

B.1 The Chinese Heartland and its Imaginaries: Essays

Knowledge Must be Correctly Cultivated! Considering 《中小学生课外读物进校园管理办法》 "Administrative Measures for the Entry of Extracurricular Reading Materials for Primary and Secondary School Students"

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All societies tend to erect walls that separate the acceptable from the unacceptable. That notion is both banal and, when manifested in the rules and styles of social discourse, the usual way in which societies perform and protect collective self-identity.² These tend to manifest themselves most acutely when they are violated or when the discursive

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² Cf., Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Vintage, 1996), pp. 27-29 ("A powerful way to conceive of the cognitive, cultural, and even, in part, the political life of a society is as a conversation. All we know of social reality is taken from the stream of unending conversations which constitute it." *Ibid.*, p. 33)).

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baselines shift.³ It seems that there appears to be a convergence around the construction of firewalls around speech that is permissible and speech that is taboo. That, at least, is one thing that the vanguards of the liberal democratic and the Marxist Leninist camps appear to agree about in their respective new areas of societal, political, economics, and cultural organization. Speech, uncontrolled, is dangerous to a society. It must be cultivated like the food that is grown to keep a population healthy. And to that end, each society requires a farmer to oversee and ensure that weeds do not invade and that noxious and deviant expressions are suppressed. This is all undertaken, societies tend to believe, for its good ordering. And society, as it comes to be defined in each era of its development, must be defended--especially against itself.⁴ That requires the cultivation of "good" knowledge as well as the marginalization of "bad."⁵

Yet it is not merely speech that is now understood to require a new set of taboos around which one can distinguish a permissible "freedom" and an impermissible offense to society, politics, culture and the like that must be administered (for we do live in an age of societal administration by organs of control fashioned in accordance with the pretensions of the political ideologies of the collectives that make and remake them).⁶ It is also the way one is expected to come to speech, and in that way, to come to meaning as a community. Here speaking serves as a performance of integration--even in diversity.⁷ This is a facet of collective meaning making, and the disciplinary structures around its authenticity, legitimacy, and rationalization.⁸ In an ironic way it runs

³ See, e.g., Martha Augoustinos, and Danielle Every, "The Language of 'Race' and Prejudice," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 26(2):123-141 (2007).

⁴ This is both a modern and ancient concept. For a taste of the modern, see, e.g., Randolph Bourne, "Herd Impulses and the State," in *Leviathan in Crisis: An International Symposium on the State, Its Past, Present, and Future*, by Fifty-Four Twentieth Century Writers (Waldo Browne (ed); Viking Press 1946 (essay originally written 1919), pp. 100-108; Michel Foucault, 'Society Must be Defended,' *Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976* (David Macey (trans); Picador, 1997). For an ancient version, consider the concept of 'asabiyah (solidarity, group feeling, group consciousness) in Abd ar Rachman Abu Zayd Muhammad ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (Franz Rosenthal (trans); Princeton University Press, 1967).

⁵ Cf., Debbie Haski-Leventha, Mehrdokht Pournader, and Jennifer S. A. Leigh, "Responsible Management Education as Socialization: Business: Students' Values, Attitudes and Intentions," *Journal of Business Ethics* (Online 2020); available [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04593-3>].

⁶ Cf., Neil Miller, *Banned in Boston: The Watch and Ward Society's Crusade against Books, Burlesque, and the Social Evil* (Beacon Press, 2010).

⁷ See, Chih-yu Shih, "Living with the State: Ambivalent Autonomy in the Yao Community in Jinxiu," *China Review* 7(2):169-189 82007).

⁸ See, e.g., Kevin R. Carriere, "Culture Cultivating Culture: The Four Products of the Meaning-Made World," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 48:270-282 (2014); see generally, Jan M. Broekman and Larry Catá Backer, *Lawyers Making: The Semiotics of Law in Legal Education II* (Springer 2013), pp. 155-180.

