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Critical Pedagogy and Chinese Education

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Proponents of critical pedagogy have argued that curricular and instructional issues can best be understood when they are placed within a context that analyzes the political nature of pedagogic authority. Issues including the school's contribution to the perpetuation of ideological hegemony, the nature of student resistance to teacher authority, alienation from one's labor and the commodification of curricular knowledge are a few of the themes which have achieved particular salience in repeated discussions of this topic.[1]

Invariably, the concepts which comprise the body of knowledge which are referred to here as "critical pedagogy" have been shaped by western notions of class and class conflict, along with an appreciation for the influence of post-industrial organizational styles and expressions of technical managerial control upon classroom organization and behavior. Occasionally, the views of important authors, categorized as writing within a critical tradition have been used to explain schooling rituals and practices in non-western settings. Basil Bernstein's views of loose vs. tight curricular framing and strong vs. weak classification systems, as measures which explain the expression of authority within curricular and pedagogical methods, have been employed as tools to further our understanding of school practices in China.[2] Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, as that set of values and attitudes of situationally specific importance to dominant social class members, possessed and imposed by those members upon the rest of society, yet perpetuated by normal schooling practices, can be considered a useful tool in explaining traditional educational behaviors with strong Confucian normative value claims.[3]

To date though, there has been no systematic attempt to place notions of critical pedagogy within the context of contemporary Chinese education. The aim of this paper is to

rectify this omission, not because a comparative fit is overly tight, but because such an exercise may facilitate re-examination of some of the assumptions behind critical pedagogy as theory and Chinese educational practice.

For this author, Henry Giroux's writings represent the most systematic attempt to define the parameters of discourse concerned with critical pedagogy issues. In rejecting the technical rationality implicit in positivist assumptions governing mainstream educational research, and in dismissing the relativism of symbolic interactionism (interpretive rationality) as well as the determinism of mechanistic neo-Marxist frameworks, Giroux focuses upon issues of ideological hegemony and culture as being key elements which comprise critical pedagogy.

> While it is important to identify the specific contents, mechanisms, and principles that underlie hegemonic school practices, it is equally important to situate them within the contradictory lived relations that make up the cultural field of the school itself. This is important for a number of reasons. First, the school with its competing tensions and disjunctions provides a concrete arena for investigating both the strengths and weaknesses of existing hegemonic practices. Second, this approach makes visible how the mediations of language, style, aesthetics and skills function as both transformative and hegemonic tools. Third, it reveals the structural limits imposed by the state and other institutions on day to day practices of teachers and students. Fourth, it provides educators with an opportunity to see how the contradictions of capital get expressed not only the discourse of teachers and students, but also in the structure of needs and impositions as they are played out in the classroom. Finally, this approach suggest developing pedagogical practices that use the lived experiences in which students discover how they give meaning to the world and how such meaning can be

used reflectively to discover its own sources and limits.[4]

Other authors have employed particular aspects this framework to analyze specific practices and policies within American schools. Michael Apple for example, has convincingly chronicled the trend toward teacher deskilling, where instructors have increasingly lost control over traditional decision-making powers and responsibilities as they affect curricular planning, its formation and implementation. The creation of "teacher proof" pre-packaged modules and instructional materials, which allocate little more than functionary responsibility to the teacher, usually through limiting one's task to the dissemination of the materials and evaluation of test results, is a prime example of this trend. For Apple, such curricular change reflects larger organizational changes in the work place where the worker has lost direct control over the operation of his/her machinery, with the advent of the assembly line and the use of increasingly sophisticated machines which require little overt external management and manipulation. Such characteristics mirror labor conditions typical of a post- industrial society.[5]

Others have analyzed the contents of high school textbooks and curricular materials in an effort to document the ways in which schools reproduce hegemonic views.[6] With respect to classroom management issues, authors such as Robert Everhart have argued convincingly that Marx's concept of alienation from one's own labor is a useful explanatory device in understanding the reasons for student resistance to classroom authority.[7] The works of these authors represent important but selective research in the general area of critical pedagogy within the American educational context.

