

Collective remembering of Confucianism in Chinese language textbooks: Official historical representations from 1949 to 2019

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Abstract

This study focuses on the collective remembering of an ancient system of meaning, examining content and changes in the construction of Confucianism in Chinese textbooks. The data consists of 84 editions of Chinese language teaching textbooks published by the People's Education Press from 1949 to 2019. Content analysis shows that Confucianism is and was barely represented in this corpus. Thematic analysis shows that: (i) Only Confucius and Mencius were recognized as Confucian masters. (ii) Representations of Confucianism in the textbooks come from *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Book of Poetry*, all of which are more than 2000 years old. (iii) Except for the 1970s, Confucianism was represented in a positive or at least neutral way. (iv) Confucianism is represented in a distant, abstract, decontextualized, and apolitical way, disconnected from students' daily life. This gives insight into how a core representation stripped of its peripheral elements can lose meaning, and lose its normative influence on behavior. Contributions to collective memory, and implications for how to edit Chinese language textbooks to be more engaging are discussed.

Keywords

collective remembering, social representations, cultural memory, Confucianism, content analysis, thematic analysis

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Collective memory has been part of academic discourse at least since Maurice Halbwachs's seminal work (Halbwachs, 1925/1980). But how an ancient system of meaning is represented in contemporary times has seldom been examined. Confucianism was China's mainstream ideology from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to the demise of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1911). This study explores how Confucianism has been represented in textbooks teaching Chinese language in school, under 7 decades of Communist rule after the collapse of the last dynasty. Through an examination of this form of officially sanctioned writing about an ancient system of meaning, it seeks a better understanding of how the construction of collective memory (Hirst, Yamashiro, & Coman, 2018) is mediated by educational institutions, and also advances theory on how social representations theory can be used as a framework for longitudinal textbook analysis (Sakki, 2014).

Collective memory and social representation of history

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1980) proposed in the 1920s that collective memory transcends individual memory, and is determined by social frameworks, like religion, class, or family. Following Halbwachs, Schuman and Scott (1989) define collective memory as widely shared knowledge of past social events that may not have been personally

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experienced, but are collectively constructed through (mass) communication. Psychological variations on this concept advance the more dynamic and functional theory that the group's present condition and agenda for the future influence how the past is presented; reciprocally, the past provides constraints for political attitudes and ideology in the present (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Societal influences on selective remembering, distortion, and forgetting are also characteristic of collective remembering (Hirst et al., 2018). This shared knowledge about the past is elaborated, transmitted, and conserved in a group through interactions among its members, often mediated by public education or commemorations (Wertsch, 2002; Páez & Liu, 2010).

Within the domain of collective memory, the concept of cultural memory was proposed by Assmann (2011) to distinguish enduring forms of collective memory, often mediated by institutions and relatively distant from everyday life, from communicative memory that is transmitted between individuals. Communicative memory is more personal and affective (see Muller, Bermejo, & Hirst, 2018). Because cultural memories are typically transmitted by institutions, through means such as textbooks (or statues, rituals, or national days), our focus is on cultural memories here.

From a psychological perspective, collective memories have been examined through the theoretical framework of social representations of history. Liu and Hilton (2005) and Liu and Páez (2018) theorized these have several functions. First, they help to create a sense of social identification and separate in-group members from out-group members. Second, they provide values and norms for in-group members and, thus, help regulate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors for the collective. Third, collective memories are a symbolic resource that can be mobilized to legitimize a contemporary political agenda (Liu & Hilton, 2005). In this paper, we use the terms collective memory and collective remembering to refer to broad categories of meaning encompassing the vast interdisciplinary literature, mainly located in the social sciences and humanities, which include elaborating on the role of textbooks in producing cultural memories. Social representations of history are used specifically to refer to features of a particular theory in psychology used to orient this research.

Textbooks as carriers of collective memory

Collective memory can be contained in various material media, such as films, photographs, monuments, and textbooks. Textbooks are produced to meet the needs of educators, and include ideological content. Crawford (2003) compared the politics and ideology

of creating national identity in the pre- and post-Milošević Serbia, and argued that social and political needs shaped history textbook content. He claims that in the Milošević era, history textbooks were extremely nationalistic, emphasizing “the image of a nation fighting for freedom and independence, for the survival and preservation of national and religious identity” (p. 48). After the downfall of Milošević, xenophobic and ideological content was removed, but the problem of narrating his politics (that are still supported by some) was dealt with by silence, not mentioning his name (Crawford, 2003). Serbian textbooks were nationalized and standardized, with no open textbook market. Instead, a single authorized textbook was edited under the administration of their Ministry of Education committee. This is very similar to the situation in China.

However, the authorization of textbooks by the state may not be the only reason that the contents of the textbooks are shaped by politics and ideology. The content of American textbooks also may reflect its political and ideological needs. Through content analysis, Hong (2009) analyzed how Asia was described in geography textbooks used in American classrooms. Major findings were that Asia was represented as a homogenous and static whole. Different Asian countries received unequal amounts of attention and were accorded different representations according to their cultural and political significance to Americans. The textbooks appeared to maintain the colonial hierarchy between the USA and Asia, in which Western cultures and lifestyles are depicted as influencing Asia, whereas Asian countries' influences on the West were not mentioned. In Hong's (2009) study, ideological influence is deep and implicit rather than explicit and obvious. This is similar to the line of analysis we take.

