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**Images of Europe in Middle and High School History Textbooks
in the People's Republic of China**

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Though nineteenth-century missionaries had already begun to teach European history in Chinese classrooms, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the government of the Qing dynasty introduced educational reforms in China and implemented a new style of education, that world history was officially added to the Chinese secondary school curriculum. It was at this time that European history was added to history textbooks. In the course of the twentieth century, the standards for both first- and second-stage secondary-school history curricula were periodically overhauled and revised, as a result of which three history-related phenomena emerged. These are discussed below in chronological order.

1. Images of Europe Towards the End of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

At the end of the Qing dynasty, world history textbooks for secondary school students evolved from being mere translations of Japanese textbooks to being created by the Chinese themselves. Traditionally, the compilation of Chinese history textbooks was completely separate from the compilation of world history textbooks; they began to be compiled together towards the end of the Qing dynasty. Later, however, they returned to being the product of separate compilation processes. In the Republic of China, private publishers and their textbooks competed on the market; during the 1920s and 1930s, several high quality textbooks were produced. Though differences in structuring between the various textbooks were rather pronounced, their portrayal of Europe was fundamentally the same.

In China, the first requirements for world history curricula emerged in 1904. At that time, there were no world history textbooks written in Chinese, so translations of Japanese textbooks were used. One example was *Western History for Middle Schools and High Schools*, published in 1908¹, which was one of the textbooks chosen to be translated into Chinese. Though it discusses ancient Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, Persia, Macedonia and the American War of Independence, more than half of the textbook focuses on European history, describing the political, economic and cultural changes and developments undergone by the major European countries as well as how these countries invaded and plundered Asia. Though the language in these translated textbooks was not very easy to read, it did allow Chinese stu-

¹ Tsuboi Kumezo (坪井九馬三, translated by Ma Yuan-ming (吳淵明) and Zhong Yao (仲遙). *Western History for Middle Schools and High Schools* (中学西洋历史教科书). Shanghai: Guangzhi Books (廣廣書局).

dents an early understanding of the formation of European civilisation in addition to giving them an awareness of European acts of plundering and colonisation in Asia.

After the foundation of the Republic of China, the Chinese began compiling their own secondary-level world history textbooks. The first of these, Fu Yün-sen's (傅運森, aka Fu Yun-sen) book *The Republican Series: History of Western Countries*², was published in 1922. Because the curriculum standards issued in 1923 dictated that Chinese and non-Chinese history had to be taught together, Fu Yün-chi also compiled and published *Middle School and High School History for the New Education System*³. This version discusses human civilisation from the following seven perspectives: humanity's living conditions; changes in religion; changes in forms of government; changes in ideology; wars and alliances; governance issues internal to the Republic of China and external issues related to its foreign relations; and the future of China and the rest of the world. Fu advocated the notion that humanity should try and live together in peace. As such, he purposefully avoided the use of notions such as regions and nations when naming the chapters and sections of the book. However, a large portion of the book's contents described events that happened in Europe which were depicted as indicating that the cultures of Europe were the most advanced cultures in the world. At the same time, however, Fu's book presented the view that a lot of the chaos and disorder to be observed in the contemporary world was closely tied to Europe.

World history textbooks produced in China after 1923 returned to being written based on the principle of separating world history and Chinese history. Processes around the compilation of textbooks matured during this time. Private publishers competed with one another to hire renowned historians to compile their textbooks, leading to the production of excellent textbooks that were unique in their perspectives. The textbooks compiled by Chen Heng-che (陈衡哲; aka Chen Heng-zhe), Yang Jen-pien (杨人梗; aka Yang Ren-pian), Ho Ping-sung (何炳松; aka He Bing-song) were seen as being some of the better ones⁴ of this time.

² Fu Yün-sen (傅运森, aka Fu Yun-sen). (1922). *The Republican Series: History of Western Countries* (共和國教科書西洋史). Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).

³ Fu Yün-sen (傅运森, aka Fu Yun-sen). (1923). *Middle School and High School History for the New Education System* (新學制初級中學教科書曆史). Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).

