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Long Live Chairman Mao: Propaganda About Mao Zedong in Chinese Primary School Textbooks (1984–1999)

SHENGLAN ZHOU♦
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Portugal

This article examines the portrayal of Mao Zedong in Chinese literacy textbooks published within the context of the Patriotic Education Campaign during the 1980s and 1990s. Employing critical discourse analysis, this study reveals that Mao is depicted as an authoritative, charismatic, and industrious political leader who maintains a frugal lifestyle and close ties with the people. The textbooks primarily highlight his role during the Chinese revolutions and the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC), while avoiding discussion of his later political conflicts and flawed economic policies. This deliberate approach allows the Chinese Communist Party to construct a favorable image of Mao, aimed at preserving Maoism's legitimacy among younger generations of Chinese who may not be well-acquainted with the Chinese revolutions. Consequently, the collective memories cultivated about Mao through the education system serve as a form of pro-regime propaganda, illustrating the intricate and symbiotic relationship between education and propaganda in the PRC.

Keywords: propaganda, education, Mao Zedong, representation, Patriotic Education Campaign

Mao Zedong (1893–1976) was one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the top-ranking political leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC) until his death. After establishing the PRC in 1949, he launched several internal political campaigns, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and commanded several wars, including the Korean War (1950–53) and the Sino-Indian War (1962; Terrill, 1980; Zhong, 1986). As the first chairman of the PRC, Mao was an influential political leader whose career experienced ebbs and flows. David Shambaugh (2021) characterizes Mao as a charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational transformational leader who brought about several qualitatively transformative impacts on Chinese society, whether political, social, or ideological (p. 4).

After Mao's death, representations and discourses of these ebbs and flows generated numerous debates in China. The vastly admired figure of "Chairman Mao" created during the Cultural Revolution was challenged by alternative discourses and criticism in the following two decades, when Deng Xiaoping (1904–97), one of Mao's major political enemies, ascended to power.

Shenglan Zhou: szhou@ucp.pt
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In the immediate aftermath of Mao's death, the CCP, learning from the Soviet Union's experience after Joseph Stalin's death, decided that "the great system of Mao Zedong Thought" could not be separated from the history of the revolution (Engman, 2021, p. 185). The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP, held in December 1978, marked a fundamental moment in modern Chinese history. It initiated a series of profound economic reforms and policy shifts, signifying China's transition from the rigid, centrally planned economic doctrines of the Maoist era to a more open, market-oriented economic model. This landmark meeting laid the groundwork for the country's rapid economic growth and integration into the global economy (Horsley, 2016). However, the legacy of Mao and Maoism was still emphasized as an important element during the creation process of "New China" in the post-reform era. The assessment of Mao Zedong by the CCP after his death clearly showed this attitude. In 1979, Hu Yaobang (1915–89), head of the Central Department of Propaganda at the time, acknowledged that Chairman Mao, together with the Party and socialism, created New China and kept the nation together, even though the Party was ready to admit his mistakes (Engman, 2021, p. 185).

Subsequently, in the 1981 "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" [关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议 (from now on "Resolution")] (Chinese Communist Party [CCP], 1981), Mao Zedong was acknowledged as a great revolutionary leader and the principal founder of the PRC, whose contributions were integral to the Party's history. However, the "Resolution" (CCP, 1981) also critically addressed his mistakes, particularly highlighting the severe consequences of the Great Leap Forward, the subsequent Great Famine (1958–61), and the Cultural Revolution. The first two were depicted as a "leftist mistake," which caused "severe loss" to the nation and the people. The Cultural Revolution was described as a complete mistake and was characterized as a period of internal chaos that caused severe damage to the country, the party, and the ethnic groups. The "Resolution" (CCP, 1981) further stated that Mao's later years were marked by an excessive concentration of power and misguided policies, leading to political and social turmoil and setbacks in China's development. However, Mao was also portrayed as a victim of the manipulation of the "counter-revolutionary gang."

Nevertheless, as the communist regime faced a series of external and internal challenges and a period of uncertainty during the last two decades of the 20th century, the adherence to Maoism was more emphasized, while Mao's mistakes were downplayed. In the Dengist period, along with "socialist modern construction," education in revolutionary thought was also crucial to the security of rule and the legitimacy of the CCP. The Party's propaganda agenda of this period included elements of Marxist-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought that complemented the Dengist emphasis on "seeking truth" (Johnson, 2021, p. 249).