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against the individual exception that is prized in theory in some societies.⁹

No, it is not merely speech, but knowledge itself that must be carefully cultivated, harvested, and consumed, for the greater good.¹⁰ That requires an even stronger administrative control element and a sharper drawing of lines between knowledge that is taboo and knowledge that must be naturalized among recipient populations. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the correct management of knowledge (and its production) also requires a the sharpest distinction between knowledge that may freely circulate among the people--for their own good and the greater glory of the collective society managed by vanguards (each in their own distinct ways in liberal democratic and Marxist-Leninist order)¹¹--and knowledge that remains solely the province of the guiding vanguard itself or its instruments (human and singular or collective and institutional). Freedom to cultivate, disseminate and internalize knowledge, in every society and in every era must be carefully managed--from the definition of knowledge itself to its presentation, to its internalization and expression by recipients at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. The liberal democratic camp, like its Marxist Leninist counterpart are now in an intense period of (re)defining and (re)deploying knowledge in societally useful ways

These are old habits.¹² The objectification, cultivation and management of knowledge in whatever forms are technologically possible is ancient. In the "old days" both book confiscations and destruction, and tight control over knowledge permitted to the masses, have long histories in the contemporary great seats of liberal democracy and Marxist Leninism.¹³ They now appear to return to human

⁹ Cf., Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Justin O'Brien (trans); Knopf, 2018).

¹⁰ This can be understood as a counter narrative to emerging narratives among liberal democratic elites that paint the cultivation of knowledge by the state (certainly) and other actors (institutions, but apparently not influencers and other autonomous actors) as a threat to individual self-actualization and to a right that must remain substantially undisturbed to embrace non-dominant cultures within a state. Cf., discussion in Lyn Lewis, "Assimilation as 'false consciousness': Higher education immigrant students' acculturation beliefs and experiences," *International Journal of Intercultural relations* 83:30-42 (2021).

¹¹ From the historical perspective of Chinese Marxist-Leninism, see usefully Theodore His-en Chen, "The Maoist Model of Education: Theory in Practice," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 4(1):41 (1976) (reacting against Soviet revisionist education, Mao Zedong launched an educational revolution the object of which was to "make education an integral part of the Chinese social-political revolution." *Ibid.*, p. 42)..

¹² Cf., Alhamuddin, Ahmad Fanani, Ilyas Yasin, and Andi Murniati. "Politics of Education in Curriculum Development Policy in Indonesia from 1947 to 2013: A Documentary Research," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9(1):29-56 (2020); Pat Broadhead, "The Making of a Curriculum: how history, politics and personal perspectives shape emerging policy and practice," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 46(1):47-64 (2002).

¹³ See, e.g., Nico Stehr, "The Social and Political Control of Knowledge in Modern Societies," *International Social Science Journal* 55(178):643-654 (2003).

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organization after the briefest period where knowledge and its production was for a time allowed to roam more or less freely (or at least more freely than it had before).

The result has appeared catastrophic to some, and certainly highly disruptive of the maintenance of placid and efficiently operating societal orders. Not that either speech or knowledge production was ever entirely free of constraint, or freely shared outside of the guiding vanguard. But now both liberal democratic and Marxist Leninist vanguards have again converged around the older notion that both speech, and knowledge (its production and dissemination) but be both better managed and more tightly control for the achievement of core societal objectives (expressed in quite different ways in liberal democratic and Marxist Leninist political orders). That much the twin great antipodes of imperial power are (re)constructing for the world as they remake it in their respective images.

This is not so much a criticism--how can one criticize the waves for pounding a shoreline and in that process remaking it?--but an observation that while the great emerging imperial societies continue to express their attachment to notions of the great freedoms of expression and knowledge production/dissemination, the meaning of those concepts is undergoing some substantial change. One can be forgiven here for giving in to the temptation to understand this process as a discursive one

Discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence each of them presupposes a play of prescriptions that govern exclusions and selections.¹⁴

And, indeed, one speaks here of exclusion and sections that produce a discourse of knowledge. But it does more than that. It produces a universe of legitimated objects around and through which meaning may be created, but in the objects selected and in what they can be used to weave together the conformation of the discursive imaginaries of the society whose coherence is dependent on that construction.¹⁵ Of course, the great harbingers of this new turn toward well cultivated freedoms of the 20th century--those who insisted in the notion that within the state

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, "The Will to Knowledge," in *Michel Foucault, Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* (1 Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984) (Paul Rabinow (ed) NY: The New Press, 1994, p. 11.

¹⁵ Roberta Kevelson, "How's of Why's and Why's of How's: Relation of Method and Cause in Inquiry," *Synthese* 74(1):91-106 (1988) ("The encoding of a set of problems is said to constitute the boundaries of a system of inquiry, such as the use of Justinian's Codex as the basis for examining and teaching the law in the 12th century universities of Milan and Bologna. The *Quaestiones* provides the means for 'discovering' the meaning of the law." Ibid., p. 95).

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(or revolution, or Party) everything and outside of them nothing, might best recognize the trend which now appears to be unstoppable.

