

# Changes of Heritage Education in China's Primary School Moral Education Textbooks

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**Abstract:** Heritage is the legacy inherited from past generations and serves as the main source of individual and national identity. Sustainable preservation of heritage mainly relies on heritage education. The subject of moral education plays a key role in heritage education in Chinese primary schools. This study investigates four sets of moral education textbooks since the 1980s to see how heritage education has been presented to primary school students in China. The results reveals that the active participation and innovation-oriented protection of heritage are being increasingly encouraged; the protection of tangible heritage and natural heritage is receiving much more attention; and the building-up of cultural confidence is turning into the focus of heritage education.

**Keywords:** heritage education; textbooks; changes; moral education

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## 1. Introduction

Heritage is the legacy inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and passed on to future generations. It reminds people of their cultural roots, beliefs, and values, thus serving as the main source of individual and national identity (Copeland 2006: 40). Heritage is often categorized into two which are cultural heritage and natural heritage. Cultural heritage is related to the ways of living developed by a group of people and passed on from generation to generation, which can be further categorized into tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage refers to what is physically touchable, such as historic sites, monuments, museums, and so on; intangible heritage is immaterial such as festivals, rituals, language, literature, music, traditions, values, and beliefs, etc. Natural heritage is concerned with landscapes that demonstrate natural beauty or habitats, including endangered animals or plant species (Aslan & Ardemagni 2006: 26; Blake 2002: 15). As a unified multi-ethnic country, China owns a time-honored history and brilliant ancient civilization, which has endowed the country with rich cultural and natural heritage. It has so far boasted 56 United Nations Organization for Education, Science and

Culture (UNESCO) World Heritage sites, including 38 cultural sites, 14 natural sites, and 4 cultural and natural heritage sites. The rich and colorful heritage tells us the story of who we are, what we have done on the land, and our relationship with the surroundings, which is undoubtedly, both the solid foundation of national unity and an invaluable resource for establishing peace and understanding among people.

Invaluable and irreplaceable resource as it is, heritage is vulnerable to natural and man-made threats such as typhoons, floods, earthquakes, wars, or economic development. The uniqueness and vulnerability highlight the importance of heritage preservation. Sustainable protection depends on public awareness and a sense of stewardship towards heritage, both of which should be cultivated through education (Copeland 2006: 55–58). Heritage education has, therefore, been gaining increasing attention in recent years. According to Hunter (1988: 72), heritage education is a teaching and learning approach to foster an understanding of history and culture through cultural materials and heritage. It is not a discrete curriculum subject; instead, it is an intercultural approach to teaching several subjects, such as history, geography, arts, literature, and the like.

Hunter (1992: 22) further points out that the best way of heritage education is to integrate it with existing curricular materials so that all subjects can serve as the basis for heritage education. In 2014, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRCMOE) issued a document entitled *Guidelines for Promoting Chinese Heritage Education* to underscore the urgency and significance of strengthening heritage education. The document proposed heritage education be infused into curricula subjects and textbooks and that the subject moral education, among all the subjects in primary and secondary schools, plays a key role in fostering the sense of heritage preservation (PRCMOE 2014).

Scholars underscore the role of schools and textbooks as the essential vehicle for transmitting values and national ideology (Ersoy & Sahin 2012: 1547–1558; Merey, et al. 2012: 1627–1632; Spring 2010: 62–65). Textbooks on how to organize knowledge and teach it to students have a great impact on many students (Wertsch 2000: 511–533). Moral education in primary schools is designed to bring up good human beings and patriotic citizens, which largely involves presenting the precious heritage to students in its textbooks. Previous studies of moral education textbooks have focused on the connotation of morality and its changes (He 2014: 95–99; Sun 2016: 162–170; Xu 2016: 23–28). Little research, however, has been conducted on heritage education. By examining four sets of moral education textbooks for primary school students in China from the 1980s, this paper aims to sort out the changes over time in the way of heritage education presented to students in history, so as to provide reference for the future development of heritage education in primary schools in China.

## 2. Historical Overview of Moral Education in China

The predecessor of moral education in China is political education. As its name implies, political education during the period of 1949 to 1978 was highly politics-oriented, whose major aim was to strengthen socialist ideologies and cultivate communist moral qualities among students. Moral education was not introduced into primary schools as a compulsory subject from grade 1 to 5 until PRCMOE issued *Teaching Plan for Whole-day Five-year Primary Schools (Revised Draft)* in 1981, which required primary schools across the country to transform political education (*zhengzhi*) into Ideological and moral education (*sixiang pinde*) (PRCMOE 1981).