By the end of the 1980s, China was marked by widespread student protests, which highlighted the vulnerabilities of the CCP's governance. This period revealed the dangers of deviating from the principle of anti-bourgeois liberalization, with Deng fearing that China could become a "loose sheet of sand" (Deng, 1985, para. 3)—politically incoherent and economically stagnant. The international response to the 1989 protests, including foreign sanctions, coupled with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War, challenged China's political control and reaffirmed the CCP's concerns about internal dissent and external

pressures. This era continued the struggle for ideological dominance that was rooted in Mao's era due largely to the cultural security concerns of the party leaders (Johnson, 2021, pp. 250–251).

Against this historical background, the CCP launched a nationalist propaganda campaign conducted on behalf of "patriotic education" in the 1980s, which was intensified throughout the 1990s. This campaign aimed to "educate" the so-called post-80s and post-90s generations of China so that they would feel proud of their country and recognize the CCP as the only legitimate ruler of China. These two generations grew up in a society characterized by rapid economic growth and ever-increasing Western influence and had no direct contact with the first generation of CCP leaders. They were seen by the party-state as vulnerable to the "Peaceful Evolution" strategies of "international hostile forces" (The General Office of the National Educational Commission, 1991, para. 6) The program of the campaign included a host of curricular and extracurricular activities such as the revision of textbooks, short trips to places related to Chinese revolutions, and the visualization of "entertainment" media products with didactic functions (Naftali, 2018, p. 705; Zhou & Wang, 2017, p. 169). This campaign, which has remained in the Chinese educational and cultural spheres ever since, is considered an important cause of the ongoing populist nationalistic sentiment of Chinese youth since the 1990s (Fang & Repnikova, 2017; Shan & Chen, 2021).

Propaganda and Education in China

Propaganda and education have a synergistic and interconnected relationship in the PRC. Propaganda is a complex concept with no conventional definition. In its most neutral sense, it implies the dissemination or promotion of certain ideas (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014, p. 2). In English-speaking countries, the term is usually associated with deliberate manipulation, deception, and lies, while in Latin countries, the term connotes "advertisement" (Marlin, 2013, p. 4). In certain Asian countries where the Soviet Union left a lasting legacy in their political systems, including the PRC, Vietnam, and North Korea, the terms equivalent to "propaganda" in the languages of these nations convey concepts that are distinct from the Western interpretation, often bearing neutral or positive connotations. Kingsley Edney (2014) considers that the equivalent term for "propaganda" in Chinese is 宣传 *xuanchuan*, which literally means "dissemination of information" (p. 25). *Xuanchuan* is generally regarded in China as a neutral or even positive concept (Edney, 2014, p. 22; Li, 2018, p. 12). According to the Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi*, the Chinese character 宣*xuan* originally signified the "big hall of the emperor" (Chinese Text Project, n.d.), which later developed the connotation of announcing orders or messages by the state or emperor. Similarly, the character 传*chuan*, as per the same dictionary, referred to post-horse or post-carriage, which was later used to mean "to send" or "to deliver" (Liu, 2013, pp. 27–28). By the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–206 CE), *xuanchuan* had already been employed as a combined term to mean the announcement of policies (Liu, 2013, p. 28). The term *xuanchuan* in its modern sense of propaganda only emerged in the Chinese language toward the end of the 19th century. The evolution of *xuanchuan* to mean "propaganda" was a result of the Japanese adoption of the term from Chinese translations of English dictionaries by Western Jesuits, which initially carried only sectarian connotations. Following World War I, the modern connotation of *xuanchuan* as political and commercial propaganda was introduced into the Chinese language (Liu, 2013, pp. 29–31).

Another Chinese term synonymous with "propaganda" is 思想工作 *sixiang gongzuo,* which means "thought works." This term has a moral component that refers to the education and correction of "mistaken" thinking (Edney, 2014, p. 22). Thus, many CCP propaganda campaigns are conducted for "education" and through education.

An example illustrating the difference between propaganda in the Western world and in China can be found in college textbooks of communication studies published in the PRC. In the textbook *Ten Lectures on Journalism Theory,* the term "*xuanchuan*" is defined as "a social dissemination activity that influences or guides people's attitudes and controls their behavior through the use of various types of symbols" (Chen, 2008, p. 1). According to this textbook, the primary goal of propaganda is to control people's thoughts and, subsequently, their behavior. To do so, propaganda employs 操纵*caozong*, or "manipulation," a term often associated with deceitful propaganda in Western academia. However, the author of the textbook explains that the Chinese term for "manipulation" carries a neutral connotation of achieving conformity between the thoughts and behaviors of the people and those of the propagandists through propaganda (Chen, 2008, pp. 3–4).

The development of the modern Chinese propaganda system dates back to the Maoist period, when Mao drew considerably from Soviet, Nazi, and other totalitarian states' propaganda methods to establish the CCP's "control system" (Welch, 2021, p. 30). The Maoist legacies of the Chinese propaganda system include the cult of Mao's personality, the identification of internal and external enemies, the fomentation of "patriotism" after the rebirth of the "New China (PRC)," and the creation of "model citizens" for the emulation of the whole Chinese society (Welch, 2021, pp. 31–32).

