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Constructing a desired image of China: Picture of territorial controversies in Chinese language textbooks

Abstract

China is one of the Asian countries, whose borders are contested by different actors on the geopolitical stage, who do not agree on the Chinese version of geography. As China is strengthening its soft power, one of the tools for the spreading of the Chinese version of the map of Asia are textbooks for teaching the Chinese language. Since 2004 China has been setting up Confucius Institutes around the world to spread its language and culture. There are some concerns and controversies arousing around Confucius Institutes, seen as Chinese government-backed institutions present on Western universities, and questions about their role in creating Chinese soft power.

The purpose of this article is to understand one aspect of language education, that is how the Chinese territory is shown to the students of the Chinese language in the textbooks that are used in the Confucius Institutes.

Key words: Chinese language textbooks, Confucius Institute, geography, soft power.

Introduction

Chinese history and geography are continuously re-constructed and re-memorized based on contemporary social and political needs of the nation and its elites. Since the end of the 19th century, an evolution of describing the Chinese nation can be observed, by either integrating or excluding certain parts, both geographical and ethnic or demographic. Sun Yat-sen in *The Three Principles of the People* presented China as having

territorial aspirations towards Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Pescadores Islands, Burma, Annam (northern part of Vietnam), and territories north of Amur River. He also showed some sentiments towards the former Imperial Chinese tributary system territories, including the Ryukyu Islands, Siam (Thailand), Sulu Archipelago (Philippines), Java, Ceylon, Nepal, and Bhutan (Sun 1937, pp. 33–35). Another Chinese leader, Mao Zedong in the interview given to Edgar Snow in 1936, expressed his conviction that in the future “the Outer Mongolian Republic will automatically become part of the China Confederation, at their own will. The Mohammedan and Tibetan peoples, likewise will form autonomy republics attached to the Chinese federation [...] Burma, Indo-China, Korea and Mongolia are illegally annexed parts of China which must be restored to it” (Snow 1937, p. 102; Yahuda 2000, p. 28). Mao eventually resigned from a broad idea of a Chinese federation, but some of his territorial ambitions tended to show up in the later decades.

When it comes to the definition of the Chinese nation, in Mao Zedong’s China, according to Townsend (1996, pp. 28–29), there were “four different Chinese Nations”: (1) official one of state nationalism, nation composed of all People’s Republic of China (PRC) citizens, including Han and non-Han people; (2) defined by ethnic nationalism and political reality, PRC’s Han nation; (3) PRC citizens and compatriots from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan; (4) in the sense of ‘Chineseness’, including all Chinese around the world, who share a cultural attachment to China.

Nowadays the Chinese nation is still in the process of reconstructing. The idea of nation and nationalist attitudes are modified by the Communist Party of China. This process can be perceived by the constructivists’ approach to nation. Eric Hobsbawm (2008, pp. 263–307) recognized nations as the constructs of deliberate social engineering. Thus, symbols, histories, myths, were instruments of social control by the ruling elite. Depending on the needs of that elite, the political or cultural understanding of the nation would be used, and particular elements could be accented. As in the case of many other nations, in China we may find some places, cities or tourist destinations, without which the describing of the nation would not be possible, such as Beijing, the Yellow River and the Great Wall. Some others may be seen controversial, like Tibet, Taiwan, or Xinjiang. To understand how the Chinese nation and its territory are perceived nowadays, we can refer to the tools of socialization prepared for its own people, as well as those addressed to other nations.

Education is an important aspect of soft power. The importance of promoting their own language in foreign countries is seen by many governments as an essential part of creating a desired image of the nation and the state. China was not the first to promote its culture and language throughout the world, but followed the popularity of French as the language of diplomacy in the 17th and 18th centuries, and English in the 19th and 20th. Meanwhile numerous countries have launched institutions dedicated to teach language and promote culture: British Councils, German Goethe Institutes, Spanish Cervantes Institutes, Japan Foundation, and many more. Since China began gaining more attention and power on the international stage, Beijing also wanted to use language as a soft power tool. Nevertheless, Mandarin is not a widely spoken language, and is perceived by many people as one of the most difficult languages to learn. Since opening the first Confucius Institute in 2004, these institutions have been supposed to convince foreigners that it is possible to learn Chinese, and to offer them that opportunity, by sending abroad Chinese language teachers and teaching materials, by offering scholarships to study in China, setting up the standard Chinese proficiency test, and organizing various cultural and educational events.