⁴ Qi Shi-rong (齐世荣). (2008). 'Survey of 20th Century Chinese and World History Education' (20世纪中国世
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Chen Heng-che's book was called *High School Western History for the New Education System* (新学制高级中学教科书西洋史)⁵. So-called "Western history" (the term for "Western" here is literally "West-Ocean" in Chinese) refers not only to the history of geographical Europe, but also to that of any surrounding regions that have been influenced by European culture; the term may thus be thought of as designating the history of "cultural" Europe. The book's first volume describes the ancient European cultures of Greece and Rome, the feudal era of barbarian invaders and the establishment and medieval history of each contemporary European country. Volume 2 discusses the Renaissance, religious reformation, major geographical discoveries and their influence on world politics. In the words of the author, who uses the analogy of a "village" to describe the focus of his book, "[t]he first volume is a rather informal discussion, for example, relating anecdotes about the ancestors of people from various villages. The second volume is more like a lecture about the business and character of the older people in the village and their history. These things are closely related to us."⁶

The more important second volume of *High School Western History* describes the details of how geographical discoveries gave rise to the colonisation and plundering of weaker countries in the Americas, Africa and Asia by the Europeans. The author produces in this way a form of criticism directed at the excessive glorification of trends in Europe's sociological ideologies⁷, thereby reminding his readers that the exploitation of weaker countries formed one of the foundations of the advanced development of European culture.

In *High School Foreign History*⁸ by Yang Jen-pien (杨人梗, aka Yang Ren-pian), the

界历史教学概况), in: *Global History Review* (全球史评论), pp. 278-284. Qi Shi-rong is a famous historian who participated in the compilation of world history textbooks after Chinese economic reform.

⁵ Chen Heng-che (陈衡哲, aka Chen Heng-zhe). (1929). *High School Western History for the New Education System* (新学制高级中学教科书西洋史). Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).

⁶ Chen Heng-che (陈衡哲, aka Chen Heng-zhe). (1929). 'Introductory remarks', in: id., *High School Western History for the New Education System* (新学制高级中学教科书西洋史). Volume 2. Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).

⁷ Chen Heng-che (陈衡哲, aka Chen Heng-zhe). (1929). 'Introduction', in: id., *High School Western History for the New Education System* (新学制高级中学教科书西洋史). Volume 1. Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆).

⁸ Yang Jen-pien (杨人梗, aka Yang Ren-pian). (1933). *High School Foreign History* (高中外国史). Shanghai: Bei Xing Bookstore (北新书局).

author states that “foreign history” as the book conceives of it is centred around Europe and though it does not refer to China’s history, it is still important to remind students of China⁹. He goes on to point out that the course of the development of European history is best recounted via “discoveries made by individuals” and “discoveries made by nations”. Yang's book praises the positive significance of Europe’s cultural advances on the development of the world’s cultures, citing, for instance, the French Revolution’s ideals of freedom, equality and universal love, which it claims that all humanity has inherited.¹⁰ At the same time, the book criticises the extreme level of nationalism that permeated the countries of Europe and eventually led to imperialist aggression.

*Renaissance High School Textbooks: Foreign History*¹¹, compiled by Ho Ping-sung (何炳松, aka He Bing-song), discusses European politics, economics, academia, education and religion during various periods, creating a comprehensive image of Europe. The author points out that within the course of world history, interaction between Europe and Asia had already been going on for quite some time, and that before Europe’s major geographical discoveries, world history had centred around Asia, as the empires of Persia, Turkey, India, Arabia and Mongolia demonstrate. The textbook’s argument further details that it was only after Europe’s major geographical discoveries that Europe became the scene of the major narratives of world history and Europe assumed the position of an unparalleled hegemon. The continents of North and South America, Africa and Asia were all invaded and colonized by Europe. The global chaos of the 1930s, as the textbook states, was caused not only by independence movements within European colonies, but also by infighting between the powerful nations of Europe over how to divide the spoils of colonization. The textbook further advocated taking a new look at the role of Asia within world history as a means of restoring the self-confidence

⁹ Yang Jen-pien (杨人梗, aka Yang Ren-pian). (1933). 'Introduction', in: id., *High School Foreign History* (高中外国史). Shanghai: Bei Xing Bookstore (北新书局).