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 distinct political activity (Apple, 2019, p. 1). School textbooks have a significant impact on shaping students' worldviews. According to Podeh and Alayan (2018), during the formative years of schooling, children's minds are particularly malleable and susceptible (p. 1). Textbooks have the ability to influence their values. This influence may remain with them for the rest of their lives. The policies of education not only reveal how societies are currently organized but how they also influence the behavior of students in the future.

Ever since the founding of the PRC, propaganda has been conducted through media, culture, and education. The communist regime used "education" to implement propaganda in all sectors of society. This system of propagandistic education was implemented by Mao Zedong in the late 1950s and early 1960s with a focus on the youth, who were, according to the PRC youth leaders, susceptible to the "poison" of the "peaceful revolution" strategy of the United States (Johnson, 2021, p. 248) under the background of the Cold War. The campaign reached its zenith during the Cultural Revolution, when the young people of China formed the rebellious Red Guards, and the "educated youth" were dispatched to the countryside to receive the reeducation of the "poor and lower-middle peasants" (Xu, 2013, p. 15).

The legacy of Maoist propaganda in education can still be observed in present-day Chinese society. Through its guidelines, the education system is still in the grip of the Central Propaganda Department. The

propaganda campaigns of the communist era are usually carried out in the name of "studies" or "learning." The combination of school/social education and the dissemination of nationalist ideologies in the media, especially in the form of entertainment, forms a complete network of patriotic/nationalist education for Chinese youth.

Research Design

Given his historical ambiguity, this research aims to answer the following questions: How is Mao Zedong represented in Chinese primary school textbooks produced during the first wave of the Patriotic Education Campaign? What is the relationship between the representation of Mao in school textbooks and the sociopolitical contexts that the PRC faced during the same period? Does the representation of Mao in primary school textbooks completely correspond to the CCP's official assessment of Mao in the "Resolution" (CCP, 1981)? If not, what are the possible reasons behind this diversion?

The research corpus consists of two sets of primary school textbooks for Chinese literacy. The first set, published from 1984 to 1989, comprises 10 textbooks designed for the five-year primary curriculum, aligning with the educational goals of the Five-Year Plan. The second set, published from 1993 to 1999, consists of 12 textbooks tailored for the six-year primary curriculum, corresponding to the educational objectives of the Six-Year Plan (Edu.cn, 2001).[1] 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 in charge of educational publications throughout China.

Each textbook consists of several units of independent lessons and a review exercise. In the most recent set (1990s), there is also an introduction to each unit starting from Volume VII (fourth grade). The lessons are divided into three categories:

1. 讲读课文*jiangdu kewen*, key lessons that require detailed explanation by teachers;
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.

Lessons in the first category are considered more important than the other two by the Ministry of Education and appear more frequently in exams. Each lesson usually consists of a main text, a vocabulary list, grammar exercises, comprehension exercises, and reading or memorization practice. The topics of the lessons are diverse, covering subjects such as science, history, everyday life, fairy tales, and legends, as

[1] Between 1978 and 1981, primary education in the PRC was regularized to a total duration of five years. However, in 1981 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.

well as excerpts from prose and poetry by renowned writers. These texts within the lessons exhibit a wide array of literary styles composed by authors hailing from various countries and historical periods.

Historical figures frequently appear in the lessons. In both sets of textbooks, 26.3% of the lessons are about historical figures (91 of 346 lessons in Set I and 78 of 296 lessons in Set II). The figures include politicians, scientists, artists, military figures, and doctors. Some are depicted as children, others as adults, and some appear in both stages of life. In addition to the better-known figures with positive representations, such as Mao Zedong, Lenin, or Isaac Newton, several types of less individualized historical figures represent collective historical groups, such as the Chinese Armies and peasants. Figures with negative representations appear primarily as collective groups, so much so that they are often referred to as 敌人*diren,* or "enemies." This group includes soldiers of the Chinese Nationalist Party, armies of foreign invaders, corrupt officials, capitalists, and figures related to religious activities, among others.

Along with mathematics and English, Chinese literacy is the major compulsory subject in the Chinese education system (first to ninth grade). As Jacques Ellul (1973) stated in his book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*:

> One of the most effective propaganda methods in Asia was to establish "teachers" to teach reading and indoctrinate people at the same time. . . . These facts leave no doubt that the development of primary education is a fundamental condition for the organization of propaganda. (p. 110)

The textbooks and lessons about Mao Zedong exemplify this propaganda method in Asia. As part of the subject of Chinese literacy, these textbooks teach students how to read while indoctrinating them with communist propaganda.

