Christine Kaemmer, PhD candidate, University of Tuebingen

“Continuity and Change of Values – An Analysis of Literary Textbooks of Taiwanese Junior High Schools“

1. Introduction

The fundamental changes in the field of politics and society in Taiwan within the last decades have also induced a change in value orientations. Reflecting on these times of value pluralism, or maybe even disorientation, my research was motivated by the following core question: What are the “ideal values“ that today’s children should internalize in the eyes of the Taiwanese authorities?

Part of the answer may be found in school textbooks. Textbooks, especially those of history, social studies and language and literature might influence the children’s value orientations for the rest of their lives. In literary texts the reader is confronted with certain models of behavior, values and thoughts, which can then be accepted or rejected. One might argue that it is not necessarily an author’s intention to influence or educate the reader. This, however, is not true in the case of school textbooks: The stories incorporated in literary textbooks are carefully chosen or rewritten solely for educational purposes. Whereas in some countries, language and literature instruction also includes teaching the children awareness of possible manipulation through literary texts,¹ this approach does not appear to prevail in Chinese education. Thus, Chinese and Taiwanese school textbooks are more susceptible to centralized political control. The uniformity of message is particularly strong if the textbooks are published by government-owned printing houses and circulated at all schools throughout the country² as used to be the case in Taiwan until recently. We should keep in mind, however, that teaching is not equal to learning, and that what can be gained from an analysis of school textbooks is a picture not of what the students actually learn but rather of what the authorities envision as the ideal content of childhood socialization.

The ongoing educational reform is one important aspect of change in Taiwan today. However,

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¹ For this didactical approach at German schools see Kölln, Hermann et al. (ed.): Westermann Lesebuch, 2.-4. Schuljahr, Analysen und Interpretationen. Braunschweig 1971, p. 80.
This paper will not focus on these reforms, such as the new Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum (jiu nian yiguan kecheng) or the newly-edited textbooks, since they came into effect only recently. Instead, my analysis shall try to illuminate an earlier point during this period of transition: The textbooks I analyzed were issued in 1999/2000 and not yet influenced by the change of government.

This paper will first provide a description of the research material and method and then give a short overview of the official educational goals for the subject Chinese at Taiwanese junior high schools as set in the curricular guidelines which were in force in 1999/2000. A summary of the different values presented to the children through the textbooks will be the main focus of this paper. The textbook analysis was based on the following core questions:

Which ideal values can be extracted from the texts? How are they characterized and how do they match social and political change? What pedagogical functions do the textbooks serve? What conclusions about the official intention of the political/educational authorities can be drawn from that information? As a reflection of the current situation in Taiwan, I expected the choice of textbook material to contain different sets of values which might even contradict each other.

2. Research method and material

School textbooks are objects of research in various fields of study like history, sociology and educational sciences. A multitude of aspects such as ideology, prejudice and value orientations are analyzed. In Western textbook research, a few comparative studies published in the 1970s and 1980s dealt with the ideological content of Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese textbooks for different subjects. Taiwanese scholars have also conducted research on similar topics. Recent Taiwanese studies undertaken during the process of educational reform focus primarily on the evaluation of the textbooks regarding aspects like environmental education,

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discrimination or gender, mainly for the purpose of advancing the quality of the textbooks.\(^5\)

For my research, I chose the qualitative-hermeneutical method since it enables the researcher to pose an unlimited number of questions to the texts without being restricted by a fixed pattern of questioning. Whenever necessary, I took quantitative aspects into account to support my findings. Some textbook analyses also focus on illustrations or exercises since they can enhance the message of the lessons. This paper, however, will only deal with the literary texts contained in the textbooks and exclude all other aspects. Subjects other than Chinese, levels other than the junior high school and additional textbook material for teachers or self-study are also excluded.

The basic material for my research is a series of textbooks for the subject Chinese at junior high schools (guomin zhongxue guowen) aimed at children aged 12 to 15. I selected this level for the following reasons: Whereas primers start with bopomofo (the Taiwanese equivalent to Hanyu Pinyin), basic character writing and simple texts, junior high textbooks include classical poetry and texts by modern Chinese and Taiwanese writers and are therefore of greater literary value. The moral messages are more subtle than in primers and have to be read between the lines. Additionally, after graduating from junior high school the pupils attend different types of schools like vocational schools or high schools according to their academic achievement. Therefore, it represents the last phase of compulsory education identical for all students.

