

The Value Orientation of Education in Chinese Society From the Application of the Three Kingdoms Story in Chinese Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

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Abstract

The Three Kingdoms period is one of the most heroic and most beloved eras in Chinese history. The historical text *Records of the Three Kingdoms* by Chen Shou and the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong both vividly recreate the turbulent and war-torn era, leaving a profound impact on later generations. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* emphasizes the promotion of “morality and righteousness,” which has contributed to its widespread popularity. Even today, many stories from the Three Kingdoms have been included in textbooks used in China’s nine-year compulsory education. In this paper, the author will take the “People's Education Press edition” as an example to explore the application of Three Kingdoms stories in these textbooks, thereby analyzing the value orientation of contemporary Chinese education and attempting to offer a modest supplement to previous research.

Keywords: Three Kingdoms stories, China's nine-year compulsory education textbooks, contemporary China, educational value orientation, people's education press edition

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Introduction

The Three Kingdoms period at the end of the Han dynasty refers to the nearly one hundred years of history from the Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 to the unification under the Western Jin in 280. The earliest historical record of this era is *Records of the Three Kingdoms* written by Chen Shou (Chen, 2000). This work regards the state of Cao Wei as the legitimate successor of the Han dynasty, and Chen Shou often praised and defended both the Cao Wei regime and the Sima clan, which has drawn criticism from later generations for over a thousand years.

In the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, Luo Guanzhong compiled historical records and folk tales to create *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature (Luo, 2013). The novel regards Shu Han as the rightful successor, displaying a clear bias in favor of Liu Bei and against Cao Cao. Since the publication of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, most of the general public's knowledge of the Three Kingdoms has been based on the novel. It can be said that the creation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* greatly increased the public's interest and enthusiasm for studying the history of that period.

Due to the widespread popularity of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, many stories from the Three Kingdoms period have been incorporated into China's nine-year compulsory education textbooks. These stories are presented in various forms such as poetry, essays, and narratives, each carrying educational significance. Since the "People's Education Press edition" is the mainstream and most widely used set of textbooks in China, this paper will take it as an example to discuss the application of Three Kingdoms stories in China's nine-year compulsory education textbooks. Through this analysis, the paper aims to explore the value orientation of contemporary Chinese education and to supplement and correct previous studies, offering a reference for future research.

The Application of "Wisdom"-Related Stories From *The Three Kingdoms* in China's Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

The Story of *Cao Chong Weighs an Elephant*

The story of *Cao Chong Weighs an Elephant* tells how Cao Chong, the son of Cao Cao, cleverly determined the weight of an elephant. It is based on *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguozhi), though it includes some slight modifications.

Cao Chong Weighs an Elephant is the first story from *The Three Kingdoms* to be included in China's nine-year compulsory education textbooks, highlighting the uniqueness of this tale. It appears in the first volume of the second-grade Chinese language textbook. The purpose of its inclusion is to emphasize Cao Chong's extraordinary intelligence, encouraging students to learn from his cleverness, to think critically when faced with problems, and to try different approaches to find solutions.

The Story of *Borrowing Arrows With Straw Boats*

The story of *Borrowing Arrows With Straw Boats* is included in the fifth-grade second-semester Chinese language textbook published by the People's Education Press. Adapted from the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, it tells how Zhuge Liang cleverly used straw boats to "borrow" arrows from Cao Cao. Originally, this event was attributed to Sun Quan, but Luo Guanzhong reassigned it to Zhuge Liang in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to highlight Zhuge Liang's

extraordinary intelligence. Zhuge Liang's *Borrowing Arrows With Straw Boats* strategy, through which he obtained over 100,000 arrows without expending the slightest effort, showcases his brilliant foresight and strategic genius (Luo, 2013, pp. 250-252).

The version of the *Borrowing Arrows With Straw Boats* story found in the textbook is largely the same as the one described in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but it has been rewritten in simpler and more accessible language to make it easier for students to understand. At the end of the story in the textbook, there are several follow-up questions designed to promote further thinking. One example asks students to "Describe the main content of the story in the order of cause, process, and result," which aims to develop students' logical thinking and memory skills.