To analyze the corpus, critical discourse analysis will be employed, a well-established approach in recent Chinese language communication studies (Qiaoan, 2019, p. 645). The methods used in this research are adapted from those proposed by Annabelle Mooney and Betsy Evans (2015), with some modifications to accommodate the unique characteristics of the Chinese language and society. Based on their methodology, I analyze the strategies of persuasion through (1) the three Aristotelian tactics, which include the concepts of *ethos* (arguments of authority), *pathos* (emotion conveyed through the discourse), and *logos* (the argument itself), and (2) rhetorical analysis, which covers the use of pronouns and titles, contrasts, metaphors, parallelisms, preconceived ideas, and intertextuality (Mooney & Evans, 2015, pp. 45–51).

I categorize lessons about Mao Zedong based on their themes and select one lesson for analysis within each theme. Additionally, recognizing Mao Zedong's presence in some lessons about other historical figures and the importance of intertextuality in creating a comprehensive representation of Mao, I also choose one lesson to analyze his indirect representation. Considering the historical, social, and political contexts of the 1980s and 1990s, I aim to discern the types of collective memory formed about Mao and how the communist regime sought to persuade children to embrace these narratives.

The criteria for selecting lessons for each subject are as follows:

1. If only one lesson covers a particular topic, it is chosen.
2. If multiple lessons cover the same topic, the selection is based on the text with the most extensive variety of actions and interactions between different characters.
3. In cases where lessons contain a similar number of actions/interactions, priority is given to lessons that appear in both sets of textbooks.
4. When there are no repeated lessons, preference is given to key/reading lessons.

Multifaceted Chairman Mao in School Textbooks

In the two sets of textbooks, there are 11 different lessons that feature Mao Zedong as the protagonist.[2] They focus on three themes:

1. Mao Zedong and his interaction with the masses 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)

To understand the collective memory created about Mao Zedong, I conducted a discourse analysis of the lessons listed in Table 1:

Table 1. List of Lessons Analyzed About Mao Zedong.

Lesson Titles	Lesson Information
"毛主席在花山 Chairman Mao at Huashan Village" (Chen, 1997, pp. 120–124)	Lesson 24, Vol.10 of Set II
"补丁 The Patch" (Cai, 1995, pp. 82–84)	Lesson 11, Vol.3 of Set II
"开国大典 The Grand Inauguration Ceremony of the PRC" (Kuai, 1997, pp. 15–21)	Lesson 3, Vol.11 of Set II
"一张珍贵的照片 A Precious Photo" (Yuan, 1987, pp. 98–101)	Lesson 25, Vol.9 of Set I

Unsophisticated Peasants and Their Caring Leader

"Chairman Mao at Huashan Village" (Chen, 1997, pp. 120–124) tells a story about Mao Zedong, his guardian, and the peasants of Huashan village during the Second Chinese Civil War (1945–49). According to a report published by Chinese official media people.cn (Han, 2020), in 1948 Mao Zedong stayed for nine days in Huashan village, which is located in Fuping County of Hebei Province. His experience with the local people is said to have inspired the author of the lesson ("Information on Writer

[2] 7 lessons in Set I and 6 lessons in Set II.

Zhai Zhigang," 2023).[3] 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 and to use the other one, which is further away. When Mao Zedong finds out about this, he asks his guardian to call the peasants back, serves them tea, and helps them grind the grain (Figure 1). Mao also chats with the peasants who use an unsophisticated dialectical lexicon. In short, the narrative aims to describe Mao Zedong as a caring, selfless leader, and a friend of the people.

***Figure 1. Illustration of Mao and his guardian helping the peasants grind the grains* (Chen, 1997, p. 123).**

Mao Zedong's attitude toward the peasants is different from the guardian's initial attitude. The latter considers Mao to be superior to the peasants. Mao thinks the opposite, as he not only pauses his work to help the peasants grind the grain but also teaches them how to drink tea, a new beverage that the "unsophisticated" peasants supposedly have never heard about. However, through detailed discourse analysis, one may realize the controversial attitude of Mao in relation to the peasants. On the one hand,

[3] The author is 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.

Mao is depicted as having a close relationship with the peasants, given that he cares about their well-being. On the other hand, he distinguishes between himself and his guardian [us] and the peasants [others] and shows a clear hierarchical difference when he mentions himself, the guardian, and the rural masses.