It is quite evident that China as a third world country with severe developmental problems is attempting to modernize on its own terms, and its status as a developing country belies close comparison with post-industrialized societies and economies. To begin with, the Chinese notion of class and class affiliation is situationally specific. As is the case

with other third world environments with socialist orientations, the distinction between manual and mental labor is a crucial determinant in defining social class affiliation.[8] One discovers an inordinate degree of hierarchy and stratification involved in the determination of wage scales amongst the various occupations in China though, influenced by the amount of one's work experience, affiliation with a state owned enterprise and one's specific occupation.[9] In a populous society with limited opportunity for geographic and social mobility, where rural life is significantly more harsh than urban life and where resources are scarce and access to basic resources is uneven, education is extremely important in determining social position. Together then, the degree of manual as opposed to mental labor involved in one's occupation, occupational pay level, one's geographical location, level of education and the educational level of one's parents contribute directly to Chinese perceptions of class and class position.

It should be noted that the political culture of the Chinese intellectual has had particular historic importance, having been enhanced by a neo-Confucian normative value structure which associated leadership ability with individual success within a rigid examination system. Although normative value claims change and are redefined through time, the autonomous political culture of the Chinese intellectual remains intact today. Being a Chinese intellectual entitles one to speak with a moral and political voice which is often distinct from orthodox party doctrine. Efforts to increase their participation in formal Communist party affairs have met with limited success in part, because of the traditional beliefs that the efficacy of one's position should be acquired through educational rather than overtly political means. On the other hand, periodic attempts to blame China's intellectuals for social ills give further indication to the fissure between regular party members and cadres and intellectuals. These dynamics of course, serve to redraw perceptions of class and power in terms of a context specific landscape, a

landscape where relations between intellectual elites and the guarantors of state power continue to be tenuous.[10]

Since 1949, the Chinese notion of class has suffered from ideological ambiguity also. Defined in looser terms than would be true of conventional Marxist conceptions of class, it has been convincingly argued that the inability to balance competing views of the importance of class background (determined by parental social position at the time of liberation) as opposed to exhibiting correct class consciousness, contributed to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution and its ensuing Red Guard factionalism.[11] Although ideological determinants of class affiliation are no longer employed on a formal basis as an end to class struggle has been officially proclaimed in the post-Mao era, pre-existing social tensions continue to express themselves, often in generational (Cultural Revolution vs. pre-Cultural Revolution or post-Cultural Revolution) terms. For all the these reasons, the terms of critical pedagogy can only be applied to the Chinese case loosely. However, it would be mistaken to categorically dismiss the possibility that issues including the exercise of hegemonic practice, resistance to pedagogic authority, alienation from one's labor and the commodification of knowledge may serve to elucidate rather than obfuscate our understanding of present conflicts within the Chinese educational system. This paperwill analyze these categories with respect to Chinese educational practice and policy; since Giroux has argued that critical pedagogy derives a great deal of its importance in its service as a necessary but not sufficient precondition to educational reform, an effort will be made to discuss the limits and possibilities for pedagogical reform within the Chinese context as well.

Hegemony

For the purposes of this piece, hegemony will be examined in terms of its structural as well as purely ideological attributes. If the relationship between party leaders and intellectual elites can be categorized as tenuous and times

volatile, the relationship between state bureaucratic organs and individual educational institutions can also be described as having included its own set of contradictions. To begin with, Chinese educational institutions of all types currently lack the autonomy and independence to which we are normally accustomed. This is not surprising given the relative youth of the national educational system as a whole (instituted only after the collapse of the Imperial examination system in 1905), repeated attempts to mechanistically borrow from European, American and Soviet models throughout the twentieth century, and the frontal assault directed toward formal secondary and tertiary educational institutions during the Cultural Revolution. Ruth Hayhoe has aptly chronicled patterns specific universities have historically pursued in their attempt to sycretize Western and Chinese value claims into a coherent sense of mission and direction.[12]

For this author though, what is most unique about the Chinese case is the degree of institutional malleability in evidence under present conditions. While education in post-Mao China is decidedly elitist hierarchical, with its reliance upon keypoint schooling at every level of the educational ladder, and while the children of professional and intellectual parents enjoy hidden advantages as they succeed academically within the structure, individual institutions find themselves constrained in their attempts to enunciate their own sense of direction. Centralization and decentralization tensions characterize educational systems of most types and calls for increased decentralization of decision making responsibility are quite numerous today in China. Historically though, decision making has been prescriptive and centralized with the stakes being particularly high; one's position within the educational ladder (national, provincial, municipal keypoint or nonkeypoint institution; comprehensive university or technical college; liberal arts or teacher training institution, etc.) has not only affected the institution's level of funding, but the quality of faculty and students the institution will be able to secure, possibilities for faculty and

student overseas study and training, resources, materials, instructional aides, etc. These type of decisions continue to be made in centralized fashion by the State Education Commission.

