

The Evolution of the Curriculum of Ancient World History in Chinese High Schools from 1949 to 2000

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Abstract: During the development of ancient world history teaching in Chinese high schools from 1949 to 2000, it underwent a tortuous development from the rise of the 1950s to the 1960s and 1970s. From the revival in the early stages of The Reform and Opening-up to the decline in the 1990s, the ancient world history courses in high schools underwent changes in content and ups and downs in status with the promulgation of teaching outlines and the evolution of curriculum settings. The reasons for this were related to the domestic political situation, history education ideology, and foreign education experience.

Keywords: Ancient world history courses ; Curriculum standards ; High school education

Since 1949, the history curriculum in Chinese high school stage underwent multiple adjustments and changes. During these changes, the content and proportion of ancient world history fluctuated and decreased.

1. Initial Creation: in the 1950s

In August 1950, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued The Provisional Teaching Plan for High Schools (Draft), which stipulated that ancient Chinese history, modern Chinese history, and foreign history should be taught separately in the 3 years of junior high school, and ancient Chinese history, modern Chinese history, and Chinese new democratic revolutionary history, as well as foreign history, should be taught separately in the 3 years of senior high school. In this design, the entire high school stage adopts the Dual-cycle Teaching Mode, where students learn world history in the 3rd grades of junior and senior high school. During this period, influenced by the Soviet Union, the overall emphasis was on foreign history over domestic history, making the status of ancient world history at this stage relatively important.

In July 1953, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued The Revised Draft of the High School Teaching Plan(Revised Draft), which stipulated that junior high school students should study ancient world history, ancient Chinese history, and modern Chinese history for 3 years, and senior high school students should study modern world history, modern Soviet history, and modern Chinese history for 3 years. This regulation still followed the Soviet system, with the principle of “world history first, Chinese history next”. In the 7th grade and the 1st semester of the 8th grade, students studied ancient world history. Compared to the design in 1950, the study time and class hours of ancient world history were expanded by half, and its status was further elevated.^[1]

In 1956, the Chinese Ministry of Education successively issued The High School Teaching Plan and The High School History Teaching Outline, which stipulated that junior high school students should study Chinese and world history, and senior high school students should study modern world history and Chinese history. Under this regulation, the 9th grade students studied the part of ancient world history, which accounted for about 2/3 of the total world history. The number of class hours was reduced, but its status and proportion were still relatively high.^[2]

2. Twists and Turns: from the Late 1950s to the 1970s

Since the late 1950s, the domestic political movement in China was turbulent, and the education industry was affected. During this period, high school history courses was impacted and had to be adjusted and compressed. In August 1957, a simplification method was introduced to various subject textbooks, which required appropriate simplification of textbook content to avoid the trouble of revising or adapting the syllabus and textbooks.

In May 1963, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued The Teaching Outline for Full Time High School History Courses(Draft),

which stipulated that students should study ancient Chinese history in the 8th grade, modern Chinese history in the 9th grade, and world history in the 3rd year of senior high school. During this period, high school history teaching was impacted, with learning time halved and class hours compressed from the past 3 hours per week to 2 hours. The proportion of ancient world history was also severely compressed.

After 1964, the political situation in China became more tense, and the entire education system was impacted. The compression of the academic system and simplification of the curriculum became inevitable. During this period, Chinese and world history courses were compiled into a single textbook, with a total of 60 lessons. The entire history discipline was subjected to unprecedented oppression, and the status of ancient world history fell to its lowest point. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the entire system of basic education collapsed, the history curriculum in secondary schools was virtually non-existent, and parts of ancient world history also disappeared.^[3]

3. Revival: during the Early Stage of The Reform and Opening-up

In 1978, the Ministry of Education of China issued The Teaching Outline of High School History Courses in Full Time 10 Year Schools (Trial Draft), which stipulated that students should study ancient Chinese history in the 8th grade, modern Chinese history in the 9th grade, and world history in the 1st year of senior high school. This plan is very similar to The Teaching Outline for Full Time High School History Courses (Draft), only transferring the world history that was originally studied in the 3rd year of high school to the 1st year of high school for learning. From the perspective of curriculum proportion, the 1978 outline stipulated that the ancient world history section accounted for 25% of the world history content, while the modern and contemporary section accounted for 75%. Compared to 2/3 of the proportion in 1956, the proportion of ancient world history significantly decreased in 1978. However, the promulgation of the syllabus marked the return of high school history teaching to the right track and the beginning of recovery and reconstruction.

In 1986, The Full Time High School History Teaching Outline was officially issued. According to its teaching arrangement, Chinese history was taught in the 7th grade and the 1st semester of the 8th grade, world history was taught in the 2nd semester of the 8th grade, and high school world history was taught in the 1st semester of senior high school. This adjustment not only increased the overall class hours of the history discipline, but also moved forward the learning time of the entire history discipline, bringing the study of ancient world history back into the junior high school stage. In addition, the outline also stipulated that ancient world history accounts for about 1/3 of world history, an increase from 1978.