This contradiction is evident in the following dialogue between Mao and his guardian:

> Chairman Mao says (to the guardian), "I wonder if you had ever thought about this: if we [我们, *women*, referring to Mao and the guardian] didn't have the support of the common people [老百姓*laobaixing*, referring to the peasants] would we be able to be in today's situation? Among everything we eat and wear, is there anything that is not an offering from the masses [群众*qunzhong,* referring to the peasants]? The common people of our country are the guarantee of our victory. To put it another way, that means that the struggle we are now going through is also for the common people of the whole country. I don't think that you don't understand this situation. In my opinion, you are putting me in a special position. (Chen, 1997, pp. 122–123)

This discourse shows that Mao does not want to be placed in a "special position" and prefers to be conflated with the peasants. However, Mao's use of pronouns and titles reveals that he and his guardian belong neither to the "common people" nor to the "masses" but to another category of people who are sustained by the masses and work "for the common people's sake" (Chen, 1997, p. 122).

This lesson reveals the importance of the Maoist legacy of the "mass line" to the students through a vivid example of Chairman Mao himself, even though this example is probably fictitious.[4] The "mass line" is one of the "three basic aspects of the living soul of Mao Zedong Thought," which is considered an important legacy of Maoism in official discourses of post-reform China. After Deng Xiaoping's ascension to power, he criticized the bureaucratic attitude of some CCP members, accused them of "losing connections with the masses," and "ruining the ambience of the society" (Jiang, 2013, para. 8). The 1981 "Resolution" (CCP, 1981) redefined the "mass line" in the post-reform era, which now means "doing everything for the masses, relying on the masses, deriving from the masses, returning to the masses, and transforming the Party's correct propositions into the conscious actions of the masses" (Jiang, 2013, para. 11). Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor, also embraced the "mass line" discourses, adapting them to the evolving context of China after the Reform and Opening-up (Xu, 2014). This historical background explains the importance of this lesson and Mao's representation in the text, as well as the distinction between the communist cadres and the masses in the dialogues between Mao and his guardian.

Chairman Mao's Convincing/Dubious Frugal Life

"The Patch" (Figure 2; Cai, 1995, pp. 82–84) is a text about Mao Zedong's frugal life. This lesson discusses the old, patched clothes that Mao is said to have worn when receiving guests before and after the

[4] See note 6.

establishment of the PRC. This text focuses on dialogues and interactions between Mao and his guardian in two similar stories to prove that Mao Zedong led a frugal life. The first story tells the following:

> Upon his arrival in Beijing, Chairman Mao settles in Xiangshan. One day, he receives a guest. Although the guardian searches for a long time, he cannot find a pair of pants that do not have patches. Chairman Mao says: "It's okay if the clothes have patches. As long as they are clean and fixed, it will be fine." In this way, he receives the guest dressed in a pair of pants with patches. (Cai, 1995, p. 82)

The second story is similar to the previous one:

> After the establishment of the PRC, every time Chairman Mao receives foreign guests, his guardian always has to remind him not to stretch his legs when he sits on the sofa. Since almost all of his socks are patched, should he stretch his legs, the patches will be noticed (Cai, 1995, pp. 82–83).

***Figure 2. Illustration of the lesson The Patch* (Cai, 1995, p. 83).**

These two stories highlight the contrast between a prominent political figure and his frugal lifestyle, which is akin to the common people. First, it is deemed unconventional for a leader like Mao Zedong to live modestly or wear patched socks, as indicated by his guardian's efforts to provide presentable attire for

guests. Second, Mao's need to conceal his patched socks when hosting foreign dignitaries suggests an expectation of opulence not typically associated with leaders who, like Mao, lead modest lifestyles.

The lesson ends with Mao Zedong's direct speech, where he repeatedly refuses the guardian's request to order him new clothes*:*

> Our country is still poor, and I cannot set an example of wastefulness. When conditions do not allow for fastidiousness, it's easy not to be fastidious. When conditions allow for fastidiousness, it's hard not to be. Communists must do what is hard to achieve. (Cai, 1995, p. 83)

This last paragraph is considered the most important part of this lesson, as the first exercise of the lesson asks the students to interpret the meaning of Chairman Mao's speech at the end of the text, and the last exercise orders the students to remember and recite the last paragraph. From this speech, we can deduce several "lessons" from Chairman Mao to the students. First, after the establishment of the PRC, people's lives improved significantly, allowing for fastidiousness. Second, as a communist, Mao could do what he considered most difficult. Finally, not paying attention to physical appearance is seen as a virtue, as Mao takes pride in this behavior.

In post-reform Chinese society, there are doubts and criticisms about the alleged lifestyle that Mao is said to have led during his lifetime, as depicted in this lesson. "On Mao Zedong's 'Patched Clothes' and its Interpretation" (Xie Jia Yi Shusheng, 2013), an article published in 2013 by an author under the pseudonym Xiejia Yishusheng (A Retired Intellectual) sought to disprove the stories about Mao's frugal life and examples of the patched clothes that Mao was said to have worn. The author uses historical records that list the inventory of Mao Zedong's clothes to prove that he had an abundance of unpatched clothes. The author also disproves the argument on Mao's frugal life by disclosing the cost of the materials used to make his clothes and the wages paid to the tailors who were employed to make the high-quality patches for him.