Individual schools work within the framework and attempt to maximize their status in a number of ways. Higher educational institutions establish cooperative agreements with sister schools in the West, in an attempt to circumvent perceptions of provincialism and localism. Arrangements with feeder senior middle schools are made as a means of guaranteeing prestige for both of the participating parties. Since senior middle school reputation is largely based upon the percentage of graduates entering the university as well as the quality of institution they attend, only the most capable students are allowed to sit for the exam. Tracking and ability grouping, widely criticized in 1981, is still prevalent in a number of settings and allows teachers to teach to the better students for purposes of ultimately enhancing institutional reputation.[13] Indeed, the use of testing as a means of enhancing reputation by documenting entrance selectivity exists even at the primary level (although such tests have supposedly been abolished). It should be remembered that although keypoint designations have been supposedly eliminated at the primary and middle school levels in a formal sense, informal "word of mouth" continues to play an important role in determining institutional reputation, and testing results contribute to popular perceptions of institutional excellence.

Schools may have some success in manipulating status hierarchies to their own benefit. However, the social context of such hierarchies includes pervasive reliance upon patron-client relations as a means of preserving or enhancing institutional position. Although competitive bidding for grants and funding is beginning to occur, personal relationships with members of the State Education Commission, the Chinese Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences and selected research institutes have always been crucial to universities seeking increased funding,[14] as are the relation-

ships primary and middle school institutions cultivate with municipal and provincial education departments. Thus, the devolution of responsibility for institutional operations at the higher education level, as supported in the 1985 higher education reform proposals, must be viewed within a context where strong autonomy and institutional independence has not been traditionally practiced or respected. Indeed, one could argue that as Chinese colleges, universities, and secondary schools experiment with money making schemes in order to augment frugal budgets, their overall dependency upon centralized state organizations is inexorably reaffirmed, since reliance upon patronship becomes ever more crucial when funds become scarce and the demarcation between winners and losers is made clear. In any event, academic institutions in China, with a few notable exceptions, have in the past, lacked the independent ability to charter or the ability to confer a significant degree of status upon their graduates, according to their own terms.[15]

As has been noted, an emphasis upon examination as a method of determining academic as well as social and political position has traditional roots. What has changed in modern China though, is the nature of the knowledge base reified for study. The traditional Chinese examination system emphasized the rote memorization of classical texts, resuscitated in the mechanical form of the eight legged essay. The knowledge acquired, although largely irrelevant to the practical concerns of day to day governance,perpetuated a belief in the importance of canon, of the almost spiritual potency of the Confucian texts. It was assumed that their mastery allowed successful graduates to engage in governance.

Today, Chinese students sit for entrance examinations which include Chinese and mathematics subject areas, as well as a series of elective concentrations in the hard sciences, the humanities and social sciences. A politics test, of proforma importance is also administered. The hard sciences, particularly physics and chemistry, are among the most popular majors because their contents are viewed as

being immune from political manipulation. The expertise acquired through their mastery is considered a guarantor of a prominent occupation regardless of the particular political direction of the country's central leadership. Given the ideological swings which have occurred within the country during the past four decades, the yearning for a stability acquired through overt political disengagement is understandable, if naive. It even extends beyond formal curricular practice and includes popular fascination with science fiction and similar fantasy literatures. However, there is an obvious contradiction when official attempts to depoliticize curriculum are accompanied by widespread perceptions which equate the efficacy of knowledge acquisition with personal expediency and self-interest. The moral force traditionally associated with the act of learning, is less appreciated and respected today. Curricular value instead, is associated almost exclusively with external reward. As a result, there are limited possibilities for developing a structure, expressed in curricular terms, that would legitimize the use of pedagogic power. Ideological justifications for the study of certain subject areas may be voiced according to the assumed expertise which is acquired through their mastery, and the use of that expertise is assumed to play a crucial role in the country's attempt to modernize. But, as long as modernization Chinese style, includes the elitist and rigid status hierarchies which have been previously noted as well as a reliance upon patron-client relationships as a means of obtaining successful mobility within the educational ladder, it, as an ideological construct, contains contradictions which may prevent it from achieving the force or influence of Maoism, in its totalism.[16]

