

Paper presented at the International Conference
Political Discourse: New Approaches to New Challenges?

University of Lorraine, Nancy
7-8 March 2022

Title: *New Textbooks to Teach the Political Thought for the 'New Era'. Spreading Chinese Political Discourse through Education*

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Abstract:

Education is a field to which the political leadership of the People's Republic of China has traditionally attributed great importance. In the past decades, the country's educational policies have been repeatedly adapted to serve not only changing social and economic needs, but also political ones. Moreover, the leadership has always maintained a rigid control on the educational field, a control that is also manifested in the production of centrally mandated school curricula and textbooks. On the one hand, control is linked to the need to guarantee ideological, political, and linguistic correctness at all levels of education; on the other, control over school curricula works as an essential tool for the maintenance and legitimation of political power, the dominant ideology, and the popularisation of the related political discourse (Vickers/Zeng 2017; Morris/Sweeting 1991).

As part of the new educational reform launched in China in 2019, specific attention is being devoted to the need to strengthen political and ideological education at all levels. Specifically, according to official documents, the political thought of Xi Jinping (i.e., "Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era") must become an integral component of school curricula, teaching activities, and tools. In this context, in August 2021, the Ministry of Education announced the publication of a new set of textbooks to teach Xi Jinping Thought at different levels (from primary to upper secondary schools), which should function as key tools to ensure that political and ideological education addressed at young students is effectively put into practice.

Starting from the assumption that these constitute instances of Chinese political discourse, the present paper proposes a critical analysis of the new set of textbooks compiled by the Ministry of Education (4 volumes, 2021). The paper relies on the theoretical frameworks and analytical tools of critical discourse analysis and textbooks analysis to examine the discursive strategies through which the leadership's efforts to disseminate and legitimate contemporary official political discourse and ideology take form into a pedagogical artefact and how this discourse is adapted to the specific characteristics of the means and its intended users (i.e., the Chinese youth).

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