In 2014, Long Jianyu, a researcher at Xiangtan University's Center for the Study of Maoist Thought and deputy director of the Comrade Mao Zedong Memorial Center in Shaoshan, Mao's birthplace, published an article titled "Counter-Arguments as to the Accusations the Everyday Life of Mao Zedong" (Long, 2014) at the Marxist Academy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In this article, Long (2014) tried to "alert the people" to the alleged intention to defame Mao Zedong's personality and spirit. Long criticized Xiejia Yishusheng's arguments. In his view, Xiejia Yishusheng's arguments deny the "unshakable fact" that Mao Zedong wore the patched clothes that are today on display at the Comrade Mao Zedong Memorial Center. Long (2014) also stated that this "fact" can be proved by photos and memories of Mao's subordinates, as is the case in this lesson.

Debates about the veracity of the stories of Mao Zedong's frugal life continue in Chinese society. The information provided by people who had direct contact with Mao is used as evidence, and conflicting sources to try to both prove and disprove Mao's virtues. Regardless of the veracity of the descriptions of Mao's past, these arguments are tools that make use of alleged historical facts and aim to create an artificial collective memory by official and counter-official propagandists. Such tools are intended to persuade people

to accept a version of the past that brings political benefits in the present to those who promote such narratives. The controversy also highlights how the one-sided educational propaganda and the impeccably crafted image of Chairman Mao by the CCP can sometimes achieve the opposite of its intended effect.

Omission of Past Memories of Mao and His Political Enemies

"The Grand Inauguration Ceremony of the PRC" (Kuai, 1997, pp. 15–21) features Mao Zedong among the first-generation communist leaders at Tiananmen Square on October 1, 1949. As the central figure in both the narrative and the accompanying illustration (Figure 3), Mao's predominant role is unmistakable. He is portrayed as the charismatic leader who not only founded the PRC but also presided over the inauguration ceremony, an event reportedly attended by 300,000 people. Through various metaphors describing the ceremony and the anticipated emotional response of the Chinese populace upon witnessing Chairman Mao, the text aims to emphasize Mao's widespread appeal and affirm his status as the legitimate founder of the PRC. This portrayal is particularly aimed at students from the 1990s who, having not experienced this historical moment firsthand, are introduced to Mao's leading role and enduring influence through the narrative.

***Figure 3. Illustration of the lesson The Grand Inauguration Ceremony of the PRC* (Kuai, 1997, p. 15).**

The illustration of this lesson is an oil painting with the same title as the lesson. This original painting was made by Dong Xiwen (1914–73) in 1953, four years after the ceremony. The perspective and alignment of the columns do not correspond to reality. According to a report on the history of this painting (Ai, 2008), Dong's choice was intended to show the grandeur of Tiananmen Square and the striking scenery of the people gathering to watch the ceremony. Mao Zedong is placed at the center, and the other communist leaders occupy the left third of the image. The right third shows the masses who attended the inauguration ceremony. Dong Xiwen increased the height of Mao's figure at the suggestion of two other artists.

In the original painting, in addition to Mao Zedong, several other relevant communist leaders are also depicted: Zhu De (1886–1976), Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969), Soong Ching–ling (1893–1981), Li Jishen (1885–1959), Zhang Lan (1872–1955), Gao Gang (1905–54), Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), Lin Boqu (1886–1960), and Dong Biwu (1886–1975)[5], among other historically less important ones. Because of the internal conflicts within the CCP, the painting underwent several changes. In 1955, Dong Xiwen, who was under political pressure, deleted the figure of Gao Gang who had conspired with Rao Shushi (1903–75) to replace Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi in their positions. Gao Gang eventually committed suicide in 1954 and was expelled from the CCP in 1955, a year after his conspiracy with Rao Shushi was defined as an "anti-communist party conspiracy" made by "representatives of capitalism" (Mu, 2017, p. 151).

During the Cultural Revolution, Dong Xiwen was considered a counterrevolutionary and was tortured. His last mission was to erase Liu Shaoqi, the most criticized communist leader at the time, from the painting. In 1972, Jiang Qing (1914–91), who was Mao's last wife and a member of the Gang of Four, demanded that the figure of Lin Boqu, the first secretary-general of the Communist central government, be erased from the painting, 12 years after Lin's death. Because of Dong's deteriorating health and the difficulty of making one more change in the original painting, two other artists produced a replica of the original one without the figure of Lin Boqu. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, when the statuses of Liu Shaoqi and Lin Boqu were reinstated, the same artists who replaced Dong repainted the two figures and that of Gao Gang on the replica, therefore harking back to the list of figures in Dong's original painting (Huang, 2008).