Pedagogic Resistance

How then, is resistance to pedagogic authority practiced within China, both on the part of students and teachers? When one analyzes the forms of resistance practiced by students, they differ little contextually, from behaviors ob-

served elsewhere. Western educators have often argued that Chinese students are better disciplined and are more industrious than their non-Asian counterparts. In recent years however, it has become increasingly clear that truancy, delinquency and overt disobedience are not alien behaviors to Chinese educational environments. During the early years of the post-Mao era, newspaper articles began to take a more objective view of student resistance and rebellion, admitting that armed security guards were required to patrol certain schools. Truancy and gang activity are said today, to begin in the early teens, when the pressure points to succeed within the educational ladder are intense, yet where youth also realize that their chances for using their education as a means to personal advancement are limited.[17]

At the primary level, overly spoiled products of one-child families are demonstrating excessive difficulty in adapting their behaviors to expected school norms. Parents, long acknowledged to possess considerable influence in motivating their children to succeed in school have themselves lost faith in the importance of acquiring an education. Rural students are encouraged to drop out in the mid-primary grades so that they can help their parents harvest crops on individually operated plots of land; intellectual and professional parents, disconsolate over their own poor wages, counsel their children against entering teaching professions; and, the students themselves have little motivation to excel academically when the connection between educational achievement and earning power is so tenuous.[18] In a society where the reproduction of status and class position is closely linked to parental expectation and influence, where loyalty to family has always preceded institutional loyalty, student resistance to conventionally accepted norms defining pedagogic authority is becoming increasingly pronounced.

Resistance does not simply express itself in terms of rebellion or disengagement however. Contradictory expectations of teacher's role are highlighted when policies are enacted which are said to overemphasize the importance of

achievement to the perceived detriment of students' psychological and physiological well-being. Thus, public criticisms of the overuse of testing or ability grouping, which first appeared in the early 1980s, spoke specifically to child-centered concerns and can be considered an attack upon traditionally accepted pedagogical norms. Calls for improved moral education or for the introduction of sex education in the schools also speak to the argument that the emotional distance within the teacher-student relationship is too extreme; teachers are unable to understand student interests and desires; students are conversely unwilling to confide in their teachers when personal problems arise.[19] Teachers are criticized for overworking their students, causing epidemics of poor eyesight and inferior physical fitness. Occasional instances of family violence and abuse have been reported in the press and are also thought to reflect the undue pressure for academic success placed upon certain students by teachers as well as parents.[20]

It should be noted that arguments in favor of a more humanistic, child-centered characterization of the teacher-student relationship, are expressed as class size in urban classrooms is decreasing, directly due to the implementation of the one child family policy. The prospects for a reform of that relationship are limited though.

The fact that pedagogical reform is so difficult to implement is due in part, to the traditional perception of the learning process which does not distinguish between individual differences in learning style or capability and which places great emphasis upon the importance of modeling behavior through example, often in mechanistic terms.[21] This theme will be further explored later in the paper. It is important to note at this time, though, that patron-clientship characteristics, which have traditionally existed within the teacher-student relationship too, may be eroding as the nature of that relationship changes from the teacher's point of view. Pressures for curricular standardization, accomplished through the imposition of the nationally mandated, university en-

trance examination, along with demands for accountability which normally accompany standardization trends, probably do not "deskill" in the Western sense, since the traditional pedagogical assumptions we have described, enhanced a strict, circumscribed definition of pedagogical role. However, teachers' authority has always been defined in extra-pedagogical terms; the ability of the teacher to direct or positively influence a student's occupational future, for example. Emotional distance between teacher and student eroded as the length and quality of the relationship matured. However, the feelings of personal impotence and powerlessness which many of China's teachers have experienced can be presumed to have had a negative, if indirect influence upon the quality of the student-teacher relationship within the classroom. Academic success is increasingly defined in impersonal terms, without the prospect of the instructor offering the possibility of benefaction. Recent debates arguing about the virtues of competition within academic settings are sensitive to this point.[22]

Alienation From One's Labor

A most useful construct that defines the terms under which Chinese students and teachers currently perform their roles is the concept of alienation from one's own labor. The educational process is viewed in instrumental terms, as a means to empowerment, and the acquisition of power is defined (for the student) in the form of obtaining a prestigious job, or (for the teacher) through obtaining suitable renumerative compensation for one's efforts while maintaining enhanced social position, the inability to articulate a clear connection between the efforts of one's labor and its dissatisfying results leads to an overwhelming sense of alienation. Students believe that they have no reason to obey the norms upon which behavioral expectations within schools are formed. Teachers, likewise have no reason to take their jobs seriously when they view their own future in precarious terms. In a strict Marxist sense, the basic instrumentalism which is

intrinsic to the valuation of labor destroys one's fundamental appreciation for the labor process, regardless of the disappointing outcomes of one's efforts. However, for many Chinese students and teachers, it is difficult to take one's work seriously because of the external context in which that work is situated