For the past four decades, moral education has mainly gone through four stages of development. The first stage is from 1981 to 1997. The major aim of moral education was to cultivate students' communist moral qualities and good behavior as well as train new talents with “Four Haves” (have ideals, have morality, have knowl-

edge and have discipline) (PRCMOE 1982). Though politics was still very much emphasized, moral education gradually turned to focus more on students' behavior.

The second stage lasts from 1997 to 2001. Moral education assumed further depoliticized tendency, for communist moral education was first replaced by civic moral education and rudimentary Marxist philosophy education (Lee & Ho 2005: 413–431). While collectivism and socialism were still very much emphasized, personal moral qualities gained more attention. Students were expected to develop capacities for making independent moral judgments in an increasingly open and modernized society (PRCMOE 1997).

From 2001 to 2016, a new set of educational reforms was implemented. Moral education in primary schools was divided into two levels: Morality and Life (inclusive of grades 1 to 2) and Morality and Society (inclusive of grades 3 to 6). The prefix “ideo-” was removed from the description of moral education, which marked an explicit depoliticization of moral education. Moral education aimed to cultivate civilized behaviors and habits, good moral qualities, and love for life; moreover, moral education tended to be closer to students' life experience, namely much emphasis was placed on linking students' life experience and social experience to their learning experience (PRCMOE 2002a, 2002b).

In 2016 PRCMOE issued a document to rename moral education textbooks *Morality and Life* and *Morality and Society* into *Morality and the Rule of Law*. In the current textbooks *Morality and the Rule of Law*, the knowledge concerning the laws and regulations is significantly increased to improve students' awareness of the rule of law. The past four decades have witnessed the depoliticization tendency of moral education, which in turn must have brought changes to heritage education in moral education textbooks.

### 3. Method

Given the importance of heritage education, the study aims to examine its changes over time in moral education textbooks in Chinese primary schools. Both quantitative analysis and content analysis are employed to evaluate four sets of moral education textbooks in primary schools from the 1980s. Primary school education in China is free and compulsory for all children from the age of 6 years old. Most primary education lasts 6 years with a tiny part lasting 5 years. The highly centralized and standardized structure of Chinese education fits well into the study because all primary schools are required to follow the same curriculum guidelines and use centrally approved textbooks.

Given the historical development of moral education, the sources for this study are selected from each of the four stages, which include four sets of moral education textbooks published by People's Education Press (PEP) in 1984, 1999 and 2006, and 2019 respectively. PEP, founded in 1950, is a press under the direct leadership of PRCMOE and the largest educational publishing house in China whose systematic research on issues in basic education and materials development has contributed to the overall excellence of its publications. Each set consists of 12 textbooks from grades 1 to 6, and altogether there are 48 textbooks.

Heritage has a broad meaning. But simply speaking, it is what we have inherited from our ancestors (Barghi, et al. 2017: 124–131). It can be classified as cultural heritage and natural heritage. Both are the legacy of our ancestors that tell us how they lived in the past, their values, beliefs, and interaction with others. In this study, both cultural and natural heritage are investigated in the four sets of textbooks.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 *Active participation and innovation-oriented protection of heritage are increasingly encouraged*

Each set of textbooks consists of 12 textbooks from grades 1–6. The 1984 textbooks contain 142 lessons in total, 1999 contain 155 lessons, 2009 contain 154 lessons and 2019 contain 154 lessons. There are 15 lessons concerning heritage in 1984 textbooks, 24 in 1999, 30 in 2009, and 31 in 2019. As can be seen in Table 1, the percentage of heritage education in the four sets of textbooks has shown an increasing tendency since the 1980s. This rising tendency is in line with people’s spiritual growth in the wake of the rapid development of the economy in China, to understand who they are, where they come from, and where they are going to go.