The illustration in this lesson has the following caption: "Illustration by Dong Xiwen." However, the figures of Liu Shaoqi, Lin Boqu, and Gao Gang appear. This is probably a copy of the replica painting made by the other two artists. However, the textbook does not explain this detail. The lesson mentions Lin Boqu and his activities at the ceremony. However, Liu Shaoqi, whose status within the CCP had already been restored by the time this textbook was published, is never mentioned, although he is depicted in the illustration. As Miike (2003) states, silence is part of invisible communication and is an important element in communication studies in Asian contexts (pp. 54–55). The silence about Liu Shaoqi in this lesson and the changes the painting underwent during the Maoist era show that these are collective memories of a past

[5] Zhu De (1886–1976): Co-founder of the Chinese Red Army and one of China's top military leaders.
Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969): Chairman of the PRC from 1959 to 1968. Liu was purged to death during the Cultural Revolution.
Soong Ching–ling (1893–1981): Honorary President of the People's Republic of China.
Li Jishen (1885–1959): A senior leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) and a major figure in the early Chinese republican government.
Zhang Lan (1872–1955): Leader of the China Democratic League.
Gao Gang (1905–1954): A Chinese Communist leader who held significant military and political positions before his fall from grace in a political purge.
Zhou Enlai (1898–1976): The first Premier of the People's Republic of China, serving from 1949 until his death.
Lin Boqu (1886–1960): A founding member of the CCP and a senior political leader.
Dong Biwu (1886–1975): Co-founder of the CCP, and a top official in the PRC, served as Vice President of China.

that the CCP wants to hide from the younger generations of China, as such memories may contribute to the instability of the present government and raise an alternative and unwanted perception of Mao Zedong.

Not Mao's Fault: Excuses "Made by" Zhou Enlai

The last lesson, "A Precious Photo" (Yuan, 1987, pp. 98–101), tells a story supposedly experienced by the first Prime Minister of the PRC, Zhou Enlai, and a girl named Zhou Guihua on a visit the former is said to have undertaken to a small village at the foot of the Lu Mountain[6] on September 7, 1961. The text can be divided into two parts. The first is about the interactions 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 and includes a dialogue between Zhou Enlai and the peasants of the village.

According to this lesson, Zhou Enlai's visit to the village took place in 1961, the last year of the Great Famine. At that time, countless Chinese people starved to death because of Mao's economic policies, notably the Great Leap Forward and the establishment of communes. Natural calamities and Soviet sanctions further worsened the situation. The story does not refer to the full political and historical context but subtly describes the endangered lives of the peasants through a conversation between Zhou and the villagers. In this way, the traumatic past history that the students did not experience firsthand is purposely "forgotten":

> Premier Zhou asks everyone if they suffer from hunger. People are hesitant, since they are afraid to say something wrong. The prime minister says: it's okay. We are from the same family. Even if you don't tell me, I can tell that we are in a period of difficulty. (Yuan, 1987, p. 100)

When hearing this, the peasants become more relieved and start to talk about the famine they experienced in previous years. After listening to the peasants, Zhou Enlai makes a speech with the dual purpose of encouraging the peasants and endorsing Chairman Mao's actions:

> In the past one or two years, we have suffered from 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, and feed many chickens and ducks. In this way, we will overcome the obstacles together! (Yuan, 1987, p. 101)

This speech points to natural calamities and external forces ("someone," referring to the Soviet Union) as constituting the causes of the Great Famine. Mao Zedong's faulty economic policies, contrary to the "Resolution" (CCP, 1981) assessment, are omitted. The intertextuality of this lesson portrays Mao Zedong as the legitimate and authoritative chairman of the PRC and justifies and conceals his mistakes and failures through Zhou Enlai's discourses to the younger generations who had not experienced these events

[6] Lushan, situated in Jiangxi province, is one of the best-known mountains in China. 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.

firsthand. The story ends with the villagers inviting Zhou Enlai to dinner, which he refuses, saying that he will eat with them when their lives get better.

This lesson, with slight variations, was featured only in the textbooks of the 1980s. It first appeared in the 1982 edition, which included two additional paragraphs not found in the Set I version published in 1987. The first extra paragraph described Zhou Enlai sending several bags of clothes and "substandard flour" to the village some days later after the visit, implying the scarcity of goods and the hardships of life at that time. It poignantly noted that even Prime Minister Zhou could obtain only "substandard flour." The second and last paragraph omitted in the 1987 edition marked the end of the "difficult times." It recounted that "our family killed a big fat pig for the 1963's Chinese New Year" and mentioned Zhou Guihua's anticipation of another visit from Zhou Enlai ("1982 Edition A Precious Photo," 2011, para. 20).