The supreme institution dedicated to the promotion of Chinese language is the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, abbreviated to Hanban, which is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The official reason for its creation is the development of China's economy and exchange with the world, which provided "a sharp increase in the world's demands for Chinese learning" (Hanban 2014b). Hanban is responsible for the Confucius Institutes program, especially for financing it, training Chinese teachers and organizing the Chinese Bridge Competition. According to its declaration, Hanban "is committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide" (Hanban 2014a). Hanban "drafts international Chinese teaching standards and develop and promote Chinese language teaching materials" (Hanban 2014a).

Publishing and distribution of teaching materials may be perceived as a part of an intentionally created policy in many different ways. The discussion of the content of history textbooks may reach far beyond the borders, as during the Japanese history textbooks content crises in 1982 and 2005 between Japan and China, and Japan and Korea. Processes of teaching and learning a foreign language include – apart from the

obvious linguistic elements – also knowledge of the culture, history, geography, and politics of a given country. A positive image of a nation is also seen in the materials to teach many languages as foreign, including Polish (Nowakowska 2013). And it also creates a picture of a country in the minds of the language learners. The aim of this study was to show what geographical image of China is presented in textbooks for teaching the Chinese language. From all of the Chinese geographical and social diversity, which places were chosen to be most representative, and how were they described? Another research question, derived from the political controversy surrounding the Confucius Institutes, was whether, and in which context, the names of disputed territories appear in textbooks, in order to promote the image of China, considered appropriate by the authorities. The main hypothesis of the article is that the textbooks published in China are presenting the picture of the country, which is not only positive, but also deliberately chosen to produce a demanded vision of China – as modern, but also proud of its history and tradition, diversified in ethnic and cultural sense, but also unified as one nation. Another hypothesis of the research is that the more often and earlier in the process of learning some geographical objects appear, the greater importance is attached to them.

Literature Review

There have been some articles focused on the Chinese language textbooks content, but they lack the analysis of aspects other than linguistic. Cynthia Y. Ning (2001) in the text “Second-language Studies and College-level Chinese-language Textbooks in the United States” presented a critical approach to structures and formats of the traditional textbooks, and focuses on such characteristics as grammar-orientation, communicative curriculum, and task-based activities. There is also an article by Wang Min and Wei Dongying (2007) about the Chinese geography textbooks, but it is focused on sustainable development and environmental education.

On the other hand, some articles about the whole process of teaching language by the Confucius Institutes, including non-linguistic, political aspects, were written by Western scholars, for instance Don Starr (2009) “Chinese Language Education in Europe: The Confucius Institutes,” James F. Paradise (2009) “China and International Harmony. The Role

of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing's Soft Power." None of the found texts touches the content of the Chinese language textbooks. Thus the presented research is innovative.

Realizing that this is an initial phase of a wider research project, the development of research is planned towards the analysis of awareness and knowledge of Chinese language learners – by studying cognitive maps, spatial representations of China that are kept within the minds of Chinese language students, as such research has not been conducted yet either.

Materials and Methods

In the first phase of the research, which is presented in this article, the textbooks for adult students of the Chinese language from the very beginners to the *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK) level 3 were taken into account. The reason for that was that these books may reach the largest audience, since most of the students cease to learn Chinese before reaching the HSK3 level of language proficiency. According to the research conducted in 2016 among Polish learners of Chinese language,¹ only 32% of them were learning Chinese longer than three years, and 29% passed examination HSK 4 or higher. The database of the textbooks consisted of over twenty titles. According to results of the abovementioned research, three-quarters of the Polish learners were using at least one of those textbooks, mostly the *New Practical Chinese Reader*, *Contemporary Chinese* and *Boya Chinese*.

The analyzed textbooks were published between 2002 and 2013 by various publishing houses from the People's Republic of China. All of them were approved by Hanban, and promoted by that institution, as they were sent by the Division of Teaching Resources to Confucius Institutes abroad as an element of the material support for them.

¹ Unpublished research conducted by the Author and Mao Rui, online in June–July 2016, among 423 learners of Chinese language from all major and some minor educational institutions teaching Chinese (Warsaw University, Poznan Adam Mickiewicz University, Jagiellonian University, Silesia University, Lodz University, Gdansk University, SWPS University, Catholic University of Lublin, Confucius Institutes in Krakow, Poznan, Opole, and some language schools), as well as individual learners and Polish students at Chinese universities.