It is with that in mind that one might most usefully approach one small aspect of this transformation, of this better management of knowledge, its production, dissemination and expression, in the emerging context of protecting society against itself and against others. To that end, on 6 April 2021 the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the "Administrative Measures for the Entry of Extracurricular Reading Materials for Primary and Secondary School Students" 《中小学生课外读物进校园管理办法》 (the "Administrative Measures").¹⁶ It worth a careful reading, not so much for its uniqueness as for its candor. The Chinese Education Ministry is merely doing in a direct way what is being undertaken in culturally compatible ways within liberal democratic society. The focus is different of course. Yet both seek to preserve and advance their conceptions of the social and political order in the manner that accords with the political strictures and institutions of these respective societies.

The basis of the policy is grounded in the critical role of borders in shaping the character, nature and content of what lies on either side of the border.¹⁷ Within the border knowledge must be cultivated in ways that strengthens core social, political, cultural, and economic principles around which the society is given form. The manifestation of the border is centered on the identification of forms of knowledge that contribute to or that destabilize the harmony and forward progress of the nation. Those borders are to be administered by the state and its constitution understood as a political-cultural project. Thus, the "right to recommend extracurricular reading materials on campus is given to the school, along with the authority to manage extracurricular reading materials on school campuses."¹⁸ Individual autonomy to select reading is subordinated to the needs of society to cultivate the universe of knowledge form which the student might draw.

¹⁶ 【立此存照】教育部发文！12种类型的读物禁止进入校园 (6 April 2021); Posted by China Digital Times; available [https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/664486.html]. A crude English translation is available [https://lbackerblog.blogspot.com/2021/04/knowledge-must-be-correctly-cultivated.html#more].

¹⁷ The Administrative Measures makes this clear. "The Ministry of Education recently held a press conference to introduce that in order to establish a "firewall" for primary and secondary school students' extracurricular reading materials to enter the campus." Administrative Measures, *supra* ("教育部近日召开新闻通气会介绍，为建立中小学生课外读物进校园的“防火墙”")

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (将进校园课外读物的推荐权赋予学校，将其他渠道进校园课外读物的管理责任压实到学校。).

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Schools, then, become the operational center of national gatekeeping¹⁹ with respect to the assemblage and curation of knowledge to be imparted to the young.²⁰ That parallels the other great firewalls that together contribute to the construction of the great virtual border that separates the nation from contamination from outside.

The school organizes management personnel, class teachers and library management personnel to propose a preliminary selection catalog; it is responsible for reviewing, re-evaluating the suitability of the readings selected from the recommended catalog approved by the state, and recommending principles, standards, and requirements for other readings. Additionally the school must comprehensively check and put forward comments; the school organizes a special team to review and check, coordinate quantity types, confirm recommendation results, publicize and report to the administrative department of education for the record.²¹

Outside knowledge is useful, to be sure. But it must be examined, certified, or if necessary stripped of its corruption, and thus purified, permitted entry in a controlled and supervised way.²² Beyond the borders are worlds of indifference, threat, and alienage. The conceptual frameworks for the organization of the world beyond borders--created and controlled by the leading societal forces of the nation, are not merely incompatible with but threatening to the orderly rationalization of the world represented by the internal cultivation of education. This is not a problem uniquely Chinese, though its Chinese characteristics are important; one encounters this impulse everywhere though with national characteristics.²³

¹⁹ Ibid. ("The school must be a good gatekeeper" 学校要当好“把关人”)

²⁰ Ibid. ("The "Administrative Measures" clarified that the school is the main body responsible for the recommendation of extracurricular reading materials on campus, and is responsible for organizing the selection and review of the school's extracurricular reading materials. In principle, extracurricular reading materials on campus are recommended once every academic year. The recommendation procedure should include preliminary selection, evaluation, confirmation, and filing." 《管理办法》明确，学校是进校园课外读物推荐责任主体，负责组织本校课外读物的遴选、审核工作。进校园课外读物原则上每学年推荐一次。推荐程序应包括初选、评议、确认、备案等环节。)

²¹ Ibid. (学校组织管理人员、任课教师和图书馆管理人员提出初选目录；学科组负责审读，对选自国家批准的推荐目录中的读物，重点评议适宜性，对其他读物要按推荐原则、标准、要求全面把关，提出评议意见；学校组织专门小组负责审核把关，统筹数量种类，确认推荐结果，公示并报教育行政主管部门备案。)

²² Cf., Joseph Zajda and Rea Zajda, "The Politics of Rewriting History: New History Textbook and Curriculum Materials in Russia," *International Review of Education* 49:363-384 (2003).