The Story of *Sun Quan Encourages Learning*

The story of *Sun Quan Encourages Learning* is included in the second-semester Chinese language textbook for seventh grade, published by the People's Education Press. It is based on a passage from Zizhi Tongjian (*Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*) and tells how Sun Quan encouraged Lü Meng to devote himself to studying (Sima, 2013, pp. 1760-1761). Lü Meng came from a military background and was known for his bravery, but he lacked strategic insight. Sun Quan believed that a general should possess both intelligence and courage, rather than relying solely on physical strength, and thus urged Lü Meng to study diligently.

As a result, Lü Meng followed Sun Quan's advice and began studying. His talent and strategic abilities greatly improved, which highlights Sun Quan's wisdom in recognizing and utilizing talent.

The story of *Sun Quan Encourages Learning* is excerpted from Zizhi Tongjian and is consistent with the original account. This story highlights Sun Quan's wisdom as a ruler in his ability to "wisely use people."

At the end of the *Sun Quan Encourages Learning* text, there are several follow-up questions, one of which asks, "Why did Sun Quan encourage Lü Meng to study, and how did he persuade him?" Sun Quan used himself as an example to persuade Lü Meng to humble himself and dedicate himself to learning, emphasizing that intelligence and insight are crucial qualities for a general. This question aims to strengthen students' thinking and help them realize the importance of learning. The story of *Sun Quan Encourages Learning* is included in the first-year middle school Chinese language textbook to encourage students to learn from Lü Meng, recognize the importance of studying, and avoid neglecting their education, thereby making significant progress in their knowledge.

The Application of "Loyalty and Righteousness": Stories From *The Three Kingdoms* in China's Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

The Memorial to Launch the Campaign

The Memorial to Launch the Campaign (Chushi Biao) is a formal memorial submitted by Zhuge Liang, the Chancellor of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period, to Emperor Liu Shan before launching a northern expedition against the state of Cao Wei. The full text of *The Memorial to Launch the Campaign* (Chu Shi Biao) has been included in the second volume of the Grade 9 Chinese language textbook, and its content is entirely consistent with the version recorded in The Collected Works of Zhuge Liang (Zhuge, 2012, pp. 5-7).

This memorial primarily takes the form of a persuasive argument, while also incorporating elements of narration and emotion. With earnest and sincere language, Zhuge Liang urges the emperor to welcome open counsel, enforce clear rewards and punishments, and stay close to virtuous officials while distancing himself from flatterers, all in the hope of restoring the Han dynasty. At the same time, the memorial expresses Zhuge Liang's unwavering loyalty and dedication to the Han cause.

At the end of *The Memorial to Launch the Campaign* text in the textbook, there are several reflective questions. One of them is: “In the first half of the text, what suggestions does Zhuge Liang make to Emperor Liu Shan regarding domestic political matters? Which suggestion do you think is the most important?”

This question is intended to help students understand the content of the text, identify the advice Zhuge Liang gave to the emperor, and analyze which suggestion was most significant in the context of the time. It aims to develop students' critical thinking skills and deepen their understanding of Zhuge Liang as a historical figure.

The Application of “Aspiration and Ambition” Stories From *The Three Kingdoms* in China's Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

Ancient Chinese Poem *Viewing the Sea*

Viewing the Sea is included in the first-year middle school Chinese language textbook. The poem is selected from the Collected Poems of Cao Cao under the “Poetry Anthology” (Cao, 2013, p. 19). In the 12th year of the Jian'an era of the Eastern Han Dynasty (207 AD), Cao Cao led a northern expedition against the Wuhuan and achieved a decisive victory, successfully unifying the north. On his triumphant return, as he passed by Mount Jieshi, he composed the poem *Viewing the Sea*, expressing his deep emotions and lofty aspirations. *Viewing the Sea* is entirely a descriptive poem. Through the portrayal of the vast and surging sea, Cao Cao expresses his grand ambition of unifying the world and his broad, expansive mindset.

Ancient Chinese Poem *Though the Tortoise Lives Long*

Though the Tortoise Lives Long is included in the second-year middle school Chinese language textbook. The poem is selected from the Collected Poems of Cao Cao under the *Poetry Anthology* (Cao, 2013, p. 22). At the end of the 12th year of the Jian'an era of the Eastern Han Dynasty (207 AD), after Cao Cao suppressed the Wuhuan rebellion and eliminated the remaining forces of Yuan Shao, he wrote this poem in high spirits.