In China, language teaching is not just about learning how to use Chinese. “文以載道” (the language is used to carry something greater than the language itself, namely “the Way” or *Dao*) has been the expectation of Chinese literati since ancient times. Chinese language teaching at the compulsory education level in PRC also includes “to recognize the richness and vastness of Chinese culture and to draw on the wisdom of national culture” (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MEPRC], 2011, p.6) as one of its important teaching objectives. Chinese language teaching at the high school level has an even more advanced purpose: “to appreciate the profoundness and longevity of Chinese culture, to appreciate the core ideology and humanistic spirit of Chinese culture... to understand, identify with and love Chinese culture, to inherit and carry forward the excellent Chinese traditional culture” (MEPRC, 2017, p.7). Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism are the three

core traditional elements of Chinese culture, and among which Confucianism is the most central (see Yao, 2000). So, language textbooks are expected to act as a carrier of deeper elements of traditional Chinese culture according to official policy in the People's Republic of China.

Confucianism as cultural memory

We argue that besides concrete historical events, deeper, institutionalized systems of meaning could also be regarded as a kind of cultural memory. For example, Zen is a system of thought and action with about eight hundred years of history in Japan. Zen is now deeply embedded in Japanese culture, being extensively influenced by and, in turn, influencing other cultural phenomena, like art, religion, and education. Zen in Japan is an extensive cultural heritage that has penetrated the daily lives of Japanese. Saito (1996) researched social representations of Zen in Japan and its transformation in Britain. She conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews among 40 respondents, including Japanese Zen practitioners, Japanese Zen non-practitioners, British Zen practitioners, and British Zen non-practitioners. The results showed that some aspects of Zen were simplified, while others were elaborated in Britain compared to in Japan. Importantly, she found that in Japan, even those Japanese who did not practice Zen produced consensual, coherent, well-structured, and proximal accounts of Zen practices, as strongly connected to everyday life. In contrast, British Zen practitioners produced a fragmented image that was relatively isolated from other daily practices.

This research is in accord with Abric's (1993) theory that social representations have a central core (i.e. central system) that "stable, coherent, consensual and historically marked" (p.76), and peripheral elements that are flexible, variable, and function to adapt the representation to concrete situations and overall social reality. However, it also suggests that when a social representation is a comprehensive and normative structure like Confucianism (or Zen), that the loss or detachment of peripheral elements of the representation may compromise the ability of the whole to produce regulative norms that impact on behavior.

The founding and development of Confucianism

Like Zen, Confucianism is a system of meaning encompassing ideology, thoughts, ethics, and behavioral norms. It was introduced by the philosopher Confucius in the 6th–5th century BCE China. Teachings and thoughts of Confucius were recorded

in the form of dialogues between Confucius and his students in *The Analects*.

Core teachings of Confucianism focus on developing personal, social, and political aspects of living an ethical and moral life. In terms of personal aspects, Confucianism emphasizes the crucial role of learning in character development. It advocates conscientiousness, perseverance, respect, and humility as approaches to learning. As Confucian master Xun Zi used to say, "if you start carving and give up, you will not even be able to break rotten wood, but if you start carving and do not give up, then you can engrave even metal and stone" (Xun Zi [1.9.4]). Learning is not limited to academic knowledge, but more importantly, to improving moral character (e.g., "A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies"; *Analects* [1.6]). The most important moral qualities are summarized as five virtues: benevolence or ren (仁), righteousness or yi (义), propriety or li (礼), wisdom or zhi (智) and fidelity or xin (信).

Situational deployment of these principles, embodied within hierarchical relationships (Liu, 2015) are how the five virtues provide normative guidance in social and political life. They form a system of relational ethics for not only ordinary people, but also, considerable advice is given to rulers on how they should govern (i.e., by setting a moral and benevolent example, and treating their ministers in a dignified manner, see Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010). Mencius wrote "The people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain are the next; the sovereign is the lightest" (Mencius, 14.60.1). Confucianism teaches relational ethics as a project of lifelong learning and self-cultivation, for everyone from the Emperor to commoners (Hopner & Liu, in press). It is particularly relevant in the area of business ethics today (see Woods & Lamond, 2011).

Rather than being static and invariable, Confucianism underwent dynamic changes and development over the years (Yao, 2000). Crucial among these was when Dong Zhongshu (179 BCE–104 BCE) persuaded China's emperor to adopt Confucianism as its official philosophy. It was thus during the Han Dynasty, four centuries after the death of Confucius, that Confucianism became the dominant ideology of China. Five texts important to Confucianism became canonical in Chinese education: *The Classic of Poetry*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Book of Changes*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Nylan, 2008). From that time on, Confucianism was intimately involved with the Chinese system of education, in

dynasty after dynasty. In the Tang dynasty (618–960), the most influential Confucianist was Han Yu (768–824), who deeply opposed Buddhist influences (Yao, 2000). In the Song–Ming Dynasties, the most prominent development was the Rationalist School in the Song Dynasty, and the Mind-Heart School in the Ming Dynasty. One of the leading figures of the Rationalist School was Zhu Xi (1130–1200), who compiled the Four Books, i.e., *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of The Mean*, *The Analects* and *Mencius*, that became accepted as the core curriculum for civil service examinations from the Song Dynasty (960–1279) on. Wang Yangming (1472–1529) was the most famous representative of the Mind-Heart School of Confucianism. His thoughts have been influential in the growing industry of psychological self-help in China, and also impacted on modernization in 19th-century Japan. Confucianism was emphatically a living tradition in Chinese history (Yao, 2000), especially as a central object of representation at all levels of the education system. However, it became ossified in the 19th century, and suffered decay together with the last dynasty of imperial China, that ended in 1911.