The textbook series was published by the National Institute of Compilation and Translation (NICT; guoli bianyiguan) in 1999/2000. The guoli bianyiguan is supervised by the Ministry of Education and used to be the only institute in charge of textbook compilation and printing in Taiwan. Following a worldwide trend towards diversification of educational materials, this policy was liberalized in the course of educational reform in 2002.\(^6\) Currently, private publishers like Nanyi chubanshe, Hanlin chubanshe or Kangxuan chubanshe edit their own textbooks series for junior high schools. From 2004 onward, the National Institute of Compilation and Translation will only be in charge of the examination and approval of textbooks. Therefore, the books I analyzed were the last “uniform” set of textbooks used at all levels.

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\(^6\) Anon.: “Guozhongxiao kecheng jiaokeshu xiangguan wenti zhi jiantao yu yinyin‘ zhu’an baogao, n.d., http://140.111.1.192/minister/case/911127.html, 23.9.03
junior high schools throughout the island.

The criteria for textbook compilation are clearly defined in the curricular guidelines: In accordance with the subject goals, the textbooks should correspond to the mental and physical development of the students and their learning abilities. The selected reading material should be suitable for several purposes at the same time: language training, literary enjoyment and promotion of a good character. The thoughts presented in the texts should be pure, the structure clear and easy to understand and the content modern and true to life. Further restrictions apply to the literary style of the textbooks: During the first term, 80% of the textbook material has to be chosen from modern Chinese and 20% from classical Chinese literature. The amount of classical texts should then steadily be increased up to a rate of 60% in the sixth term.\footnote{Jiaoyubu (ed.): Guomin zhongxue guowen kecheng biaozhun, www.edu.tw:.81/primary/business/2214p1.htm, p. 1.}

The textbook series \textit{guomin zhongxue guowen} consists of six volumes of colorful paperbacks, one for each term. The books are slightly smaller in size than the standard A4, are divided into 13 to 15 lessons in approximately 80 pages and cost about 35-40 NT$. Each lesson starts with biographical information about the author and a short summary of the text which explains its core message at the outset. It ends with a section “discussion and practice” which consists of exercises designed to enhance the pupils’ level of literacy. The design and structure of the textbooks remain unvaried at all levels, which demonstrates a high degree of standardization.

The units of the textbooks are not thematically or chronologically structured, neither are they presented within any kind of context (e.g. literary history, genres etc.). For analytical purposes, I classified the content in three different categories. The first category comprises texts relating to the \textit{social environment and cultural heritage}. Texts about \textit{family, friends and other human relations} make up the second category. The third category includes texts that are meant to promote \textit{desirable morals and character traits of the individual}. Before I present the findings of my analysis of these categories, let me first take a look at the official subject goals stated in the curricular guidelines on which the compilation of textbooks is based.
3. The Taiwanese junior high school at the turn of the 21st century

3.1 Educational goals

The goals and ideological foundations of education are clearly defined in the publications of the Ministry of Education. Whereas in the year 1990 the ultimate goal was seen in restoring the Mainland, the respective paragraph could no longer be found in the brochure of the Ministry of Education at the end of the 1990s. Yet the promotion of the “Three Principles of the People” (sanmin zhuyi) by Sun Yatsen - which had been the at the center of education since 1929 - was still regarded as an important basis. According to the “Three Principles”, education should improve the livelihood of the people and guarantee everybody an adequate place in society. Additionally, economic development and national regeneration should be pursued in order to achieve independence of the nation, democracy, advancement of social welfare, and to achieve the ideal world of universal brotherhood.\(^8\)

Chapter 13, Section 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of China of 1947 deals with “Education and Culture“, Article 158 states that:

> Education and culture shall aim at the development, among the citizens, of the national spirit, the spirit of self-government, national morality, a healthy physique, scientific knowledge, and the ability to earn a living.\(^9\)

The curricular guidelines (guomin zhongxue kecheng biaozhun zonggang) of 1994, on which the compilation of the analyzed textbooks was based, state the goals of all subjects and educational stages. The ultimate goals of junior high school instruction are stated as follows:

> The junior high school continues primary school education. Life education, moral education and democracy education are at its center. The aim is to educate an optimistic youth and healthy citizens with a balanced development of virtue, knowledge, healthy body, group spirit and aesthetics.\(^10\)

Furthermore, the guidelines list desirable attitudes and values such as “self-respect and respect for others”, “a diligent and responsible attitude”, “national spirit”, “love of the country and the family” as well as “creativity and logical thought”, “helpfulness”, “love for life” and

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“environmental awareness”.  