¹⁰ Yang Jen-pien (杨人梗, aka Yang Ren-pian). (1933). *High School Foreign History* (高中外国史). Shanghai: Bei Xing Bookstore (北新书局), p. 89.

¹¹ Ho Ping-sung (何炳松, aka He Bing-song), Wang Yun (王云). *Renaissance High School Textbooks: Foreign History* (复兴高级中学教科书外国历史). Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆). In 1924, Ho Ping-sung translated James Harvey Robinson’s (1863-1936) *The New History*, which can be seen as the template for the type of composite research that Ho advocated.

of the Chinese people as a nation. The author praised the scientific spirit¹² of Copernicus and Galileo in an indication of what he considered the path to this restoration – the study of the more advanced aspects of European culture, such as its political structures, economic techniques, and scientific culture, as a means of making China stronger and more independent. In this light, the use of the word “renaissance” in the book's title has far-reaching implications.

This overview of these five textbooks from the late Qing dynasty has provided us with a good understanding of the influence that history textbooks during this period had upon Chinese perceptions of Europe's role in world history. Though each of the authors of these textbooks emphasised the fact that Europe was one of the main causes of China being invaded and plundered, they at the same time endorsed the idea that European culture was advanced and that the way for China to grow stronger and become self-reliant was to learn from Europe.

2. Images of Europe after the Foundation of the New China

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, requirements for the teaching of history demanded a new understanding of historical change in light of social and economic patterns; textbooks were rewritten accordingly, and textbook development once again switched from being about mere translation to focusing on local compilation. Textbook quality, however, did not consistently increase, going through “ups” and “downs”.

Early textbooks of the People's Republic of China were translations of Soviet textbooks. *Middle School Foreign History*¹³, published in 1949, described Europe in terms of the five modes of society: primitive society, slave-based society, feudal society, capitalist society, and socialist society. The book emphasized events in European history related to class struggle, such as Greco-Roman slave revolts, the rebellions which occurred from the fifth to the sixteenth centuries of the capitalist class against the control of their feudal lords, and the seventeenth-century proletarian revolts against the oppression perpetrated by the capitalist class. These textbooks divided the world of that time into two camps, the capitalist and the socialists, resulting in the division of Europe into the capitalist West and the Soviet East. China was under the Soviet Union's banner of socialism and therefore obligated to fully Sovietize.

¹² Ho Ping-sung (何炳松, aka He Bing-song), Wang Yun (王云). *Renaissance High School Textbooks: Foreign History* (复兴高级中学教科书外国历史). Shanghai: The Commercial Press (商务印书馆), p. 466.

¹³ Edited by Shen Chang-hong (沈长虹), revised by Wang Zhi-jiu (王芝九). (1941). *Middle School Foreign History* (初级中学外国历史课本) Volume 1. Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

The first textbooks compiled independently by the Chinese to be given a positive reception were *Middle School World History* and *High School Modern and Contemporary World History*¹⁴, both published by The People's Education Press in 1955. *Middle School World History*¹⁵ discusses the history of Europe from prehistoric times to the end of World War II. Most of its content focuses on the slavery-based society of the Greco-Roman period and the feudal period from the fifth to the sixteenth centuries. *High School Modern and Contemporary World History*¹⁶ only presents the development of modern and contemporary European history. Unlike the 1949 version of the volume, which put heavy emphasis on political history, this version provides a comprehensive treatment of the political, economic and cultural aspects of European history. The Soviet Union was viewed in very friendly terms; the history of its socialist revolution and its socialist reconstruction of history made up two-thirds of the content for the high-school version of this textbook. In this set of books, while the Soviet Union was depicted as vigorously marching towards communism, the rest of Europe was viewed as capitalist and therefore in a period of "total crisis", on the verge of total annihilation.

After the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, provinces in China started to use locally produced textbooks. Under the revolution's influence, the teaching of history focused on the phenomena of class struggle. European history as it appeared in the textbooks of the time shrank in scope and become part of political history, which centred around the notion of class struggle. It is worth mentioning that this is the first time that textbooks placed a rather high value on the roles played by leaders of ordinary people within the history of societal change.