Confucianism and China in the 20th century

New Confucianism is a movement that began in the early 20th century in Republican China. It aimed to bring Confucianism into dialogue with Western thought, and is still influential in Taiwan today (Bresciani, 2001). However, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Confucianism became the object of criticism. The founding generation of the PRC, especially Mao Zedong, considered that Confucian traditions were an outdated stumbling block, not conducive to the development of Socialist modernity. This situation continued until Mao's passing in 1976. During this period (about the 1950s–1970s), the government's attitude toward Confucianism was negative. Such a power shift has previously been observed to greatly change how a central object, like the nation, is represented in history textbooks and teaching (Kello & Wagner, 2014). According to Sakki (2014), "textbooks are state technologies – means that are used by the state to reproduce itself" (p. 36). As the PRC is now ruled by an official ideology of Communism rather than Confucianism, the representation of Confucianism in official textbooks would be expected to be greatly diminished.

After the death of Mao, Confucianism became less frowned upon officially, as pragmatic economic development took center stage for China. After two decades of rapid growth, in 2000, China surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. China

hosted the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games successfully. These things greatly enhanced both the Chinese government's and people's confidence in heritage culture. Then, the problem the government faced was how to gain soft power and increase international standing, given that both Marxism and the ideology of the free market were borrowed from the West. In contrast, Confucianism is an indigenous cultural tradition with substantial potential for development today (Liu, 2014; Tu, 1996). In the last decade, the PRC reinstated the "cultural confidence" of Confucianism to rejuvenate the Chinese nation and bolster its cultural heritage under-pinning "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era." The government has created several hundred Confucius Institutes around the world to teach Chinese language and heritage culture (Lueck, Pippis, & Lin, 2014).

The current study

The textbook is an essential carrier of social representations (Sakki, 2014). School textbooks communicate an official (or authorized) representation of Confucianism, which reflect the "state's curriculum" (Carreto, 2011). School textbooks are said to contain knowledge that the older generation in power wishes to transmit to the younger generation (Pingel, 2000). Thus, the following questions are addressed in the current research: How has Confucianism been represented under the PRC, and how has this changed over the course of the past 70 years? To address these questions, we collected Chinese language teaching textbooks published from 1949 to 2019, and analyzed the content of these volumes both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Methods

Textbook selection and data collection

Ever since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, teaching materials have been unified under a system of "one series of textbooks under the same syllabus, with unified compilation and nationwide usage". But there have been a few periods, including the "Great Leap Forward" from 1958 to 1960 and the "Cultural Revolution" from 1966 to 1976, and a few other years when "diversified policies of teaching materials" were advocated (Ge, 2019; Du & Li, 2016). However, even in these three special periods, the usage of unified teaching materials still accounted for teaching materials in half of the country's primary school and junior high schools, and most of the high school materials.

Unified teaching materials were and are published by People's Education Press (PEP). Founded in 1950,

PEP is a specialized publishing house directly under the leadership of the Ministry of Education of the PRC. It undertakes the overall tasks of researching, compiling, publishing, and distributing teaching materials for elementary education, and various other textbooks and educational books. The textbooks published by PEP are used nationwide, amounting to scores of billions of copies. They are undoubtedly “mainstream materials” (Ge, 2019). In the textbook production process, the editors select, revise, and trim the texts written originally by their authors.

We selected all textbooks used to teach Chinese language, from primary school to senior high school published by PEP from 1949 to 2019. We accessed these textbooks from the internal library of PEP located in Beijing. Their copies of the textbooks before 1999 are electronic, and are paper-printed after 2000. We did not investigate history textbooks, since history is not included in primary school, and more importantly it is not a required course in basic education. On the other hand, all students in mainland China are required to study Chinese in every single semester during their 12 years of mandatory education.

From 1949 to 2019, there were in total 84 editions of Chinese language textbooks published by PEP, including 45 editions for primary school, 21 editions for junior high school, and 18 editions for senior high school. Each edition includes textbooks for all grades. For example, a single edition of a primary school textbook consists of 12 volumes from the first to the sixth grades, with two volumes for each grade. There were 595 volumes in total, and 11~50 passages in each volume. Each passage represents one lesson for students. In sum, there were 17,417 passages in all, from the 595 volumes and 84 editions.

Any texts related to Confucian figures or Confucian classic texts (the Four Books and the Five Classics) were selected from the above 17,417 passages. First, the first author nominated a preliminary list of significant Confucianists and then invited two associate professors of Chinese philosophy to edit the list, which was then made final (see Appendix for the final name list of Confucianists). Second, the third author read through all of the 17,417 passages, and photocopied any pieces of the passages related to the list of Confucianists or Confucian classics. The second author re-checked his work to avoid leaving things out. Finally, there were 470 passages with Confucian content that became the raw data for this study.

Data analysis procedures

Content analysis and thematic analysis were used as our analytical strategy for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, respectively. Content analysis is a

systematic, replicable technique for compressing a high volume of texts into fewer content categories (Stemler, 2000), and are thus used to help us focus more on the frequency of occurrence of categories of text.

Content analysis. The first author read all of the 470 passages and classified them into four categories inductively: (1) Excerpts from Confucian classics (123 passages), (2) Essays or excerpts by significant Confucianists (177 passages), (3) Passages or excerpts introducing or commenting on significant Confucianists or Confucianism (16 passages), and (4) Footnotes mentioning significant Confucianists and Confucianism (154 passages). These categories were discussed and confirmed by an associate professor of Chinese philosophy to ensure the categories could cover all content, with no overlap or omissions.