3.2 Goals of the subject Chinese

During junior high school, Chinese is taught for five hours per week, which means that more time is attributed to Chinese than to any other subject. The goals of the subject Chinese (guowen) can be divided into those related to the students’ cognitive skills and those aimed at their moral-psychological development. Obviously, in the subject Chinese, the students should learn the correct use of the standard language in all areas (e.g. correct pronunciation, listening comprehension, character writing, calligraphy, text production, discussion skills) and should develop an interest in the pleasures of literature. The guidelines mention that the subject should teach the pupils a “deep understanding of Chinese culture“ and “national spirit“ as well as moral, democratic and scientific ideas. Furthermore, they should be educated in patriotic thought and be able to think “actively and creatively“. A sense of responsibility and good manners are further character traits that should equally be developed.

The guidelines show that the goals in the field of language and literature cannot – and should not – be separated from what we call moral or value education. The stories, essays and poems in the textbooks were carefully chosen to serve two aims at the same time: To enhance the reading and writing skills of the pupils and to instill them with a sense of morally correct thought and behavior.

4. Analysis of the textbooks

4.1. Social environment and cultural heritage

About 32 % of the texts deal with the social environment and cultural heritage of the children. I posed the following questions at this textual category: What kind of impression about the actual everyday life and the living conditions on Taiwan is conveyed and how realistic is it? Do the texts try to arouse a feeling of belonging to a certain “home“, or even more strongly, of patriotism and nationalism? If so, by which literary means are these emotions achieved? Do

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
political symbols or personalities appear in the texts? What about democracy education? What kind of knowledge about the cultural heritage can be detected in the texts? Are there any indications of a tendency towards “Taiwanization“, e.g. through specifically “Taiwanese“ topics or texts written by Taiwanese authors? What about other countries and literatures?

Concerning the social environment, the current social, political and literary trend of “Taiwanization“ is strongly reflected in the textbooks. Since the 1980s, critical voices have been claiming that the schools should teach more about the actual home of the children – Taiwan – and less about Mainland China. The editors of the textbook series already seem to have responded to this claim: Unlike in previous series, local literature by Taiwanese authors makes up a major portion of the analyzed textbook material. For example, things that are specifically Taiwanese (food, games, local expressions) as well as events and personalities of Taiwanese history like Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) are mentioned in several texts. The Taiwanese past, however, is strongly idealized and portrayed as having been a simple but honest society.

On the other hand, there is a tendency to demonstrate continuity with the Chinese cultural heritage. Some texts play with the image of a person suffering from homesickness while being abroad from Mainland China. Symbols of cultural heritage like calligraphy, the instrument Erhu, legends and local plants are mentioned in the texts. This might contribute to a sense of there being a common Chinese culture which is closely linked to Mainland China. Continuity with the Chinese cultural tradition can also be detected in the layout: Unlike their Mainland Chinese counterparts, the Taiwanese textbooks are printed the traditional way from top to bottom and the pagination is done in Chinese numbers. As we all know, older textbooks were full of images of the communist enemy. This hostile image, however, has completely disappeared and not even political differences between the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan are mentioned in the textbooks of 1999/2000.

The image of the West is positive but stereotyped: “Foreign friends“ pray before dinner, European politicians are “brave and modest unlike the ones in China“ and Western scientists like Einstein and Louis Pasteur serve as role models. Two translations of Western literature written by Albert Einstein and Douglas MacArthur can also be found in the textbooks. It is obvious that these texts were not selected because of their high literary value but rather

14 See studies by Meyers and Martin.
because their authors are regarded as shining examples of moral perfection. General Douglas MacArthur led the military operations against Japan in the Pacific during the Second World War and planned common strategies of defence together with Chiang Kaishek in the Korean War. Thus, he is a true military hero in the eyes of the Taiwanese authorities. Einstein mentions in the translated passage of his autobiographical text “Mein Weltbild” that he is grateful to others without whom his own success would not have been possible. It might be concluded that he serves as an ideal model since he embodies the personification of two educational ideals: “Chinese” modesty combined with “Western” scientific spirit. On the other hand, one text condemns the negative effects of the French Revolution and the movement to get the right to vote for women in England. It states that uncontrolled freedom may result in terror and brutality. Such statements might be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the side-effects of Westernization.