By the 1990s, this lesson had been deliberately excluded in more recent editions. This omission signifies a concerted effort to erase the memory of the traumatic events of the Great Famine at a time when the PRC was facing substantial challenges, both domestically and internationally. In such circumstances, portraying Chairman Mao in an impeccable light to the younger generation could be a crucial strategy for preserving the Party's legitimacy, even though these historical events would later appear in the middle and high school's history curricula according to the "Resolution" ("The Great Leap Forward," 2010). The intentional delay in introducing this topic into the school curriculum during the 1990s reflected the turbulent political situation in China during that period, necessitating increased censorship and careful management of Mao Zedong's image.

It was not until the 2010s that the stories of Zhou Guihua and Zhou Enlai resurfaced in official media, with Zhou Guihua celebrated as a model citizen who had dedicated herself to sharing her experiences with Zhou Enlai with younger generations (Tao, 2019). In one report, a comparison was made between Zhou Guihua's life in the 1960s and her current situation to highlight the transformations that the village had undergone since the Reform and Opening-up policy was implemented. Notably, the report omits any mention of the Great Famine or Mao Zedong in the narrative (Xiao Yu, 2019).

Conclusion

In China, education and propaganda have been intricately linked. Within the framework of compulsory education, Chinese literacy, a core subject, serves as a vehicle for disseminating the CCP's political ideology. This approach effectively molds children's thoughts and behaviors under the guise of education, fostering a new communist "morality."

The portrayal of Mao Zedong in textbooks for Chinese students during the 1980s and 1990s presents a complex image. Primary school Chinese literacy textbooks depict Mao as a benevolent, industrious, and modest leader revered by the populace and his fellow communists alike. He is primarily shown as a respected and authoritative figure pivotal to the Chinese revolutions and the formative years of the PRC. Any failures or errors during his tenure, such as those mentioned in the "Resolution" (CCP, 1981), are either omitted or attributed to external pressures.

This nuanced representation of Mao can be understood against the backdrop of his fluctuating political influence, particularly after the Cultural Revolution. Following the Tiananmen protests, the CCP acknowledged the necessity of reasserting Mao's relevance to the younger generation and strategically tailored his portrayal in educational content with a progressive approach. This effort was crucial for maintaining the Party's authority and aligning the younger generation's perceptions with the official narrative.

Podeh and Alayan (2018) highlighted the susceptibility of children's minds during their formative years, noting that school textbooks played a significant role in shaping lifelong values (p. 1). Between 1981 and 2018, history textbooks for middle and high school students incorporated narratives critical of Mao's policies, specifically the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, aligning with the principles of the "Resolution" CCP ("Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution," 2010). These textbooks destinated to the same post-80s and post-90s generations, then teenagers, explained that the cause of the Great Leap Forward was Chinese leadership's complacency and pride in the face of victory, which led to a rush to achieve success, exaggerating the role of subjective will and effort. Cultural Revolution, on the other hand, was a result of Mao's mistaken belief in the Party's drift toward revisionism, posing a threat of capitalist resurgence ("The Ten-Year Internal Turmoil of the 'Cultural Revolution'," 2010). Therefore, without a preparatorily unblemished image of Mao formed during their early education, students exposed to these critiques in later years could develop a more critical view of Maoist China, potentially questioning the CCP's legitimacy. This approach to education proves the CCP's use of curriculum as a tool for long-term sociological propaganda (Ellul, 1973), aiming to cultivate loyalty while carefully navigating the complexities of Mao's legacy.

The 13th National People's Congress, held in 2018, amended the PRC's constitution and ended the limit of two consecutive terms for the chairman. This has enabled Xi Jinping to remain in power for unlimited terms. Comparisons between him and Mao Zedong have emerged in academia (Lee, 2018; Meng, 2018, pp. 179–186) and mass media (BBC News Chinese, 2021). This reveals Mao Zedong's impact on the collective memory of the Chinese people and the world. In November 2019, the State Council published "Compendium of the Implementation of Patriotic Education in the New Era" (People's Daily, 2019) to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the PRC. This document, which aimed to cement Xi Jinping's leadership, initiated the second wave of the Patriotic Education Campaign, which reevaluated Mao's mistakes and the Cultural Revolution in history textbooks, causing a huge debate among Chinese society (Liu, 2020). As Xi often refers to Mao and his works in public discourses and portrays himself as the successor of Maoism (Qiao, 2023; "Mao Zedong in the eyes of Xi Jinping," 2016), the evolution of representations of Mao Zedong in this second wave of Patriotic Education Campaign is worthy of further studies.

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