Table 1. Database of the textbooks

Name	Volumes	Publishing house
1	2	3
<i>Boya Chinese</i> 博雅汉语	1, 2	Peking University Press
<i>Chinese for Beginners</i> 初级汉语课本	1	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Contemporary Chinese</i> 当代中文	1, 2, 3	Sinolingua
<i>Conversational Chinese 301</i> 汉语会话301句		Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Experiencing Chinese: Experiencing Culture in China</i> 体验汉语 文化篇		Higher Education Press
<i>Experiencing Chinese: Living in China</i> 体验汉语 生活篇		Higher Education Press
<i>Experiencing Chinese: Traveling in China</i> 体验汉语 旅游篇		Higher Education Press
<i>Road to Success</i> 成功的路	Threshold, Lower Elementary 1, 2, Elementary 1, 2	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Meeting in China</i> 相会在中国	Speaking 1, 2	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Modern Chinese Beginner's Course</i> 初级汉语课	1, 2	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Great Wall Chinese</i>	1–6	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing</i>	1	Sinolingua
<i>Practical Chinese Reader</i> 实用汉语课本	1, 2	The Commercial Press
<i>New Practical Chinese Reader</i> 新实用汉语课本	1, 2	Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>Living in China – Spoken Chinese for Foreigners</i> 生活在中国		Beijing Language and Culture University Press
<i>The World of Chinese</i> 汉语世界	1, 2	Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
<i>Chinese Conversation for Foreigners</i> 外国人汉语会话课本	1, 2	Beijing Language and Culture University Press

1	2	3
<i>Communicate in Chinese</i> 交际汉语 (phrasebook)	1–4	科学普及出版社
<i>Chinese in Hand</i> 中文在手 (phrasebook)	<i>Basic Chinese</i> 基础篇, <i>Daily Chinese</i> 生活篇, and <i>Travel Chinese</i> 旅游篇	People's Education Press

In the first stage of research, which is presented in this article, a total of 932 units (lessons) were analyzed, in total 40 volumes of textbooks. In the content of each lesson geographical names were identified. Among all of the lessons there were 266 lessons including any kind of them. These names appeared in the new words sections, in the texts, dialogues, and a few times in the texts in English, presenting additional information about China and Chinese culture. Besides quantitative analysis, an analysis of content of the texts was also conducted. The context of the sentence in which names appeared was also analyzed, for instance: objective or evaluative description, relation to which sphere: geography of China, economy, transport, leisure, weather, and cuisine.

Discussion of the results

According to expectations, some of the names were particularly popular, and those were the locations that may be seen in tourist folders, creating a kind of showcase of the country. Unbeatable in first place was taken by the capital city, Beijing. It was mentioned 96 times, that is in 36%, if we take only texts with geographical names into account, or in 10% of all lessons. Second place was taken by another famous Chinese city, namely Shanghai: it appeared 63 times, 24%.

Besides these two metropolises, the Great Wall took third place (39 times as Changcheng, plus sometimes a particular section of the Great Wall was mentioned: mostly it was Badaling (8 times), Mutianyu (2 times), as well as Jinshanling and Simatai (1 time each), altogether in 15% of the lessons). The Great Wall was described as “one of the world’s wonders in ancient architecture” (Practical Chinese Reader), and even – mistakenly – “the only human construction visible from the moon” (A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing). The Chinese idiom *Bu dao Changcheng fei haohan*, meaning “He who has never been to the Great Wall is not a true man,” was placed in a number of texts. Students

are taught that climbing the Great Wall should bring great emotions and experience of a beautiful landscape (Contemporary Chinese, New Practical Chinese Reader, Living in China).

When it comes to the cities besides Beijing and Shanghai, they were left far behind. Among the relatively popular there were: Xi'an (10%), Harbin, Guangzhou (Canton), Hangzhou, Nanjing, Guilin (all of them 6%), and also Tianjin, Suzhou, and Chongqing (5%). Special Administrative Region Hong Kong (5% of the lessons) was three times more popular than Macau (around 2%). Taipei was mentioned in three lessons, that is less than 2% of the lessons with any geographical name.