We calculated how many passages had Confucian content in each volume of the textbook. In this way, the relative ratio of Confucian content of each volume was obtained by dividing the number of Confucian passages by the total number of passages in that edition. In some years, there was only one edition: then, the percentage of Confucian content per year is equal to the per edition data. In other years, when multiple editions were released, the ratios of Confucian to non-Confucian passages were averaged across editions in the same year. In years when no new edition was released, we used the data from the previous year. This is because when no new editions are released, students use the textbooks from the previous year.

Then the first author conducted a frequency analysis by counting the number of texts for each category. To ensure reliability, the first author’s counting was rechecked separately by the second author. When discrepancies occurred, the first and the second authors discussed them until they reached an agreement. In each category, we also classified the texts into subcategories and checked these in the same way. So, for example, excerpts from the *Analects* were judged to fall into three subcategories: (1) On learning and teaching, (2) On self-cultivation of personal morality, and (3) On politics. Then the first and second author would decide independently which category each passage should be classified into. Then inter-rater reliability was assessed by Cohen’s kappa (κ). For all of the classification tasks, Cohen’s kappa (κ) ranged from 0.93 to 1.0.

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) from within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) that is not bound to any particular theoretical or epistemological framework, and widely used in the analysis of texts

similar to this study (e.g., Khan, Svensson, Jogdand, & Liu, 2017).

The thematic analysis procedure followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and, (6) producing the report. The first author led the whole process of the analysis, and the second and third authors contributed to the last three steps. The first three authors received their education in the PRC, so we acknowledge that this might have led to certain biases of interpretation. To remedy this possible flaw, we invited the fourth author to join in the qualitative analysis, as he was educated in the United States and Hong Kong, but is fluent in Chinese. Thus, the validity of the thematic analysis was improved.

Results

Through content analysis, the frequency of different categories of Confucian representations in different years and decades is presented first. Then, the thematic analysis showed qualitative details of what and how the Confucian figures and works were represented, and comment on how the trends of Confucian representations changed over time.

Analysis of the sources of confucian representations

We summed up counts of the four categories, obtaining the ratio/percentage of Confucian content per year. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, there were overall not many citations of Confucianism in official Chinese language teaching textbooks from any period, the total amount typically being in the 1–4% range (see last column). Confucianism has become only a minor element in the official language learning curriculum of the PRC. However, the relative ratio, though small, was highest from 1997–1999, and from 2016 on (exceeding 6% for the first time), indicating greater inclusion of Confucian content in the last 2–3 decades.

What is included and what is not included. Compared to rough frequency statistics, we were much more interested in the articulation of who was explicitly recognized as a “Confucian master” by the editors of textbooks, and what were recognized as “Confucian classic texts.” We found that only Confucius and Mencius were presented as Confucian figures, together with notable Confucian works *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Book of Poetry*. Thus, in terms of period, figures, and works typically identified as Confucian, all appeared more than two thousand years ago. The dynamic, lived evolution of

Confucianism for the last 2000 years has been erased from the textbooks, except for brief mentions in footnotes.

Themes of Confucian representations in the Chinese language textbooks

We identified two main themes composed of six distinct and coherent sub-themes (table 2).

Theme 1: The representation of Confucian figures and works..

Considering the close relationship between Confucius and Mencius and the principal works describing them, *The Analects* and *Mencius*, we analyzed Confucius and Mencius together first, and then *The Book of Rites* and *The Book of Poetry*.

Sub-theme 1: Confucian figures: Confucius, Mencius, and *The Analects* and *Mencius*. The first and most vivid time that Confucius appeared in our corpus was the Story of Confucius, included in a primary school text in 1957 (*《高级小学语文课本》第一册*, p.60). The first of these vivid stories embodies Confucius’ educational ideal of “providing education for all people without discrimination.” In the second story, Confucius gives different answers to the same question to different questioners, reflecting the ideal of “teaching students following their aptitude.” The third story highlighted Confucius’ critique of the harsh and brutal rule by dynastic government at that time. Although this passage did not explain the relationship between Confucius and Confucianism, it represented Confucius as a teacher with advanced educational ideas, and compassion for people at the bottom of society.

A biography of Confucius was provided in the ninth volume of *Ten-year school experiment textbook for Chinese language* in 1961 for the first time (*《十年制学校实验用课本语文(全20册) 1961–1962》*). The footnote of the passage “Sixteen excerpts from *The Analects*” commented, “Confucius, had the forename Qiu and style name Zhong Ni. He used to travel across different states for thirteen years (to persuade the emperors to implement the benevolent rulership) but failed. He then returned to State of Lu. He made corrections and deletions to *The Book of Poetry*, *The Book of History*, *The Books of Rites*, and *The Book of Music*, praised *The Book of Changes*, and edited *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. He is a thinker and educator who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period” (p.105). Subsequent editions of these textbooks reduced this complex footnote to a single phrase: “a thinker and educator, who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period” without any reference to his concrete contributions. It was not until 2000 that the textbook again introduced Confucius and *The Analects* in detail.

The other Confucian master acknowledged by the textbooks is Mencius. The most common keyword in

Table 1. Frequency of Confucian Representations in Chinese language textbooks from 1950 to 2019.