¹⁴ Compiled by the Graduate Institute for Curriculum and Teaching Materials (课程教材研究所). (2010). *The 1949-2000 Research Series (History): History of the Creation of Learning Materials for Elementary and Middle Schools in the New China* (新中国中小学教材建设史1949-2000研究丛书[历史卷]). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社), p. 131.

¹⁵ Compiled by Li Geng-xu (李庚序). (Volume 1, 1955; Volume 2, 1956). *Middle School World History* (初级中学课本世界历史). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

¹⁶ Compiled by Li Chun-wu (李纯武). (1955). *High School Modern and Contemporary World History (Volume 1)* (高级中学课本世界近代现代史 (上册)). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).
Compiled by Yang Sheng-mao (杨生茂) and Li Chun-wu (李纯武). (1956). *High School Modern and Contemporary World History (Volume 2)* (高级中学课本世界近代现代史 (下册)). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

For example, the descriptions of important historical figures in the textbook *World History*¹⁷, published in 1973 by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, include, alongside the deeds and ideology of the leaders of the socialist revolution, such as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924), and Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), inspirational stories of leaders of the masses, such as Spartacus (120 BC-70 BC)¹⁸, Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525)¹⁹, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658)²⁰, and Pougatcheff (aka Pugachev, 1742 - 1775)²¹. Textbooks produced during the Cultural Revolution did not provide great detail on Europe's economic and cultural history; instead, they simply defined Europeans as imperialistic invaders. Even the Soviet Union was described as a socialist, imperialistic aggressor²². The simplified treatment of such issues in textbooks produced during the Cultural Revolution is an extension of the nervousness felt within China over getting involved in the "struggle" of the revolution. The textbooks were quickly abandoned when the Cultural Revolution ended in 1977.

After the economic reform of 1978, the People's Education Press immediately returned to the work of compiling unified textbooks for the whole of China. In the period after

¹⁷ Beijing Municipal Commission of Education's Textbook Compilation Group (北京市教育局教材编写组编). (1973). *World History for Beijing Municipal Middle Schools (Trial Version)* (北京市中学试用课本世界历史). Beijing: The People's Publisher of Beijing (北京人民出版社).

¹⁸ Spartacus (~120 BC-70 BC) was a Thracian from the north-eastern part of the Balkan peninsula. He was captured by the Romans when they invaded northern Greece and was sold into slavery as a gladiator. He was sent to the city of Capua where he received his gladiator training. Spartacus, along with his companions Crixus and Oenomaus, started an insurrection from the kitchen of the gladiator school they attended. They fled to Mt. Vesuvius where they set up a base to continue their uprising. Having started with 70 famous gladiators, the ranks of their army quickly grew to over 100,000. They won several victories against the Roman army.

¹⁹ Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525) was a German reformer of the Reformation era who in 1524 became a leading figure in the Peasants' War.

²⁰ Oliver Cromwell was a seventeenth-century Englishman who is representative of the bourgeois revolution. From 1642 to 1648, he commanded the "Ironsides" cavalry and the New Model Army during two successive civil wars, defeating the King's forces. In 1649, under pressure from the city's residents and the yeomen, King Charles I was executed and the Commonwealth of England was formed.

²¹ Yemelyan Ivanovich Pugachev (~1742-1775) was the leader of a popular insurrection in Russia. He was born on the banks of the Don River in the town of Zimoveyskaya (now known as Volgograd Oblast) into a poor Cossack family. At 18, he was conscripted into the army and fought both in Poland and in Turkey. Due to his bravery on the battlefield, he was promoted to second lieutenant. Later, he had to leave the army and return home because of an illness. In 1773, he gathered 80 Cossacks and started a rebellion, beginning one of Russia's anti-serfdom wars.

