PART ONE

THE NEW SCHOOL SYSTEM AND NEW EDUCATED ELITE
THE NEW SCHOOLS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: CHINESE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN THE LATE QING

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“Western-style education” in China, referring to schools that included Western subjects, had its roots in the missionaries and reformers of the 19th century. But it was only in the first years of the 20th century that a nation-wide mass education system began to take shape. The New Policy (xinzheng 新政) reforms of the Qing dynasty made education a central concern from their beginnings in 1902, and a number of officially-sanctioned schools emerged with the educational regulations of 1904.¹ The goal of compulsory and universal education was to be met gradually; the regulations stipulated that each prefecture needed a middle school and each county a primary school. The actual numbers were much larger, even while local schools might only follow the official curriculum to a degree. A functioning state school system could certainly be found in China’s cities by the time of the 1911 Revolution. In the countryside, as is well known, building local schools by confiscating temple lands and raising taxes provoked protests; however, there were also quiet successes that historians have perhaps underestimated.²

Regardless of the exact number of schools and students, the publication of recognizably modern textbooks (that is, short books devoted to particular subjects and aimed at specific age groups) grew from relatively small numbers through the 1890s to a veritable explosion circa

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¹ For the early development of China’s modern education system in English, see Borthwick 1983: 87–127; Bastid 1987; Abe 1987; and Curran 2005. The classic study in Chinese is Shu 1932; see also inter alia Xiong 1998; Li and Wang 2000; Mao and Shen 1988.

² VanderVen 2005.