Year*	Total Volumes	Total Passages	Confucian Contents**				Sum	Relative Ratio
			Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4		
1950 to 1951	35	1182	3	0	0	4	7	0.0059
1952	30	935	5	3	0	2	10	0.0107
1953	8	320	0	0	0	0	0	0
1954	10	218	5	3	0	1	9	0.0413
1955	18	527	1	1	0	4	6	0.0114
1956	4	86	0	0	0	0	0	0
1957	12	373	0	0	1	0	1	0.0027
1958	24	497	0	2	0	1	3	0.0060
1959	24	537	3	5	1	5	14	0.0261
1960	42	1329	6	13	1	12	32	0.0241
1961	67	2132	28	22	0	12	62	0.0291
1962	8	294	0	0	0	0	0	0
1963	22	654	4	11	2	9	26	0.0398
1964 to 1977	22	703	1	1	0	2	4	0.0057
1978	22	708	0	7	0	7	14	0.0198
1979 to 1980	4	105	2	3	0	3	8	0.0762
1981	20	646	4	16	1	6	27	0.0418
1982	2	60	2	1	0	3	6	0.1000
1983 to 1986	18	471	4	6	1	4	15	0.0318
1987 to 1988	34	1101	8	22	1	16	47	0.0427
1989	28	810	2	5	0	12	19	0.0235
1990 to 1991	14	386	5	8	1	12	26	0.0674
1992 to 1994	36	949	5	9	0	11	25	0.0263
1995 to 1996	15	349	3	3	1	4	11	0.0315
1997 to 2000	8	183	9	6	2	5	22	0.1202
2001 to 2003	40	1190	9	15	2	5	31	0.0261
2004 to 2005	5	65	2	2	1	3	8	0.1231
2006 to 2015	5	65	3	2	0	4	9	0.1385
2016 to 2019	18	542	9	11	1	7	28	0.0517
Total	595	17417	123	177	16	154	470	0.0270

Note. *The statistics are from 1950, because the first edition of Chinese language textbook after the founding of Peoples' Republic of China is in 1950. Some years in column 1 are more than two, which indicates the textbooks have no change over those years.

**Category 1: number of passages of excerpts from Confucian classics. Category 2: number of passages of essays or excerpts by the significant Confucianists. Category 3: number of passages of introducing or commenting on significant Confucianists or Confucianism. Category 4: number of passages with footnotes mentioning significant Confucianists and Confucianism. Sum: the sum of Category 1, Category 2, Category 3 and Category 4. Relative Ratio: Sum divided by Total Passages

his introduction is “the Warring States Period.” A more detailed introduction to Mencius also comes from the aforementioned *Ten-year school experiment textbook for Chinese language* in 1961. In the footnote of Three Passages from *The Mencius* in the twelfth volume of the textbook, Mencius is introduced in detail: “Mencius (390–305 BCE), with the forename Ke and style name Ziyu. He lived in the Zhou State during the Warring States Period. He was a student of Confucius’ grandson Kong Ji (Zi Si). After graduating, he traveled to many states and places to try to promote his political ideas but was accepted by few kings. So finally, he went back and dedicated himself to teaching and writing until he died. He is a Confucian master after Confucius. He is also a thinker with significant

influence in ancient China” (p.126). However, just like Confucius, the subsequent editions of the textbooks did not retain any detailed introduction, until this was returned in 1997.

Another way of understanding the representation of Confucius and Mencius is to analyze excerpts from *The Analects* and *Mencius*. We analyzed all of the excerpts across all editions of the Chinese language textbooks published from 1949 to 2019.

The excerpts from *The Analects*, and *Mencius* could be classified into the following content areas:

1. On learning and teaching. The texts illustrated the importance of leaning, the proper attitude toward learning, what content one should learn, and also how to teach students.

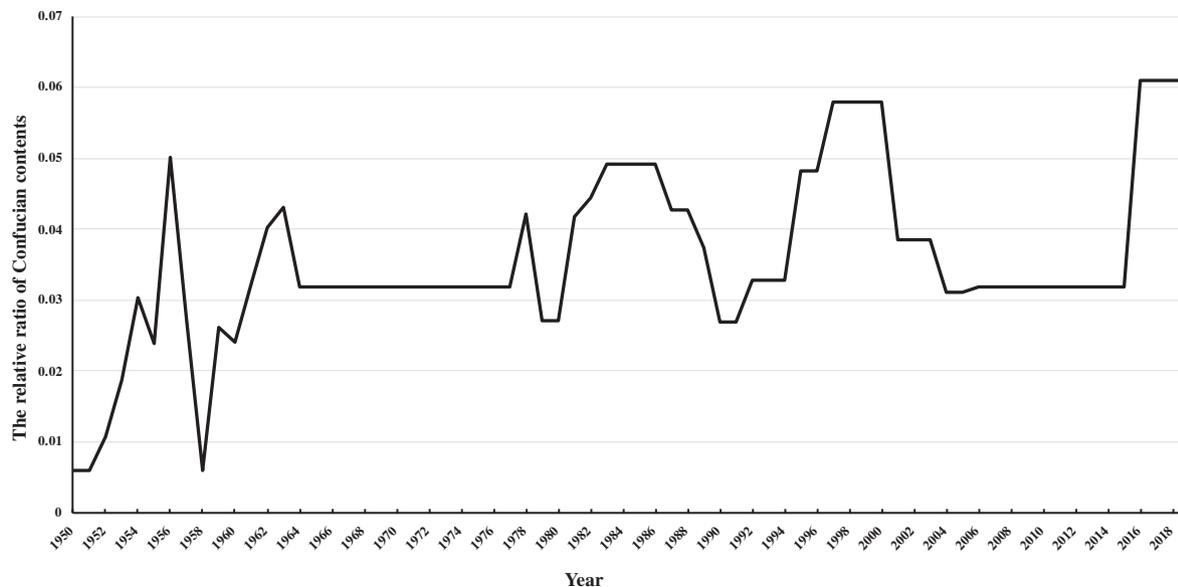


Figure 1. The relative ratio of Confucian contents in Chinese language textbooks from 1950 to 2019.