Table 2. Names of the Chinese cities mentioned in the textbooks.

Name of the city	Number of lessons	Percentage among lesson with names (in %)	Percentage among all the lessons (in %)
1	2	3	4
Beijing	96	36	10
Shanghai	63	24	7
Xi'an	27	10	3
Ha'erbin	17	6	2
Guangzhou	17	6	2
Hangzhou	17	6	2
Nanjing	16	6	2
Guilin	15	6	2
Tianjin	14	5	2
Hong Kong	14	5	2
Suzhou	14	5	2
Chongqing	10	4	1
Kunming	8	3	1
Luoyang	7	3	1
Chengdu	7	3	1
Qingdao	7	3	1
Sanya	6	2	1
Lhasa	5	2	1
Dalian	5	2	1
Lijiang	5	2	1

1	2	3	4
Shenzhen	4	2	< 1
Macau	4	2	< 1
Wuhan	4	2	< 1
Taibei	3	1	< 1
Yangshuo	3	1	< 1
Kaifeng	3	1	< 1
Xiamen	3	1	< 1
Dali	2	1	< 1
Lanzhou	2	1	< 1
Chengde	2	1	< 1
Pingyao	2	1	< 1

Source: results of the research.

Content analysis of the texts revealed how those cities were described with their own special characteristics. The capital city is the most important and most prestigious place in the whole country, therefore it must present itself as perfect. Beijing therefore was presented as “country’s chief political, economic and cultural centre” (Practical Chinese Reader), “ancient city and cultural centre of China” (A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing), as a city of long and rich history (Modern Chinese Beginner’s Course, New Practical Chinese Reader, Road to Success), famous in the world. Beijing is an ancient city, with many historical objects worth to be visited (Living in China). Not often a modern face of Beijing was commented, once: as “becoming a cosmopolitan city as its economy continues to develop” (New Practical Chinese Reader). Only one critical aspect was shown, namely that the transportation situation is not great (Go2China Lessons). A lot of attention was also paid to the weather: summer were described as hot and dry, and it was recommended to visit Beijing in autumn.

Not only Beijing, as a main municipality in China, was presented in the largest number of lessons, but also a significant number of its tourist spots were showed in them. The Forbidden City, Gugong, ranked fourth among all of the geographical names. It was mentioned in 29 lessons (11%) as the most popular tourist destination in Beijing. According to the textbooks, on the city map we may also find: the Summer Palace Yiheyuan (23 times, 9%, and the 6th name in total), “as the most popular ancient garden” (Practical Chinese Reader), Tiananmen (22 times, 8%), Temple of Heaven

Tiantan (17 times, 6%), Fragrant Hills Park Xiang Shan (11 times, 4%), whose autumn red leaves were praised (Practical Chinese Reader), then also Beihai lake (10 times, 4%), and Wangfujing street (3%). Occasionally some other places in Beijing could be found: Quanjude Beijing Duck Restaurant, hutongs (presenting old Beijing culture and lifestyle), Liulichang Street, Silk Market, Xizhimen, Qianmen, Zhongnancun, Xidan, Old Summer Palace Yuanmingyuan, Yonghegong Lama Temple, and the Great Hall of the People, “which was built in only 10 months” (Practical Chinese Reader). Tiananmen Square was “regarded as the symbol of new China” and it was mentioned that “many important state ceremonies and mass rallies have been held on Tiananmen Square” (Practical Chinese Reader). On the photos that may be found in the textbooks, the architecture of China is presented usually with the Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City. Also, spectacular modern buildings, such as Bird Nest Olympic Stadium, are shown as the illustration of transformations taking place in Beijing in the last years.

Shanghai, in contrast to the mostly traditional Beijing, in many texts was described as China’s biggest city. Also, it was the largest industrial centre of the country (New Practical Chinese Reader, Road to Success). Shanghai was presented as the most beautiful international city in China. It should be underlined that Shanghai may be international, but, according to the text, it has its own characteristics, very different from European and American municipalities (Contemporary China). In one of the texts Shanghai was compared to Beijing, and described as more lively, and offering more business and trade opportunities, hosting more factories, and restaurants. Among other sites, Yuyuan garden neighborhood was praised for its tasty snacks (Conversational Chinese 301). On the other hand, its streets are narrower, the parks are not as big nor beautiful as in the capital city, and has much less historical spots (Modern Chinese Beginner’s Course). The weather in Shanghai is described as a coastal city in the southern part of China (Road to Success), hot and humid (Great Wall Chinese).