The political liberalization of the last few years has influenced the choice of texts about society and politics. Whereas older textbook studies found political indoctrination via symbols or slogans, this has obviously decreased. Chiang Kaishek doesn’t appear in the literary textbooks for junior high schools at all and only two of the texts were written by Sun Yatsen. Today’s textbooks stress freedom and democracy instead of worshipping political idols.

4.2 Relationships

20% of the texts focus on relationships in different environments like family, school and society. How should the students treat their parents and vice versa? Which family members appear in the texts and what would an ideal attitude towards them be? Which social groups are mentioned? How are they depicted and how should relationships within society work? Do female characters in the stories think and act according to different values than male characters?

The predominant feature of texts dealing with the relationships between family members is their emphasis on filial piety (xiao). Mostly, diligent study or success are presented as manifestations of this ultimate virtue. The family is presented as a unit of harmony, warmth and security and the protagonists are always grateful and respectful to their ancestors. The parents behave according to traditional role models. Whereas the mothers are loving and caring and seem to be responsible for moral education, the fathers are presented as supportive
but strict authorities. The professions mentioned in the textbooks also reflect traditional role models: The women are mothers, peasants or teachers, the men are politicians, soldiers, scientists and discoverers. It can be concluded that the official view on gender issues at the turn of the 21st century was still conservative and that this form of education might still influence the life and career planning of today’s children. Although the little girls who appear in the stories don’t necessarily behave in a traditional way, it is obvious that most of the real textbook heroes are still boys. One notable exception is the legend of famous Hua Mulan who disguised herself as a man and went to war. Last but not least it is striking that only a small number of the textbook stories were from female authors.

Outside the family, teachers serve as important models. They are always fair and patient, and the children should approach them with respect and gratitude in return. People of lower social strata must be treated with tolerance and generosity and the attitude towards friends should be honest and sincere. Relationships with the opposite sex at an early age are strongly condemned, mainly because they might be detrimental to academic achievement. In addition, every individual’s responsibility for society is heavily emphasized.

**4.3 Ideal character traits**

The third and largest category is made up of about 41% of the textbook material. It contains those texts that are aimed at promoting ideal attitudes and behavior of the students. What are these attitudes and behavior patterns and how are they characterized?

According to the textbooks, an ideal student should understand the importance of study. He should be active and motivated, concentrated and diligent. Besides diligence and perseverance, an active and intrinsically motivated attitude towards learning is predominant in the textbooks. This seems to be in striking contrast to the reality one can observe in Taiwanese schools where students are passive rather than active. In fact, students, teachers and parents still seem to favor rote learning and mainly concentrate on exam-oriented knowledge. The ideal, however, is no longer a “bookworm“, but a well-balanced personality with mental flexibility and a strong interest in lifelong learning.

Studying hard not only benefits the children themselves but is also an expression of duty towards their parents. Should they become successful academically or professionally, they should remain modest and unassuming. Variations of this ideal of modesty can be detected in many textbook stories: The ideal student should be able to enjoy the simple things in life and
not strive for material goods. Furthermore, the texts depict various situations in which the protagonist solves a problem by showing strength, discipline or courage.

Regarding the question of how one should approach one's natural environment, the emphasis in the textbooks is on an aesthetic appreciation of nature. Living in harmony with nature, the ideal student can find peace and tranquility, understand the beauty of the environment and therefore might also take an active part in its protection. Like nature, music can also help the students to cultivate character.

4.4 What the textbooks don’t say

It seems obvious that certain aspects of reality are excluded from the junior high school textbooks. The setting of the stories is rural and idyllic, peasants work hard on their farms, people live in harmony with nature, enjoy beautiful landscapes and follow a traditional way of life. The urban society that most Taiwanese students experience in their real lives is not depicted at all. Elements of a technologically advanced society like machines, computers, factories, cars, skyscrapers, as well as its side-effects like pollution and environmental destruction, remain unmentioned.