2. On self-cultivation of personal morality. These are teachings of Confucius and Mencius on essential aspects of personal morality and how to make progress in this area.
3. On politics. These are political views of Confucius and Mencius.

Sub-theme 2: Confucian works: *The Book of Rites* and *The Book of Poetry*. Most but not all textbooks acknowledged *The Book of Rites* and *The Book of Poetry* as Confucian classics. The excerpts texts from *The Book of Rites* could be classified into four categories as follows: (1) On learning. This category is about what to learn and how to learn. (2) On self-cultivation of personal morality. This category is about how to cultivate one's moral integrity. (3) On politics. The texts in this category condemned the tyranny of rulers and articulated a more ideal society. (4) On military strategy. This was about how to win a war. The excerpts from *The Book of Rites* were thus similar in content to the excerpts from *The Analects* and *Mencius*, emphasizing three main points advocated by Confucianism: attach importance to learning, cultivate personal morality, and benevolent, virtue-based politics.

The excerpts from *The Book of Poetry* could be classified into the following three categories: (1) Showing the oppression and exploitation of the people at the bottom of society by their rulers; (2) Reflecting the spirit of unity of soldiers; (3) Praising love. We can see that unlike *The Analects*, *Mencius*, and *The Book*

of Rites, *The Book of Poetry* does not involve the topics of learning or personal cultivation. The only category in *The Book of Poetry* that related to the other three sets of Confucian extracts is the condemnation of tyranny. This reflects that *The Book of Poetry* is not as didactic as the other sources; it communicates ideas from ancient Chinese culture that were important to Confucius (he loved music and poetry as essential elements in the cultivation of moral character), but is less relevant to Confucianism as an ideology.

In summary, the above analysis showed that the Confucianism represented in Chinese language textbooks from 1949 to 2019 was mainly from four Confucian classics, namely *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Book of Poetry*. These excerpts emphasized three categories: learning, personal moral cultivation, and benevolent governance. However, these representations were not static. We now analyze changes in Confucian representations in textbooks.

Theme 2: Changes of Confucian representations.. Quantitatively, we can find four peaks of Confucian related content from 1950 to 2019 as shown in Figure 2. Qualitatively, we tried to examine how Confucianism was presented. We found that most of the time, the textbooks did not provide a clear-cut description when presenting Confucianism-related content. The evaluations of Confucianism changed, just as the quantity of Confucian excerpts changed across the four peaks.

Table 2. Outline of themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-themes
1. The Representation of Confucian Figures and Works	1. Confucian figures: Confucius, Mencius, and <i>The Analects</i> and <i>Mencius</i> . 2. Confucian Works: <i>The Book of Rites</i> and <i>The Book of Poetry</i> .
2. Changes of Confucian Representations	1. 1st peak: mid-1950s 2. 2nd peak: early 1960s 3. 3rd peak: 1980s 4. 4th peak: late 1990s

Sub-theme 1: 1st peak (mid-1950s). The first peak occurred in the mid-1950s and fell sharply in the late 1950s. In this period, the Confucian texts selected were rich and profound. The textbook comments on Confucianism were positive. For example, the fifth volume of the Senior High School Textbook for Chinese Language (《高级中学课本语文》) published in 1954 had three excerpts from *The Analects* in one passage (p.119), namely *The Madman of Chu*, *Jieyu, Passed by Confucius* [18.5], *Changju and Jieni Were at Work in the Field together* [18.6], and *The Old Man Hediao* [18.7]. The main thrust of the three excerpts is to ask the same deep question. When the country is in distress, should the individual enter the world to save the country, or should he hide away from the world? There is no standard answer to this question. Confucius just made his own choice and gave his reasons. He neither convinced his opponents nor was he persuaded by them. We think this is an issue closely related to an individual's choice of life path and can stimulate students' thinking about their own lives.

Sub-theme 2: 2nd peak (early 1960s). The relative ratio of Confucian content reached its second peak in the early 1960s. For example, in 1961, *The Analects* and Confucius were introduced in detail: “*The Analects* is a book that records the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. After Confucius' death, it was compiled by his disciples ... Zi, means master, refers to Confucius. Confucius with the forename Qiu and style name Zhong Ni. He used to travel across different states for thirteen years (to persuade the emperors to implement the benevolent ruling), but failed. He then returned to State Lu. He made corrections and deletions to the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of History*, the *Books of Rites*, and the *Book of Music*, praised the *Book of Changes*, and edited the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. He is a thinker and educator who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period” (p.105, volume 9, *Ten-year school experimental textbook for Chinese language* 《十年制学校实验用课本语文》, published in 1961). The footnote of two excerpts from the *Book of*

Rites in volume 10 of this edition provides a detailed introduction of the *Book of Rites* (p.116). Moreover, also in this edition, the footnote of “To Encouraging Learning” by Xun Zi provides a detailed introduction to Xun Zi's life and his Confucian standpoint (p.57, volume 20). Subsequently, the footnote of *The Stories of Qihuan Duke and Jinwen Duke* (《齐桓晋文之事》) introduced Mencius in detail (p.65). The richness of the contents of and the positivity of the evaluation of Confucianism reached a peak in this edition, leaving other contemporaneous editions far behind.