In July 1986, China's Compulsory Education Law came into effect. In response to this, The Nine Years Compulsory Education Full Time Junior High School History Teaching Outline (Preliminary Review Draft) of 1988 stipulated the teaching of history in junior high schools. Chinese history was required to be taught in the first and second grades of junior high school, and world history was taught in the 9th grade. The content of ancient world history still accounted for 1/3 of world history. This outline would completely transfer the study of world history to the high school stage, helping students form a global perspective on world history.

In 1990, The Revised Outline of History Teaching for Full Time High Schools was issued, which once again adjusted the teaching of Chinese high school history. Students in grade 7 and 8 studied Chinese history, in the 2nd semester of grade 8 studied world history, in the 1st semester of grade 1 studied modern Chinese history, in the second semester of grade two studied world history, and in grade 3 offered elective courses on ancient Chinese history. The main changes in this outline revision were the addition of Chinese history content and the emergence of elective courses, which can not only reduce students' learning burden to a certain extent and complete the system, but also meet the learning interests of some students. The implementation of a dual cycle in the content of ancient world history was beneficial for students to consolidate and deepen their learning.

4. Silence: at the End of the 20th Century

After a brief revival at the beginning of China's Reform and Opening-up, the status of ancient world history began to decline significantly in the 1990s.

In 1992, The Nine Year Compulsory Education Full Time Junior High School History Teaching Outline was implemented. Chinese history was studied in the 1st and 2nd grades of junior high school, world history was studied in the 3rd grade of junior high school, and modern world history, modern Chinese history, and elective ancient Chinese history were studied in the 3rd year of high school. This course arrangement redistributed history courses to each grade in high school, but the proportion of ancient world history in high school only accounted for 1/4 of world history, and the proportion was beginning to decrease.

In 1994, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a corresponding adjustment notice for the teaching syllabus of 23 primary

and secondary schools, including history subjects. In response to this, in 1996, the National Education Commission of China issued The History Teaching Syllabus for Full Time Ordinary Senior High Schools, which stipulated that the 1st year of senior high school students should study modern Chinese history, the 2nd and 3rd years should have limited elective courses in modern world history and ancient Chinese history, and the 1st and 2nd years should have arbitrary elective courses in Chinese cultural history and world cultural history. Diversified elective studies began to emerge in the curriculum, but from then on, the content of ancient world history disappeared.

5. The Reasons for the Evolution of the Curriculum of World Ancient History in High Schools from 1949 to 2000

From 1949 to 2000, the curriculum of ancient world history in Chinese high schools underwent a half century of ups and downs, with many reasons closely related to their historical background and the characteristics of the high school history curriculum.

At the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the science education industry was in a period of thriving and progressive development, and the history discipline in secondary schools flourished with this trend. Due to the close and friendly relationship with the Soviet Union, China's development in various fields was guided by the Soviet Union, and the curriculum and textbook format of high school history were also guided by that of Soviet Union. Therefore, in the 1950s, the proportion of ancient world history content in high school history subjects was relatively high, ushering in a period of peak development.

In conclusion, the main influencing factors for the evolution of the curriculum of ancient world history in Chinese high schools in the 2nd half of the 20th century are as follows:

1. Domestic political situation: during this period, the fluctuations in the curriculum of ancient world history in high schools were almost synchronized with the changes in the domestic political situation in China. It flourished during the initial period of the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s and the revival period of The Reform and Opening-up in the 1980s, but was affected by The Cultural Revolution and stagnated in the 1960s and 1970s. This factor has an impact on the ups and downs of the entire education industry and is the main reason for the changes in the curriculum of ancient world history in secondary schools.

2. History education ideology: history education ideology mainly has an impact on the specific structure distribution and curriculum design of the high school history discipline, especially on the curriculum design after The Reform and Opening-up. In the early stages of The Reform and Opening-up, the status of the content of ancient world history was restored and improved due to the progress of historical education ideas. However, after the 1990s, influenced by the ideas of "emphasizing the present and neglecting the past" and "ignoring foreign history and valuing the domestic history", the content of ancient world history was gradually excluded from the curriculum.

3. Foreign education experience: at the beginning of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, China was greatly influenced by the education experience of the Soviet Union and followed the Soviet history education model for curriculum design, resulting in a large amount of content on ancient world history. After The Reform and Opening-up, the introduction of Western educational ideas has had a certain impact on curriculum design. With the deepening of The Reform and Opening-up, its influence became increasingly significant.

It can be seen that the changes in the curriculum of ancient world history in secondary schools in the 2nd half of the 20th century were greatly influenced by the above 3 factors. In the subsequent research on the evolution and development of secondary school history teaching curriculum, attention should also be paid to the influence of these 3 factors.

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