Set of textbooks	Lessons about heritage in the whole textbooks	Total lessons of the whole textbooks	Percentage of heritage education in the whole textbooks
1984	15	142	10.56%
1999	24	155	15.48%
2009	30	154	19.48%
2019	31	154	20.13%

**Table 1: Quantity of lessons about heritage in textbooks**

We analysed the content of the textbooks and found that in 2009 and 2019 textbooks, students are encouraged to actively participate in the protection and preservation of heritage while in 1984 and 1999 textbooks, students are merely taught to know the precious heritage in China. For instance, in Lesson 2 of Textbook 8 for 2009, it is recommended that students take the role of being a tour guide to introduce the landscapes of their hometown; in Lesson 10 of Textbook 10, it is suggested that students perform the roles in Beijing Opera. 2019 textbooks take a step further to warn students of the possible disappearance of some intangible heritage. Lesson 16 of Textbook 3 contains the following statement:

My mom has told me that sugar painting in my hometown has over 600 years of history, but fewer people choose to make this kind of painting nowadays. What a pity! If only I could master the skill of sugar painting. (PEP 2019b: 64)

This statement highlights that every individual can do their bit in the protection of heritage. According to Copeland (2004: 17–21), heritage doesn’t just mean passive inheritance; instead, people in the present have the choice of what constitutes heritage, the contents of which would appear to have been selected in the past for them. The choice of what makes up heritage is more contingent on local communities and individuals. This bottom-up nature of heritage determines that the aim of heritage education is not only to develop students’ knowledge about heritage but more significantly to prompt them to move from ideas to action and commit themselves to the process of heritage protection.

Heritage is the legacy from the past, but it is not just protecting the past. In other words, heritage is not something that is fixed, but something that changes over time. China is one of the world’s oldest and richest con-

tinuous cultures. China's heritage and identity have gone through over 5,000 years of development. In its long history, Chinese culture has constantly been reinventing itself. The Chinese Ministry of Culture has been gradually setting up a fairly comprehensive system to preserve the cultural and natural heritage, sticking to a principle of "putting preservation first, concentrating on salvation, making rational use and carrying on and developing China's cultural heritage". Guided by this principle, the idea of innovation-oriented protection of heritage is put forward in 2019 textbooks. In Lesson 7 of Textbook 4, several illustrations demonstrating the new ways of playing the traditional game rope-skipping are presented, and students are encouraged to try new ways of playing the traditional games and have more fun. In Lesson 10 of Textbook 8 for 2019, the students are taught that while some social customs and habits are disappearing and in urgent need of protection, some are outdated and call for transformation. There is the following statement:

With the development of society, some social customs and habits can no longer meet the development of social development. These customs and habits are calling for transformation. (PEP 2019c: 79)

Although the outdated customs and habits are not listed, students are encouraged to survey to find out some and figure out ways to improve them. From these lessons in the current textbooks, we could find that heritage education is now shifting from a preservation-only focus to a focus on innovation-oriented protection.

#### ***4.2 The protection of tangible heritage and natural heritage is receiving more attention***

We further investigated the respective lessons of intangible, tangible, and natural heritage. As is shown in Table 2, all four sets of moral education textbooks attach great importance to the presentation of intangible heritage. 1984, 1999, 2009, and 2019 textbooks consist of 12, 22, 23, and 22 lessons concerning intangible heritage, respectively. The lessons of intangible heritage are always on top of the priority list. Traditional Chinese philosophy places great emphasis on personal ethics and morality. We read through the textbooks and found that traditional virtues like honesty, modesty, diligence, and patriotism are highlighted in all four sets of textbooks. Besides, traditional festivals like Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Mid-autumn Festival are presented to students in the four sets of textbooks. The emphasis on traditional virtues and festivals suggests that moral education textbooks have paid much attention to developing students' sense of morality and loyalty to the country.

Set of textbooks	Lessons about tangible heritage	Lessons about intangible heritage	Lessons about natural heritage
1984	2	12	1
1999	2	22	1
2009	4	23	3
2019	5	22	4

**Table 2: Quantity of lessons about tangible, intangible, and natural heritage in textbooks**

Meanwhile, lessons about tangible heritage and natural heritage increase markedly in the 2009 and 2019 textbooks. In 1984 and 1999 textbooks, students were only taught to protect the historic sites and endangered animals in China. In 2009 and 2019 textbooks, besides the historic sites and endangered animals, students learned the importance of protecting the artifacts, buildings, and natural landscapes. This increase reflects the enhanced

awareness of protecting and preserving tangible and natural heritage. In the late 1970s, China started the process of reform and opening-up. Since then, it has created an economic miracle, becoming the fastest growing economy in the world. In the early stage of reform and opening-up, the government spared no effort to fight poverty and improve the well-being of people. Some traditional buildings, monuments, and natural landscapes were destroyed for the sake of economic development. With the improved living standard and education, the knowledge on the value of tangible and natural heritage has been greatly enhanced. Moreover, the acceleration of the economy promotes the development of tourism. An increasing number of people have access to experiencing the wonders left by their ancestors, which makes them realize the value of the rich tangible and natural heritage in China. Lesson 6 in Textbook 9 for 2019 is inclusive of more than 10 photos of the natural landscapes in China and contains the following statement:

China boasts majestic mountains and magnificent plateaus, intermontane basins and broad plains, as well as rolling hills and vast rivers, lakes, and seas. The varied mosaic of landform types makes up a picture that reflects the lasting charm of Chinese culture. (PEP 2019a: 48)

This statement makes clear the relationship between natural landscapes and cultural heritage. It is the unique landscapes that have nurtured generations of Chinese people and brilliant Chinese culture. Since we depend in part on where we live, the protection of natural landscapes is also a vital part of heritage education.