Sub-theme 3: 3rd peak (1980s). The third peak occurred in the 1980s, as Deng's economic reform was beginning. During the time of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, primary and secondary education was greatly affected, as traditional education was denigrated (Deng & Treiman, 1997). There were no new textbooks published by PEP from 1965 to 1977. Confucianism was an object of societal criticism during the Cultural Revolution. However, we can see in Figure 2 that Confucian content rose again in the late 1970s, climbing to the peak recorded in the mid-1950s. Confucianism was again represented in a positive way.

Sub-theme 4: 4th peak (late 1990s). In the late 1990s, Confucian content increased in quantity, and the evaluation of Confucianism changed as well. One notable sign was a description of the Confucian classics. The *Full-time general senior high school textbook (experimental) for Chinese language (compulsory)* (《全日制普通高级中学教科书(试验本)语文(必修)》) provided a comprehensive introduction to *Mencius* and the life story of Mencius in volume 5. This is the first comprehensive and detailed introduction of a Confucian classic in our corpus.

However, this trend went down again in the early 2000s, until the Chinese Ministry of Education unified the national primary and junior high school textbooks for Chinese language teaching in 2016. As shown in Figure 2, the 2016 edition contained a lot of Confucian content.

Overall summary

Our overall interpretation of Confucian representations in Chinese language textbooks is as follows:

1. Distant. The Confucian masters recognized by Chinese language textbooks are only Confucius and Mencius (although the Confucianists in the Song Dynasty are mentioned, their works were not included). The only Confucian works selected into the textbooks are *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Book of Poetry*. Although these works are classics, they have existed for more than two thousand years. Another great Confucianist, Xun Zi, a contemporary of Mencius who at one time was considered his equal, though mentioned, was not identified as a Confucian figure. The “Mind-Heart School” in the Ming Dynasty and New Confucianism, both of which are part of contemporary Chinese culture, had no place in the textbooks. This representation of Confucianism as being entirely historical, might lead students to wonder “Perhaps Confucianism is good, but what does it have to do with me?” (this impression was indeed found in an interview study of highly educated young Chinese, see Xie, Zhou, Liu, & Liao, in press).
2. Abstract and decontextualized. To improve the appreciation of Chinese culture is one of the main goals of Chinese language teaching. Textbooks are the most important institutional carriers for accomplishing this goal. However, the Confucian-related contents in the textbooks are presented in a decontextualized way, resulting in an abstract impression of Confucianism lacking in vividness. For example, in most editions of the textbooks, Confucius was introduced as a “thinker and educator”, but what he did was rarely mentioned. The sixth volume of the *Standard compulsory education curriculum standard experimental textbook* in 2001 (《义务教育课程标准实验教科》) selected one of Han Yu’s poems as its text. This poem was written by Han Yu when the emperor degraded him in rank because he argued that the emperor was giving too much honor to Buddhism. However, both the critical background information and the Confucian background of Han Yu were neglected. Thus, the life history of Confucianists was often erased from the textbooks. When Confucianist writings were selected, who the author is and why he or she wrote the essay were ignored, leaving a decontextualized, empty, and abstract impression of Confucianism.
3. Apolitical. Confucius and Mencius are the two Confucian masters recognized in Chinese language

textbooks. A primary orientation of their works is toward politics, especially benevolent governance (Liu, Li, & Yue, 2010). The introduction to *The Analects* in our corpus presented its most important idea as how to govern the country: “First of all, as one of the Confucian classics, *The Analects* of Confucianism fully reflects the Confucian idea of governing the country” (see Standard high school curriculum standard experiment textbook in 2006 《普通高中课程标准实验教科书2006》, p.85). It can be said that the content of learning, teaching, as well as cultivation of personal morality in Confucianism all serve the political theory of benevolent governance. But across the textbooks, learning and teaching and personal moral cultivation were emphasized far more than governing the country. For example, in the seventh grade of *Compulsory education textbook Chinese 2016–2018* (义务教育教科书 语文 2016–2018), Twelve Essays from *The Analects* selected 12 famous quotes. But of these 12 famous sayings, four were about learning or teaching, and eight about personal morality cultivation. Not one reflected the political philosophy of Confucian governance. However, political philosophy and self-cultivation are the two wings of Confucianism that complement each other. This is not to say that textbooks must show all aspects of Confucianism, but the textual selections in the textbooks make the representation of Confucianism appear as indifferent to political problems.

Discussion

By collecting and analyzing Chinese language teaching textbooks in mainland China from 1949 to 2019, the current study revealed Confucian representations and representational change. We found that only Confucius and Mencius were recognized as Confucian masters and only four classics, *The Analects*, *Mencius*, *The Book of Rites* and *The Book of Poetry* were acknowledged as Confucian texts. This represents Confucianism as ancient history, detached from culture change over the last 2000 years. The representation appears largely devoid of group identification functions (see Liu & Hilton, 2005). Thus, at present the representation of Confucianism in Chinese language textbooks fails to communicate depth of understanding and appreciation for traditional Chinese culture, which is an official objective of the national curriculum for this subject.

While there were peaks and troughs in the quantity and quality of content over the decades, reflecting political eras in the history of the nation, the image of Confucianism presented across time is distant,

abstract, decontextualized, and apolitical. The total amount of text concerning Confucianism was tiny in relation to the total text presented across all eras and all textbooks. There is a consistent absence of connection from the texts selected to represent Confucianism, and the content of everyday life, thus presenting a total disconnect of cultural memory from communicative memory (Assmann, 2011).