²³ See, e.g., Henry Reichman, *Censorship and Selection: Issues and Answers for Schools* (3rd ed., American Library Association, 2001); Caren J. Town, 'Unsuitable' Books: Young Adult Fiction and Censorship (McFarland & Co., 2014).

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It follows that such control is as strategic as decisions about the character porosity, and openness of other borders that serve both to connect a distinct space to others but also to solidify its own constitution as separate, autonomous, and distance.²⁴ One gets a sense of what lies at the core of that sense of difference, and what is worth protecting through the cultivation of knowledge protected from corruption by considering the twelve classes of materials that form the core of forbidden or suspect work. These include the following categories of knowledge:

(1) Violating the party's line, principles and policies, slandering and stigmatizing party and state leaders, heroes, and joking about party history, national history, and military history; (2) Content that harms the honor and interests of the country and contains anti-China, insulting, or ugly-Chinese content; (3) Leaking state secrets and endangering national security; (4) Endangering national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; (5) Content that violates religious policies and promotes religious teachings, doctrines and canons; (6) Content that violates ethnic policies, incites ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, undermines ethnic unity, or does not respect ethnic customs and habits; (7) Propagating erroneous views such as individualism, neoliberalism, historical nihilism, etc., and have an ideological tendency to worship foreign and foreigners; (8) Those who have bad tendencies such as vulgar, kitsch and vulgar, low style, unhealthy thinking, promote supernatural power, mysticism, and superstition of ghosts and gods, and have value-oriented problems such as obscenity, pornography, violence, cults, gambling, drugs, suicide inducing, abetting crime, etc.; (9) Insulting or slandering others, infringing on the lawful rights and interests of others; (10) There are scientific errors; (11) There are illegal placement of commercial advertisements or disguised commercial advertisements and improper links, and the illegal use of the words "recommended by the Ministry of Education" and "designated by new curriculum standards"; (12) Other violations of public order and good customs, moral standards, laws and regulations, etc., causing adverse social effects.²⁵

²⁴ Administrative Measures, *supra* ("Excellent extracurricular readings and classroom teaching complement each other. They are a useful supplement to teaching materials and teaching aids. They are undoubtedly useful for and play an irreplaceable role in promoting national spirit, zeitgeist and scientific spirit, cultivating students' sense of family and country, enhancing personality cultivation, broadening international horizons, and fostering awareness of the rule of law." 优秀的课外读物与课堂教学相辅相成, 是教材、教辅的有益补充, 对于弘扬民族精神、时代精神和科学精神, 培养学生的家国情怀, 提升人格修养, 开拓国际视野, 涵养法治意识, 无疑具有不可替代的作用。)

²⁵ Administrative Measures, *supra*. ((一) 违背党的路线方针政策, 污蔑、丑化党和国家领导人、英模人物, 戏说党史、国史、军史的; (二) 损害国家荣誉和利益的, 有反华、辱华、丑华内容的; (三) 泄露国家秘密、危害国家安全的; (四) 危害国家统一、主权和领土完整的; 五) 存在违反宗教政策的内容, 宣扬

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The categories are unsurprising. The easiest of these are text that contain scientific error. Even here, though, there is room for policy--consider in the United States the fight over the scientific value of evolution, or of climate change, both of which have been attacked on "factual" grounds.²⁶ Another category, and one quite well known in liberal democratic states, includes vulgar and obscene work or work that incites racial, religious hatred. Culturally offensive categories include belief in the supernatural or witchcraft, which calls to mind the efforts by certain religious groups in liberal democratic states to ban the "Harry Potter" book series.²⁷

Yet another category includes politically sensitive information--about the vanguard, about key policy areas (unification and territorial integrity, etc.), or that harms the honor or interests of the state. This is an open ended and quite political category that necessarily inserts the machinery of supervision by the vanguard into the selection (and de-selection) of information. This itself can become sensitive, as shifts in the policies and basic line of the vanguard might result in knowledge once acceptable becoming unacceptable and requiring removal. Of particular interest is the ban on works of a critical nature that is related to the lives and works of national leaders, hero, and national history, including military history. That suggests the appropriation by the state of an orthodox view of all of these matters against which debate is forbidden. The idea appears in quite distinct form in liberal democratic states,²⁸ as well as in developing states where control of official narratives takes on a distinctive politics.²⁹

In this milieu, though the school remains the key administrative institution for managing knowledge on campus, its scope of discretion is