²² Beijing Municipal Commission of Education's Textbook Compilation Group (北京市教育局教材编写组编). (1973). 'Conclusion', in: id., *World History for Beijing Municipal Middle Schools (Trial Version)* (北京市中学试用课本世界历史). Beijing: The People's Publisher of Beijing (北京人民出版社).

the economic reform beginning in 1987, one textbook appraised, after going through several revisions, as being one of the better textbooks available was *High School World History*²³. This book describes the history of the evolution of what it referred to as the “five patterns” within European society, with emphasis on the socialism of the Soviet Union and the various aspects of how it manifests itself within the cultures of politics, economics and science. Additionally, the textbook analyses in detail the influence upon the world order exerted by the two world wars, both beginning in Europe, and their impact on the structure of the two juxtaposed social systems of capitalism and socialism. Unlike previous publications, textbooks from the post-economic reform period attach special importance to the history of European science and technology as well as the history of its art and culture. The 1987 book includes European scientists, writers, composers and artists such as Pythagoras (572 BC-497 BC), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Pushkin (1799-1837), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Albert Einstein (1879-1955). This signalled a change in the image of Europe it was considered desirable to represent.

From the foundation of the People's Republic of China up until the implementation of Chinese economic reform, history textbooks in Chinese middle schools and high schools had made use of the “five forms of social history” method in order to explain European imperialism. The Chinese Cultural Revolution pushed the content of textbooks to political extremes. After the revolution, textbooks gradually ceased making obvious attempts to point out differences in social systems and the value of class struggle. They also successively reduced their politically motivated criticisms of European imperialism. This was replaced with the teaching of capitalist economics and cultural knowledge, which were now seen as worthwhile objects of study.

3. Images of Europe after Comprehensive Economic Reform

After 1992, the People's Republic of China implemented a policy of comprehensive economic reform. At this time, middle-school and high-school history curricula began to emphasise

²³ Compiled by the Graduate Institute for Curriculum and Teaching Materials (课程教材研究所). (2010). *The 1949-2000 Research Series (History): History of the Creation of Learning Materials for Elementary and Middle Schools in the New China* (新中国中小学教材建设史1949 - 2000研究丛书[历史卷]). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社), p. 134.

learning about the world within a spirit of openness and searching out opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. This new openness caused the previously dominant two-dimensional images of Europe to be replaced by new, more multifaceted ones.

The textbook *World History* which was published in 1992 to a positive critical reception,²⁴ proposes to students that they get to know European history within this spirit of openness. The version of *World History*²⁵ for the junior stages of high schools uses political, economic, and cultural history as well as the history of international relations to describe the leading role that Europe has played within the development of world history, taking an approving tone towards both capitalism's and socialism's historical achievements. Its political history focuses mainly upon the establishment of state power by the capitalist class and the structural changes in Europe's international policy. Its economic history emphasises the Industrial Revolution and the economic crises endured by capitalism. A large part of the book's content focuses on cultural history, including the classical culture of the Greco-Roman period, the Renaissance, early contemporary and later modern cultures of science, literature and the arts as well as modern culture. The high school version of the book only discusses contemporary and modern world history²⁶. Volume 1 details the rise of the capitalist economy and its influence on the world, while Volume 2 discusses the socialist revolution and its influence on the world's two main political systems (i.e. socialism and capitalism).

Both volumes expend a significant amount of space on introducing the experiences of economic reform. Next, the book goes on to discuss the European aggression and colonisation of the eighteenth century in a rational and factual manner. Breaking with previous textbook tradition, this book admits the fact that contemporary Asia's previous subjugation to the West

²⁴ Compiled by the Graduate Institute for Curriculum and Teaching Materials (课程教材研究所). (2010). *The 1949-2000 Research Series (History): History of the Creation of Learning Materials for Elementary and Middle Schools in the New China* (新中国中小学教材建设史1949-2000研究丛书[历史卷]). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社), p. 472.