#### ***4.3 The cultivation of cultural confidence is turning into the focus of intangible heritage education***

Intangible heritage is indispensable to every aspect of people's life: monuments, artifacts, and historic sites are a product of intangible heritage; intangible heritage also influences an individual's identity, which is closely related to a national past; the values, beliefs, moral codes and ways of thinking also underlie the community's life. Intangible heritage, however, is threatened by the acceleration of modernization and globalization. People's national identity and loyalty to the country are challenged due to the advances in communication technologies and fragmenting effects of globalization. Great efforts have been made to preserve the intangible heritage, but with the change of cultural ecology, the presentation of intangible heritage has also undergone some changes in moral education textbooks.

We continued to investigate the four sets of textbooks to reveal the changes in the presentation of intangible heritage in the textbooks. According to Aslan & Ardemagni (2006: 30), intangible heritage can be classified into four domains: values and belief systems, rituals and festive events, traditional science and performing arts, language and stories. We calculated the lessons of different domains of intangible heritage in the four sets of textbooks. The results were analyzed in percentage terms, as is shown in Table 3.

Categories of intangible heritage	1984	1999	2009	2019
Values and belief systems	46.15%	54.55%	36.36%	33.33%
Rituals and festive events	15.38%	9.09%	18.18%	16.67%
Traditional science and performing arts	0%	0%	22.73%	25%
Language and stories	38.46%	36.36%	22.73%	25%

**Table 3: Percentage of different categories of intangible heritage**

The percentage of values and belief systems falls in 2009 and 2019 textbooks after the peak in 1999 textbooks. This is consistent with the 2002 and 2019 curricula guidelines that relate moral education more closely to students' life experience and social experience. The 2009 and 2019 textbooks underline the development of students' psychological health and moral judgment abilities. We read through the textbooks and found that traditional values like patriotism, honesty, modesty, diligence and senior respect have remained constant topics since the 1980s. One noticeable change is that more importance is attached to the family's role in transmitting the traditional values. The traditional family values are the rules and virtues passed from one generation to another in the family. As a family is the basic unit of society, enhancing traditional family values is fundamental to national development and social harmony. In Lesson 3 of Textbook 10 for 2019, some well-known examples concerning the traditional family values like *The Chinese Code of Success—Maxims by Zhu Zi*, *An Admonition to My Son by Zhuge Liang* are presented, and students are taught to inherit the family values and make a contribution to the big family of the society.

Rituals and festive events are important symbols of culture, an understanding of which facilitates students' appreciation of China's diverse traditions and creates a sense of loyalty to the country. A striking change in rituals and festive events in the textbooks is that the 2019 textbooks highlight the importance of maintaining family traditions through holidays for the first time. Holidays are a time for family, food, and fun. The family traditions celebrated each year will make the holiday a special occasion to bring family members together. For instance, Lesson 12 of Textbook 5 for 2019 discusses the family feast on Spring Festival Eve. The family reunion dinner on the eve of Chinese New Year has long been an essential part of celebrating the Spring Festival. Students are told that the family tradition enables everyone to develop a sense of belonging and helps build strong family relationships. Another major change is that the rituals and festive events of countries in the world are presented in 2009 and 2019 textbooks. In Lesson 14 of Textbook 11 for 2009, there is the following statement:

We are deeply impressed by their long history and colorful art when visiting these world-famous cities. If we go a step further to experience their customs, we will be presented with a more gorgeous and fantastic picture. (PEP 2009b: 102)

Students get to know the various festivals and rituals of different countries and are taught to recognize the similarities between different cultures and celebrate the differences. In addition, the historical sites and traditional foods of different countries in the world are introduced to students in 2009 and 2019 textbooks. It is explained that the historic sites, literature, science can be considered as the world's common heritage, and everyone is responsible for the protection of the common heritage, which suggests that heritage education in primary schools goes beyond the scope of national heritage to impart the knowledge about world heritage.