Though the Tortoise Lives Long is a philosophically rich poem that expresses the poet's spirit of growing stronger with age and his proactive, enterprising mindset, as well as his ambitious resolve to expand territories and unify the realm.

Ancient Chinese Poem *To My Younger Cousin* (Second Poem)

To My Younger Cousin (Second Poem) is a poem by the Three Kingdoms-era writer Liu Zhen, written for his younger cousin. It is included in the second-year middle school Chinese language textbook. The content is selected from “Collected Works of the Seven Masters of the Jian'an Era (Yu, 2017, p. 160). Although the poem appears to praise the resilience of pines and

cypresses, it is actually an expression of personal aspiration. Using these trees as metaphors for steadfastness, the poet conveys his firm resolve and places high hopes on his cousin.

The Application of Three Kingdoms Stories on “Character” in China's Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

Admonition to My Son

Admonition to My Son is a personal letter written by Zhuge Liang, Chancellor of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period, to his son Zhuge Zhan. The letter is filled with Zhuge Liang's earnest expectations for his son and reflects the deep affection between father and child. The *Admonition to My Son* (Jie Zi Shu) has been included in the Grade 7 Chinese language textbook, with its content selected from The Collected Works of Zhuge Liang (Zhuge, 2012, pp. 27-28).

In the twelfth year of the Jianxing era of Shu Han (234 AD), Zhuge Liang fell ill and died in the army camp at Wuzhangyuan. On his deathbed, he composed the timeless masterpiece *Admonition to My Son*, in which he counseled his son Zhuge Zhan on the principles of “cultivating one's character and setting firm aspirations” and “calming the mind to establish one's studies,” thereby highlighting the author's profound life wisdom.

The Three Visits to the Thatched

The Three Visits to the Thatched is included in the third-year middle school Chinese language textbook, with the original text coming from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Luo, 2013, pp. 200-205). In the 12th year of the Jian'an era of the Eastern Han Dynasty (207 AD), Liu Bei visited Zhuge Liang's humble thatched three times to seek advice on strategies for stabilizing the country. Luo Guanzhong, drawing from his imagination, wrote the highly engaging *Three Visits to the Thatched* episode. *The Three Visits to the Thatched Hut* allows students to learn from Liu Bei's humility and sincerity, as well as Zhuge Liang's visionary wisdom.

The Application of Three Kingdoms Stories on “Emotions and Sentiments” in China's Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbooks

Ancient Chinese Poem *Liang Fu Xing*

The ancient poem *Liang Fu Xing* was written by the literary figure Cao Zhi during the Three Kingdoms period. It is included in the second-year middle school Chinese language textbook, with the content selected from The Collected Works of Cao Zhi (Cao, 2013, pp. 104-105). *Liang Fu Xing* describes the difficult lives of the people living along the border and sea, profoundly reflecting the harsh and miserable conditions faced by the common people of that era. The poem expresses the author's deep sympathy for the lives of the laboring masses. In *Liang Fu Xing*, Cao Zhi depicts the tragic lives of the disaster-stricken people, showcasing his kind-hearted nature and compassionate empathy for the suffering masses.

Ancient Chinese Poem *Red Cliff*

The ancient poem *Red Cliff* was written by the late Tang Dynasty poet Du Mu and is included in the second-year middle school Chinese language textbook. The poem vividly depicts scenes from the Battle of Red Cliffs during the Three Kingdoms period, illustrating the idea that the

success or failure and the honor or disgrace of historical figures are subject to certain elements of chance. Du Mu wrote this poem after passing by the ancient battlefield of Red Cliffs, reflecting on the rise and fall of heroes from the Three Kingdoms era. The poet uses the historical event of the Battle of Red Cliffs to express his frustration and sorrow over his inability to serve the country and his feelings of disillusionment.

Conclusion

A total of eleven Three Kingdoms-related stories are included in China's nine-year compulsory education textbooks. The themes of these stories cover wisdom, ambition, loyalty, character, and sentiment, with three stories each on "wisdom" and "ambition," two stories each on "character" and "sentiment," and one story on "loyalty." From this breakdown, it is evident that contemporary Chinese education values the promotion of "wisdom" and "ambition," encouraging students to learn from the outstanding qualities of historical figures, set lofty goals from a young age, enhance their problem-solving abilities, and establishing the correct "values" and "outlook on life," and striving to achieve lofty ideals through hard work and determination.

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