Most of the names of other Chinese cities and provinces appear in lessons about weather and transportation, as destinations of the travels or places from where the characters originate from. Xi’an is presented as a city of culture, full of historical sites (Road to Success, Hanyu Jiaocheng), of which one was listed: the Terracotta Army. That would be a right place to visit for those who would like to learn about China’s history (Contemporary Chinese). Harbin, on the other hand, is described as the

winter capital of China, with beautiful winter landscape, ice sculptures, and ice lanterns in particular (Hanyu Jiaocheng, Great Wall Chinese). The weather there is described as cold (Boya), but its citizens like to swim in cold water (Road to Success). In the context of Guangzhou, the Cantonese dialect was mentioned, but with a note that Mandarin is widely spoken in a public sphere (Conversational Chinese). Hangzhou is a city, which “Marco Polo described as the noblest and the finest city in the world, famous for its lake” (A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing). You may also find the saying *Shang you Tiantang, xia you Su Hang* meaning that just as there is paradise in heaven, there are Suzhou and Hangzhou on earth. Guilin is praised for its natural landscapes (Conversational Chinese, Hanyu Jiaocheng, A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing).

Table 3. Chinese provinces by the biggest popularity

Name of the city	Number of lessons	Percentage among lesson with names (in %)	Percentage among all the lessons (in %)
1	2	3	4
Sichuan	22	8	2
Yunnan	15	6	2
Guangdong	14	5	2
Xinjiang	11	4	1
Hainan	11	4	1
Xizang	10	4	1
Shandong	10	4	1
Shanxi	10	4	1
Zhejiang	9	3	1
Hunan	8	3	1
Anhui	8	3	1
Fujian	4	2	< 1
Dongbei	4	2	< 1
Qinghai	4	2	< 1
Guizhou	4	2	< 1
Shaanxi	4	2	< 1
Henan	3	1	< 1
Guangxi	3	1	< 1
Heilongjiang	3	1	< 1
Jiangxi	3	1	< 1

Table 3 cont.

1	2	3	4
Neimengu	3	1	< 1
Jiangsu	3	1	< 1
Hebei	3	1	< 1
Hubei	3	1	< 1
Liaoning	3	1	< 1
Jilin	3	1	< 1
Gansu	2	1	< 1
Ningxia	2	1	< 1

Source: results of the research.

When it comes to the provinces, obviously not all of them were represented on the same level. The most widespread name is Sichuan (22 times, 8%), usually in the context of its famous cuisine, for instance the hot pot. Then there was Yunnan province (15 times, 6%), with many ethnic minorities (Hanyu Jiaocheng) and tasty snacks (Conversational Chinese 301), and Guangdong (14 times, 5%).

The question how the places that are sensitive to the Chinese government such as Taiwan, Tibet, or Xinjiang, were presented in the textbooks was also interesting. The Chinese teachers sent by Hanban have to obey the laws of China and try to avoid being involved in activities contrary to the interests of China. How often the autonomous regions were presented in the analyzed textbooks? In fact they were less popular than it was expected: Xinjiang (11 times) and Tibet (10 times) appeared in a slightly more than 4% of the units, while Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Ningxia were hardly ever described. Xinjiang was praised as a region where tasty fruits were grown, and texts about other regions were nonexistent. Taiwan was mentioned in 5 lessons, so around 2% of the lessons (Taibei in 3 lessons), of course never as the Republic of China, just as one of China’s provinces.

In the analyzed textbooks some of geographical objects, such as rivers and mountains, were also present. Yangtze River Changjiang (15 times, 6%) was more popular than the Yellow River Huanghe (9 times, 3%). Yangtze was described as one of the longest in the world, while the Yellow River valley as “the cradle of the ancient Chinese civilization” (Practical Chinese Reader). Of among the mountain ranges, Chinese language students learn mainly about Huang Shan (12 times, 5%) and Tai Shan (11 times, 4%), and rarely Emei Shan, Wutai Shan or Hua Shan. Mount Everest was mentioned only three times, much less often than expected.



Map 1. Provinces of the PRC, Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan according to the popularity in analyzed textbooks

Source: results of the research.