There is a breakthrough in the presentation of traditional science and arts in 2009 and 2019 textbooks. Traditional scientific knowledge, techniques, music, dance, etc., which were ignored in the past, first appeared in 2009 textbooks. They are called "the essence of Chinese culture" and are favored by friends in different countries. Take traditional Chinese medicine, for example. Its value is underlined in Lesson 10 of Textbook 10 for 2009. There is the following statement:

Traditional Chinese medicine has a history of several thousands of years. It is a well-established system of medical practice developed through thousands of years of empirical testing. It demonstrates the wisdom of the

Chinese nation. (PEP 2009a: 87)

It is pointed out that traditional Chinese medicine is now going global, and more and more foreigners get to know and trust its curative powers. The colorful folk art is also presented in Lesson 11 of Textbook 8. Students who learn folk music, dance, and craftsmanship have won recognition from experts at home and abroad for their distinctive local style and artistic expression of romanticism. More importantly, the urgency of protecting folk art is brought to attention. Students learn that folk art is in danger of fading away by the impact of urbanization and modernization, and the intangible heritage is protected by the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China*.

The percentage of language and stories decreases in 2009 and 2019 textbooks. In 1984 and 1999 textbooks, stories are mainly folktales and fables that teach moral lessons. Students are hoped to cultivate a sense of responsibility, patriotism, and respect by learning from the folktales and fables. Folktales and fables remain an important part of 2009 and 2019 textbooks. However, it is noteworthy that students are imparted the knowledge concerning the evolution of Chinese characters and hope to have more confidence in Chinese civilization. They are instructed those Chinese characters have a far-reaching impact on the neighboring countries. Lesson 8 of Textbook 9 for 2019 states:

Chinese characters are not only the carrier of Chinese civilization but the commonwealth of human civilization. Chinese characters were imported into Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other areas and contributed to their economic development and cultural communication. These countries around China, therefore, form Chinese characters' cultural spheres. (PEP 2019a: 70)

By showing Chinese characters' contribution to the world, Students are expected to build cultural confidence so that they will become global citizens with a strong sense of national identity.

## 5. Conclusion

In the face of modernization and globalization, the major aim of heritage education is to bring up global citizens with a strong sense of national identity. However, the advances in communication technologies and fragmenting effects of globalization are challenging traditional cultural identity and loyalty to the country. The preservation of strong national identity, to a large extent, depends on the protection of cultural traditions and heritage in that an individual's sense of identity derives from his/her knowledge of his/her origins and what is inherited from the past (Copeland 2004: 18–22). Given the significance of protecting heritage, heritage education has been gaining increasing attention in recent years. This paper investigated four sets of moral education textbooks in Chinese primary schools to sort out the changes of heritage education in moral education textbooks. The changes could be summed up as follows: more concern is given to the innovation-oriented protection of heritage; more emphasis is attached to the protection of tangible and natural heritage, and more efforts are devoted to the build-up of cultural confidence. All these changes are encouraging signs that reflect the greater awareness and dramatic improvement of heritage education in China.

In the foreseeable future, heritage education will continue to be an issue of much national concern. Although rapid progress has been made in heritage education, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Heritage edu-



cation has so far been traditionally carried out in school settings, and teachers use conventional teaching strategies as textbooks to impart knowledge of heritage. However, the understanding of heritage gained from textbooks could be neither effective nor contextualized to the need of the students. It would be appropriate for students to visit museums, heritage sites, or national parks to experience the beauty of ancient civilizations. Emerging technologies like augmented reality can be applied to heritage education if students live far away from any heritage sites. Augmented reality can involve students with the heritage, offering them life-like experiences with the heritage, which will contribute to their profound understanding of the rich heritage left by the ancestors.

Hunter (1992: 25) proposed that heritage education be not itself a concrete curriculum subject. It is a cross-curricular approach to the teaching of different subjects. Although moral education plays a key role in heritage education in China, heritage education should also be carried out in other subjects in primary schools. In recent years heritage education has been added to Chinese, music and art. So, this paper can be a starting point for a more comprehensive study of heritage education in primary schools. Future research could investigate the textbooks of other subjects to ascertain the overall development of heritage education in China.

Textbooks and curricula give the standard version of what should be taught. However, they cannot show us variations in teachers' presentation and students' learning ability; in other words, textbooks and curricula can only document what students are expected to learn, but not the reality of what the students may have learned. This is the limitation of this study; thus, it is hoped that future studies could focus on the learning outcomes of current heritage education in primary schools.

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