Commodification of Knowledge

A final concept which may have some relevance to the current Chinese case is the process whereby knowledge bases are being commodified. In recent years, courses, degrees and institutions specializing in tourism, hotel operations, business management as well as various vocational subject areas have proliferated. The growth of applied science disciplines has been equally striking. The penchant for curricular specialization with an emphasis upon vocationalism is not new to China, and was enhanced in the 1950s, as the Soviet educational model predominated. It can be argued though that a certain degree of "trendiness" exists today which was not in evidence during the 1950s, due to the attention paid to the potential profitability of the educational enterprise. As the range of curricular programs at secondary and tertiary levels expands, foreign influences as well as economic considerations can be seen to be driving the process, although the long term implications of this process remain unknown.[23]

To this point, issues of hegemony, pedagogic resistance, alienation from one's labor and the commodification of knowledge bases have been noted with general reference to Chinese education. It has been argued that the usefulness of these terms in a theoretical sense, is derived in part from their contribution to discussions concerned with pedagogical reform and the possibilities for reform. With that assumption in mind, two different school environments will be described in detail, based upon visitations conducted by the author during the summer of 1988. An attempt will be made to relate the terms of critical pedagogy, when applicable, to the school

observations. Then, the general strengths and weaknesses this approach will be summarized.

Case Number 1 - The Jiankang Road (Health Road) School

The Jiankang Road School is a primary level school for retarded children located in Hangzhou. 28 boys and 42 girls attend the facility which is staffed by 13 teachers and one receptionist. Begun in the spring of 1982 as a special class attached to the Donghai Primary School, the Jiankang Road School established its institutional independence and expanded to its current size in 1983. Previously used as a factory building, the site includes five classrooms, a library, clinic, stock room, music room, two resting rooms and a school perated factory (used by students in grades 5 and 6).

Today, special education programs within the city include both special classes in ordinary primary schools and this independent school. The curriculum is said to be similar in both settings but authorities are quick to acknowledge that the special education curriculum is different from parallel efforts to meet the needs of "slow students."

One is immediately struck by the gender imbalance within the Jiangkang school population, but the authorities did not admit to the existence of overt discrimination in the selection process. They instead claimed that since only one or two of the students resided outside of the district, student population ratios were representative of the district population. It was admitted that it is difficult to find qualified male teachers for this type of work however, and this difficulty was attributed to the existence of gender sterotyping.

Students are referred to the school by both ordinary primary level teachers and parents. A number of students are sent to this school when it becomes obvious that they can't follow the daily routine of their home school. Others can not be accepted, even on a preliminary basis, by their ordinary primary schools and are thus placed in the Jiangkang Road School by their parents, who pay 4 yuan a term for tuition and

15 yuan a month for food.

Upon their arrival, students are given a version of the Wechsler IQ test and their average score was reported as 40. the Hangzhou University Psychology Department developed a battery of tests including items from the Wechsler as well as the Raven matrix exam, although the tests were not in current use in the school. Because provincial norms for all IQ tests had not been gathered, norms from Shanghai and Hunan were being used for comparability with provincial scores.

Teacher observations of student behavior affirm their difficulties in speech, particularly pronunciation and motor activity (slow responses, lack of flexibility). Many of the students have seizures on a regular basis; some take medication repeatedly, although it is administered at home rather than in the school.

The curricular goals of the school include instilling in the children, a sense of self-sufficiency. During the first 2 years, students are expected to learn to work independently. In grades 3 and 4, they participate in exercises aimed at facilitating the acquisition of domestic skills, homemaking, cleaning and cooking. In grades 5 and 6, the students become exposed to broader social norms and participate in factory work on a regular basis.

These goals are supposedly accomplished through implementation of a morning curriculum which emphasizes language, math, speech, singing, physical education, fine arts, handiwork and moral education in the morning, and extra-curricular activities, games and manual labor in the afternoon. Students in the first three grades work two hours a week, students in the middle grades work four hours a week and fifth and sixth graders participate in an intensive work-study curriculum.