Among the tourist destinations that were expected to be more popular, but in reality appeared in less than 1% of the texts, there were the following: Terracotta Army, Three Gorges, West Lake, Ming Tombs, Hainan island and Sanya city, Jiuzhaigou Valley, Mogao Caves, Emei Shan, and Shaolin Temple. One of the reasons why these destinations were not so popular in the textbooks, may be that their names are difficult to learn or pronounce. But even if we take a closer look at the data including photos' content, additional vocabulary, and introduction about China provided in English, they were also not that popular.

Conclusions

There are many components used to construct the soft power of a country. Among them, language education aimed to foreigners may play an important role and can be used to build up the desired image of

a nation. Those textbooks are used in the process of learning Chinese by foreigners, who tend to tie their life or careers with China, so the possibility of shaping their picture of that country cannot be neglected. How can we describe this particular soft power tool, a result of the combination of language education, tourism promotion, and border controversies?

Based on research, it seems that in the first stage of language education the greatest importance is given to strengthen the interest in ancient Chinese culture, not the contemporary one. In the second stage the effects of modernization and economic development are highlighted.

In this context it is not surprising that the most popular architecture objects in the textbooks were the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. The importance of the Great Wall for the national pride of the Chinese people could not be underestimated. Its uniqueness in the world has been emphasized on many occasions in the context of cultural policy in China, therefore, such a high position of the Great Wall is not surprising. The Great Wall appears in the first verses of the national anthem, on the 1 RMB banknote, and also in the name of one of the Chinese textbooks series. The myth of its visibility from space has been repeated so often, that many Chinese and foreigners believed it – and as it may be noticed, this myth was still present in some of the textbooks. The Forbidden City, now a museum, could be seen as a proof of the richness of Chinese culture, although most valuable collections were taken to Taiwan in 1949. At the same time the Forbidden City served as an example of the disastrous Western influence in China, since after the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, European troops plundered the imperial palace. Both of these historical objects were described as beautiful, making a great impression on the visitors. They were the evidence of the magnificence of Chinese history and culture.

It is worth to mention, that for the last decades of constant growth, China has been building a picture of a country of fast development, that positively affects not only biggest municipalities of East coast, but also interior provinces. In the analyzed textbooks, however, presented pictures of cities and provinces may only strengthen the stereotypes and deepen divisions. Foreign Chinese language students could learn about the sites well-known for their history and tradition, like Beijing and Xi'an. Later on, most modern and developed cities, such as as Shanghai and Guangdong, were presented.

If some distant provinces were mentioned, they were praised only for their cuisine, traditional culture of ethnic minorities and nature, not

economic or social development. That could be a sign of still existing internal, geographical and ethnic essentialism. The description of minority regions was limited to their characteristics related to ethnicity. Culture of national minorities in China is often considered interesting as a kind of colorful folklore, so their representatives are displayed in folk costumes, and also the local cuisine is appreciated. From the early decades of the 20th century the Chinese Marxist-Leninists promised material and cultural progress to minorities that inhabit remote regions, described as backward and feudal. Even today the problems of minorities having lower social status than the Han people, and forced to match with the level of Han culture, were not solved yet. The culture of national minorities is considered as popular destinations for both local and foreign tourists, but not having much to offer in comparison to the Chinese high culture, even if it is in contrary to official multinational policy guidelines. During the annual meetings of the National People's Congress, representatives of national minorities are shown in the media wearing multicolored, traditional dresses, while members of the Han majority usually wear Western-type suits or military uniforms. It shows a different approach to these groups, which is similar with Anthony D. Smith's (2003, pp. 95–130) 'missionary nationalism' of great empires. The same approach seems to apply to the picture of distant provinces in the analyzed textbooks.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the names associated with controversy, such as Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang, were not particularly emphasized in the analyzed textbooks. The information about the islands in the South China Sea or Diaoyu/Senkaku islands were nonexistent. Perhaps more advanced learners would encounter them in the next volumes of the textbooks. This requires further study.

In short, what image of China can get a learner Chinese from Chinese textbooks for beginners? China is displayed as a great civilization and rich culture, the country which is geographically diverse, inhabited by people with different ethnic, cultural, culinary characteristics. A country on the road to modernization, which has already benefited some parts of the state, but not distant provinces, still being the folklore, multi-cultural background for more economically developed and enjoying long history and high culture parts of China.

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