

Public school teachers in Qingdao, 1940-1949: “Teachers in Continual Service”

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This paper focuses on teachers working at public schools in Qingdao, Shandong Province, between the Wang Jingwei regime period (1940-1945) and the post-war Nationalist government regime period (1940-1949). Having gone through many regime changes during the first half of the twentieth century, Qingdao well represents the typical Chinese city at the time, and its history provides us with insights into the institutional structures within public schools, which remained unchanged in the face of the otherwise ever present political instability.

To focus on public school teachers is particularly productive, since public schools in a modern nation deal with the everyday lives of the general population at an early age, as governments try to utilize them as an effective tool to implement state ideology and political influence. Teachers at public schools, therefore, are placed in a highly ambivalent position; that is, while as agents of the state they are expected to enforce its policies and exercise its control among their pupils, these very same pedagogues, as local intellectuals, were themselves subject to state regulations and control regarding freedom of expression, etc. This paper examines what it meant for schoolteachers and the institutions they served to be working in the midst of constantly shifting regional political power, using the case of Qingdao.

The historical research on the subject to date tends to stress discontinuity; that is, any change in political regime invariably brought about many changes in educational policy and institutional structure. This is especially true of historians of China with leanings toward revolutionary historiography. On the other hand, there is a group of historians who have recently shifted their focus to the historical continuity that marked China under both the Wang Jingwei and PRC regimes.

This article, which follows the latter approach, attempts to illuminate such continuities, beginning with an examination of the transformations experienced by the Qingdao school system, including the question of why the number of primary schools in Qingdao increased between the 1900s and 1940s. Then the discussion shifts to the careers of a number of representative teachers at the primary school level, the analysis of which shows a large amount of continuity in the status of teachers within the profession. Finally, the author examines how the post-war Nationalist government dealt with the legacies of the preceding regimes, the case in point being the emergence of “teachers in continual service”, which the author discusses based on pension application records.

Throughout the article, the author attempts to show how the status of many teachers within the school system remained the same, despite numerous political and social changes going on around them in Qingdao and comes to the following conclusions. First, the analysis of teachers’ reports shows that while personnel matters of city districts (*shiqu* 市区) were highly susceptible to political change, those of townships (*xiangqu* 郷区) were not, as demonstrated by a large contingent of “continually serving teachers” there. Secondly, the analysis of pension application records reveals the existence of tension between individual teachers and their superiors regarding how teaching experiences during the Japanese occupation were to be treated for the purpose of pension calculation.

Based on the above analysis, the author argues that a given regime had only a limited influence on the status of teachers in the public school system and many of these pedagogues, though placed at relatively low levels in the state power structure, proactively struggled to effectively protect their interests and their statuses within the profession.