²⁵ Wang Hong-zhi (王宏志), Yan Zhi-liang (严志梁) primary editors. Also edited by the history section of The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社历史室). (1991-1992). *World History (Experimental Version) Textbook for Compulsory Three-year\ Four-year Junior High Schools* (义务教育三年制\四年制初级中学教科书(实验本)世界历史). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

²⁶ Wang Hong-zhi (王宏志), Yan Zhi-liang (严志梁) primary editors. Also edited by the history section of The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社历史室). (1995). *Contemporary and Modern World History for High School* (高级中学课本世界近现代史). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

was only partly due to the colonisation and plundering engaged in by capitalist Europe, and also arose from the fact that while Europe's capitalist material economy was developing, feudally organised countries in Asia were in decline and had closed themselves off from the rest of the world.²⁷ The most significant changes in the 1992 edition of the textbook are the ways in which it looks beyond differences in social systems and takes a factual view of European colonisation and aggression.

Since the turn of the twenty-first Century, educational requirements for history have been relaxed in China, with both European and world history being taught from a perspective of openness. Textbooks have also started using what it refers to as the "three scientific revolutions" as another thread for their historical narrative. The textbook *World History*²⁸, published in 2007, describes the factors leading up to the three scientific revolutions and the influence that these revolutions had on the world. The first scientific revolution as defined by this textbook, or the Industrial Revolution, took place in the 1760s with Newtonian mechanics as its theoretical basis and was characterized by the broad use of the steam engine. The second one occurred in the 1870s and revolved around theories of electromagnetism. Referred to in the textbook as The Second Industrial Revolution, it was defined by the use of electric power and the internal combustion engine. The third scientific revolution, called the Technological Revolution²⁹, happened in the 1940s and 50s. Major breakthroughs were made in the areas of nuclear energy, computers, space navigation, and bio-engineering.

Textbook content has also been adjusted, with contemporary and modern history giving equal treatment to the European Union, the United States, and Russia, while the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are also given their own treatment in order to demonstrate

²⁷ Wang Hong-zhi (王宏志), Yan Zhi-liang (严志梁) primary editors. Also edited by the history section of The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社历史室). (1995). *Contemporary and Modern World History for High School* (高级中学课本世界近现代现代史). Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社), p. 23.

²⁸ Edited by Chen Qi. Compiled by the Development Center of the Graduate Institute for Curriculum and Educational Materials and the Graduate Institute for History Curriculum and Educational Materials (课程教材研究所历史课程教材研究开发中心). (2007). *World History*. Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社).

²⁹ Edited by Chen Qi. Compiled by the Development Center of the Graduate Institute for Curriculum and Educational Materials and the Graduate Institute for History Curriculum and Educational Materials (课程教材研究所历史课程教材研究开发中心). (2007). *World History*. Beijing: The People's Education Press (人民教育出版社), p. 102.

the multi-polar nature of the world's political situation. Within the perspective of complete openness which appears to have taken hold in the twenty-first century, the former view of Europe as the centre of world history has been abandoned. However, the view of Europe as having a superior culture is still being taught. Each of the "scientific revolutions" happened as a result of European achievements, and European history is still of paramount importance within the cultures of the world's developed nations. Recognising the multi-faceted nature of the contemporary of the world allowed China to see Europe's strong points, which opened up opportunities for cooperation.

Despite the fact that the amount of space dedicated to Europe within middle-school and high-school history textbooks has been on the decline since 1992, understanding of Europe has become deeper. Textbooks in China are now describing Europe's politics, economy and culture by means of narratives involving political revolutions, the development of capitalist economies, scientific and technological revolutions, and the state of international relations. These factors work together to reveal an image of Europe as being an extremely important influence within the development of world history. The starting point for understanding Europe and the basis of Europe's image in this new era, as it is represented in these textbooks, is the transcending of differences, viewing the past in a rational light, and seeking out opportunities for cooperation.

Taking a broad view of world history textbooks for middle and high schools in China since the start of the twentieth century, we can observe that images of Europe have been closely tied to the requirements for history education in each instance. Textbooks during the late Qing dynasty, the early republic and shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China described European nations as colonisers, aggressors and imperialists. However, at the same time, they never abandoned the notion that Europe was representative of advanced culture and worthy of study by China. In 1992, history textbooks for middle and high schools began to advocate a way of looking at Europe that transcends differences in social systems, views Europe's past aggression in a factual and rational light and emphasises interaction and cooperation, thereby laying a good foundation for future Sino-European relations in which mutual learning is set to play a prominent role.