school system, a project officially begun in 1902, which was led by national and local reform-minded gentry, by government officials, by textbook publishers, and increasingly by professional educators themselves. The goals of these groups did not always correspond, and the Chinese notion of proper childhood development was in constant flux. The remaining chapters take up textbooks in four different subjects. Chapter 2 shows how language readers, which students studied daily, not only introduced them to vocabulary and grammar, but presented lessons on all the other subjects of the school day (except for the sciences, though they included short biographies of famous scientists). Moral lessons took the form of stories about ordinary students who did good deeds and famous cases from the pages of history. Fables with talking animals and tales of generals, emperors, and inventors filled many readers. Language readers conveyed political lessons, sometimes in clear dissent against official views. Even more, they taught students what roles they might fill as they grew up.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on textbooks that taught self-cultivation, ethics, civics, and hygiene. This was also a subject taught every day. If language readers conveyed lessons through indirection – through narratives that, like all stories, could be read in different ways – ethics textbooks did more to tell students directly how to behave. Ethics and civics textbooks did use stories to gain students' attention, but they also told students what to think. Nonetheless, they also took students into the world of political debates between tradition and

modernity, conservatism and progressivism, individualism and communitarianism, though expressed in simpler terms. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss Chinese history textbooks. History and geography were taught on alternate days. It was through history that students learned what it meant to be Chinese – heirs to great racial and cultural traditions that had long flourished and in which students could take pride. Even though the country had seen troubles since the nineteenth century, as history textbooks frankly noted, it was history that taught students their duty to resolve those troubles. Finally, Chapter 7 shows how geography textbooks taught students to think of China as a bounded territory that was composed of diverse – but unified – peoples shaped by a rich land. Geography textbooks defined space by connecting children to circles of community that expanded from neighborhood to nation and the world. If history textbooks rooted Chinese-ness through time, geography textbooks linked Chinese-ness to place.

The chapters that follow point to tensions between the official curriculum and actual textbooks in particular places. But by and large, textbook writers represented mainstream elite views that were not too far off from official views. Indeed, increasingly the official curriculum was shaped by the attitudes of professional educators who were consulted by officials. The basic ingredients of Republican ideology were widely shared: that China needed to survive in an international order of social Darwinian struggle, that a strong state needed a strong citizenry, that a citizenry needed to understand itself both as individuals with rights-and-duties vis-à-vis the state and as members of complex social orders, that patriotism required strong minds and strong bodies, and that women too were citizens – at least to some degree. Chinese intellectuals had begun to propagate theories of citizenship in the 1890s, and these contributed to the revolutionary movement that culminated in 1911 and continued to inform social movements and protests throughout the republican period. Chinese textbooks gave these abstract theories concrete form. Neither the curriculum nor any textbook was politically neutral. They taught the Chinese to be Chinese, but they were torn between competing views of a citizenship that emphasized the people's autonomous participation in the processes of government and a citizenship that emphasized the individual's membership in a political society that was an organic whole.