Family life is also idealized in the textbooks: divorce or arguments, illegitimate children or orphans are absent and single parents are always widowed mothers. People behave according to their role and function within society, nobody complains or tries to change anything. There are no difficulties in interpersonal relations like menace or violence. In contrast, the role models in the stories always exemplify tolerance, friendship and consideration. Model citizens in the texts mainly work in traditional professions and are for example peasants, merchants, scholars, artisans or officials. Social injustice is excluded from the textbooks and the vision of an ideal society is conveyed where people of lower social strata (e.g. cleaning women or street vendors) are treated with respect and are equally content with their lives. Beggars, handicapped people, minorities or outcasts are not mentioned. At the turn of the 21st century, the Taiwanese aborigines are still not represented in the textbooks, neither by their literature nor as a social group with their own culture, problems or interests.

Apart from a few paragraphs about “the West“, there is no information about other countries or the rest of Asia given in the textbooks. They remain almost exclusively focussed on the Chinese world. Indications of topicality like contemporary politicians or celebrities or newspaper clippings are equally absent. This might indicate that the compilers attribute more
educational value to the depiction of an ideal world and the use of classical literature than to real life facts and reports on current affairs.

Some Taiwanese scholars are critical of this “ideal textbook world“. Xu Junya\(^{15}\) criticized that the textbooks were full of “positive thought“ and therefore contrary to real life which is full of conflicts and contradictions. According to Xu, negative feelings like frustration might be of even greater educational value for children since they can, by means of contrast, demonstrate how precious and beautiful life really is. Xu strongly condemns the fact that texts about negative aspects of life were not included in textbooks in the 1990s.

5. Conclusions

From this analysis, several conclusions can be drawn as to the pedagogic intention and educational vision of the authorities. In present-day Taiwan, the belief in the individual's ability of self-cultivation seems to be the foundation of the educational conception just as it used to be in traditional China.\(^{16}\) The imitation of role models is regarded as especially important for learning. Teachers as well as literary characters in the textbooks serve as positive models of thought and behavior. There is only one negative model offered whose attributes are not suitable to be adopted by the children: Hu Shis Cha bu duo xiansheng. Apart from fictional characters, the sages of the past are often used as ideal models of behavior whose strengths and wisdom should be imitated and admired. It can be concluded that Taiwan’s educationalists seem to be of the opinion that positive models of behavior are more effective than negative ones. The fact that negative aspects of life are excluded from the textbooks contributes to this impression. The texts are mainly affirmative, the heroes never experience failure, doubt or fear, which suggests that everybody can be successful if they only have enough willpower and try hard enough. Another educational means is to arouse emotional reactions in the children when they are learning about the main character’s experiences. If the hero of a textbook story reacts emotionally, this is designed to arouse empathy in the young reader and motivate him to think about his own behavior and change it, if necessary.


\(^{16}\) For the use of role models in Chinese education see Ridley, Charles et al. (ed.): The Making of a Model Citizen in Communist China. California 1971.
Furthermore, the analysis of the literary textbooks leads to certain conclusions about the visions of the political/educational authorities and about society itself. Certain aspects of life are stressed in the textbooks, others remain unmentioned. This might imply a search for identity in a globalizing world: By means of selection and interpretation, indigenous Taiwanese features are constructed and strictly separated from the outside world. Such an ideal world, as depicted in the textbooks, is set up as a bastion against modernization and Westernization with all the evils attributed to it, like higher divorce or crime rates. In contrast to individualism, materialism or hedonism which might be regarded as side-effects of a Westernized society, family values and the simple pleasures in life are emphasized. Traditional Taiwanese society is idealized as an honest, ideal society where none of these side-effects yet existed.

The uniform and unquestionable set of values presented in the textbooks might be one official way of coping with the observed decline of values in real life. Localization and Taiwanization are seen as possible answers to globalization, and might also be an expression of autonomy from Mainland China. In the wake of the changes in modern society, the authorities of the late 1990s tried to define their own, specifically Taiwanese cultural – maybe also national – identity. As could be expected, the ideal values emphasized in the textbooks have different origins and contain new aspects like democratization and “Taiwanization“ as well as traditional elements. Educational reform is in progress, however, and the new authorities have already approved of a variety of new textbooks, so this analysis might only provide a momentary glimpse of the situation and leaves room for further comparative studies.

6. Bibliography


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