宗教教理、教义和教规的；六）存在违反民族政策的内容，煽动民族仇恨、民族歧视，破坏民族团结，或者不尊重民族风俗、习惯的；七）宣扬个人主义、新自由主义、历史虚无主义等错误观点，存在崇洋媚外思想倾向的；（八）存在低俗媚俗庸俗等不良倾向，格调低下、思想不健康，宣扬超自然力、神秘主义和鬼神迷信，存在淫秽、色情、暴力、邪教、赌博、毒品、引诱自杀、教唆犯罪等价值导向问题的；（九）侮辱或者诽谤他人，侵害他人合法权益的；（十）存在科学性错误的；（十一）存在违规植入商业广告或变相商业广告及不当链接，违规使用“教育部推荐”“新课标指定”等字样的；（十二）其他有违公序良俗、道德标准、法律法规等，造成社会不良影响的。）

²⁶ See, e.g., Jeffrey Mervis, "Tennessee House Bill Opens Door to Challenges to Evolution, Climate Change," *Science* 332(6027):295 (15 April 2011); Nicole M. Colston and Jacqueline M. Vadjunec, "A critical political ecology of consensus: On "Teaching Both Sides" of climate change controversies," *Geoforum* 65:255-265 (2015).

²⁷ See Brian Meadors, *Harry Potter and the Cedarville Censors: Inside the Precedent Setting Defeat of an Arkansas Book Ban* (McFarland & Co, 2019).

²⁸ Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge* (Routledge, 2014); Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture & Social Criticism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991 4th printing 2003)

²⁹ Linda Chisholm, "The Making of South Africa's National Curriculum Statement," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 37(2):193-208 (2007).

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limited, and in political or state matters severely so, by the need for guidance from the institutions of the vanguard. This applies with even more severe consequences with respect to knowledge that touches on state secrets. The issue here is also complicated as notions of what constitutes a state secret have become much more dynamic, with a tendency to expand rather than contract the concept.³⁰

The last significant category touches on issues of corruption and commercial related wrongdoing (illegal placement of advertisements or appropriating signs of state approval of a work, etc.). Included as well are issues of slander and libel and a catch all category designed to sweep in any other objectional form or content of knowledge that the reviewing administrators, under the guidance of the vanguard, might also find objectionable.

In this way, education serves to further the great transformation of overall policy that has moved from a theory of convergence through globalization to one of decoupling through the emphasis of difference and the controlled interlinking from autonomous and more protective spaces.³¹ Each imperial camp will vigorously criticize and condemn the efforts of their rival in their efforts to operate their respective systems within meaning frameworks compatible with their core principles. That is both to be expected and necessary to sharpen and refine the difference that itself gives form and meaning to the principles and operations of each system. Yet as one undertakes this necessary performance of criticism one ought not to forget the equally necessary element of self-criticism (at least among members of elites and vanguards who have a hand in these operations).

In the face of this emerging context, the better analysis is not the banal (but necessary) one: that the analysis ought to be a function of extent to which the actions and understandings of the rival system are incompatible and dangerous to the integrity of one's home system and framing principles. That is easy enough. In this case, of course, those incompatibilities are glaring but also useful only as a means of analyzing what actual construction of taboo barriers for the protection of the integrity of the home system of knowledge production and dissemination. In this case there are no surprises.

The harder and more important analytical framework is whether the analyzed actions are themselves compatible with the principles and objectives in whose service they have been created and operated. That is by far the more interesting--and difficult (sensitive) question that tends to be avoided in this age of ideological competition and democratic centralism (applied in contextually appropriate ways in Marxist Leninist

³⁰ Hitoshi Nasu, "State Secrets Law and National Security," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 64(2):365-404 (2015).

³¹ But see Richard Falk, "Hans Küng's Crusade: Framing a Global Ethic," *Politics, Culture and Society* 13(1):63-81 (1999).

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and liberal democratic orders). At least in conversations among and within ruling elites, that reticence is lamentable.

And even within that framework there are compatibilities that might be usefully explored. First the importance of education institutions as gatekeepers of knowledge production and dissemination. Second, the focus on the definition of knowledge that must be avoided either as a contaminant or as a threat to the integrity of the social order. These impulses are shared in common among the leading elements of both Marxist Leninist and liberal democratic camps (through their parties in power). Third, the ways in which these differences and alignments suggest where each of these systems seek to project their approaches outward within their emerging spheres of influence, and in competition for the control of a global narrative of knowledge, knowledge production, management, and deployment.

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