To our knowledge, our study is the first to show how the representation of an ancient system of meaning is constructed and filtered through the official lens of a contemporary Ministry of Education. Ancient systems of meaning, we argue, are important to cultural memory. Though previous research on social representations of history has focused on people and events, important historical figures and events also can be considered as an embodiment of cultural forms.

The core idea of Confucianism is benevolence, which is embodied in role relationships between oneself and others (Hwang, 2001), and the lifelong cultivation of moral character (Liu, 2014). This core representation was maintained in our corpus, but only as a distant memory, not as something affecting one's personal life, or relevant to the current political situation. Thus, according to the theory of Abric (1993), the central core of Confucianism has been cut off from any peripheral system connecting it to application in everyday life. As in Chinese social representations of history (Liu et al., 2009), foundational events and people in Confucianism were retained, but its dynamic changes through history (see Yao, 2000) have been forgotten (Hirst et al., 2018). Unlike where there is a dynamic relationship between communicative memory and social representations of history (see Choi, Liu, Mari, Garber, in press), there was no recency effect to make Confucianism relevant to Chinese society today. It was represented as ancient history only.

We further found two characteristics of representing Confucianism in the current study, which may or may not be true for representations of other ancient systems of meaning. First, the ancient system of meaning was simplified, by stripping it of details and social contexts. The central core representation (Abric, 1993) remaining is the bare bones of a formerly rich system of thoughts. The thoughts are so abstract that concrete examples can be used to teach only selective aspects of the ancient system in the textbooks we reviewed. For example, a primary concern of Confucius was benevolent governance, but in our corpus, this was far subordinate to learning, teaching, and cultivation of moral character. This suggests that Confucianism plays little part in bolstering the current ideology of state governance in China today. Second, the narrative style of describing the founder and foundational figures

and tests could be another way of modifying the representation to strip it of ideological meaning. For example, Confucius was represented as a “thinker and educator”, but his deeds were often ignored. This decontextualized narrative makes the representation hard to remember, or to have any impact on students' daily life. This finding may be relevant for the comparison of the narrative style of cultural vs. communicative memory (Muller et al., 2018), and for probing into how central core representations might lose their normative power if their peripheral elements are stripped away (Abric, 1993).

This lifeless distancing does not satisfy the core objective of the curriculum for language learning in China to “draw on the wisdom of national culture” and for students to “inherit and promote the excellence of Chinese traditional culture...and love Chinese culture, and prevent cultural national nihilism”.

Practically, from the late 20th century on, Confucianism once again became attractive to, and encouraged by, the Chinese government (Yu, 2008). In order for students to absorb Confucianism better, editors should consider providing more background information about the authors of the text, and the social and political context wherein the text was written. This would allow the text to come alive for students. Second, there could be more editorial content encouraging students to apply the text learned in school to their daily life. Just like Confucius used to say, “Isn't it a pleasure to learn and practice often?” (*The Analects* [1.1.1]).

Some limitations and directions for future research are worth noting. In the current study, we included all of the editions of Chinese language textbooks from 1949 to 2019. Chinese language textbooks were selected for this first investigation, mainly because this is a required subject for all children growing up in China. This enabled us to form a high-level contrast between the current educational regime and the imperial past, because Confucian-related content was central to all teaching in dynastic China. However, Confucian representations also may appear in history and politics textbooks, which is worth exploring for future research. The presentation of Confucianism in history and politics textbooks may be more explicit and salient, to augment the findings of the current study. These textbooks may provide an additional wealth of Confucian content; they might contain a more systematic introduction to Confucianism. But we would also expect there to be more obvious and explicit ideological positioning, and even more variability according to era. Such further investigations would deepen our understanding of the living relationship between

communicative and culture memory, in a country like China, that is simultaneously old and new.

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Appendix

List of significant Confucianists.

Name	Birth–death year	Name	Birth–death year	Name	Birth–death year
Confucius	551BCE–479BCE	Yan Yuan	521BCE–481BCE	Zi Gong	520BCE–456BCE
Zeng Zi	505BCE–435BCE	Zi Si	483BCE–402BCE	Mencius	372BCE–289BCE
Xun Zi	313BCE–238BCE	Yang Xiong	53BCE–18	Zheng Xuan	127–200
Han Yu	768–824	Liu ZongYuan	773–819	OuYang Xiu	1007–1072
Zeng Kong	1019–1083	Zhang Zai	1020–1077	Cheng Hao	1032–1085
Zhu Xi	1130–1200	Lv ZuQian	1137–1181	Lu JiuYuan	1139–1193
Wen TianXiang	1236–1283	Chen XianZhang	1428–1500	Wang YangMing	1472–1529
Luo RuFang	1515–1588	Li Zhi	1527–1602	Huang ZongXi	1610–1695
Wang FuZhi	1619–1692	Dai Zhen	1724–1777	Zhang XueCheng	1738–1801
Zhang TaiYan	1869–1936	Ma YiFu	1883–1967	Xiong ShiLi	1885–1968
Zhang JunMai	1887–1969	Liang ShuMing	1893–1988	Feng YouLan	1895–1990
Fang DongMei	1899–1977	Xu FuGuan	1903–1982	Tang JunYi	1909–1978
Mou ZongSan	1909–1995	Yu YingShi	1930–	Cheng ZhongYing	1935–