Field site observations confirmed that pedagogical practice was less traditional than that which one would commonly associate with an ordinary primary school. Class sizes of 12 students per teacher allowed for a significant degree of group

work to occur; in a grade 3 class, students sat in small groups at different tables observing flowers, noticing their color and texture. Students in a grade 5 classroom were using sewing machines to construct plastic shopping bags. In grade 6, they were wrapping and packaging boxes together in groups of 5 or 6, with the aid of a machine.

In a second grade classroom, communal singing was led direct by a piano teacher as the class celebrated June 1st - the International Day of the Child. Some students were seated with their hands behind their backs on their seats (which is traditionally accepted behavior for primary children) while others were not. When a question was asked, hands would rise, a student would stand up and give an individual answer. A communal answer would follow and the student would sit down. A group dance, with piano accompaniment, was observed although students were allowed to express the expected gestures out of sequence with the teacher's directions.

Certificates of merit for individual and collective performance were placed upon classroom walls. Points were tabulated on the blackboard on a row by row basis. It was acknowledged that individual token rewards such as gold stars were often used for motivational purposes.

Students art work was prominently displayed on classroom walls, and it was explained that although students are taught to read and write, they draw with difficulty and they are unable to fully comprehend the meaning of the words they write. Videotapes, produced by the Hangzhou University psychology department showed students jumping up and down to the directions of a leader, out of sequence; they had difficulty performing tasks requiring the exhibition of manual dexterity (such as bouncing a ball) or demanding spatial awareness (placing triangles within a rectangle). Additional scenes included a demonstration of holding a spoon properly and then eating food, practice in moving one's hands clockwise while singing, dancing like a bird, brushing one's teeth, walking up and down stairs and dressing.

The teachers who staffed the Jiankang Road school were experienced; five had taught for over 30 years while the youngest teacher in the school had four years of previous experience. They received a 15% stipend over and above an ordinary teacher salary from the China Welfare Fund. Their duties included making home visitations, meeting with the school parents' commission once a month, holding staff conferences on Saturday afternoons, and maintaining records on all students from the time of their admission to the school. It was emphasized that parental contact with school authorities was encouraged and parents were more likely to visit these children than their other ones. Hangzhou University inservicing and staff development was subsidized by a grant from UNICEF.

Analysis

To what extent can the concepts which comprise a critical pedagogy framework serve to clarify our understanding of the Jiankang Road School with reference to its institutional mission, culture and curriculum? The verdict is a mixed one.

In a country where educational provisions for disabled students are few and inadequate, where only 6% of disabled children received any education whatsoever,[24] it must be assumed that the children attending the Jiankang Road School were extremely fortunate to have access to the institution. Under such conditions, it would be naive to expect to observe overt displays of pedagogic resistance. In addition, there was little evidence to suggest that either students or teachers felt alienated from their own labor. When the principal was asked by the author to assess the value of the inservice counseling provided by the Hangzhou University Psychology Department, her answer was that she learned to be more patient with the children's progress and to judge their progress on individual rather than comparative terms. On the one hand, many of the pedagogical techniques observed at the school were similar to what one would observe in an ordinary Chinese primary school. Lessons were

teacher directed and appeared to follow a pattern of demonstration, participation or question- response. In spite of notable differences in class size, distinctly individualized approaches to learning were not apparent. The range of behavioral disorders afflicting the school's students varied, yet in all cases, children performed the same task at one time. Teachers may have been counseled to show more patience with their students' achievement, but they still demonstrated a basic faith in using traditional pedagogical methods. Western approaches which stress the use of clinical models of instruction in a radically individualized manner simply were not in evidence. On the other hand, small group instruction was evident in a few classrooms, and teachers did play facilitating roles in those environments, particularly when students operated equipment. The culture of the school appeared to correspond to Bernstein's classroom rituals which he categorized as entailing loose pedagogic framing and weak curricular classification to a point.

It is important to remember that such an institutional climate is created within an external environmental context where the aspirations for these children are decidedly low. There is a factory subsidized by the China Welfare Fund, close to school premises, employing disabled workers. But, under the best of circumstances, these children can look forward to adult employment in a segregated work setting, without the prospect of marriage (prohibited by law), and with their independence severely circumscribed. Under these conditions, it is easy to see how school authorities can legitimately rationalize their creation of a series of classroom rituals, more expressive than the norm, but still situated within a basically traditional framework. The purpose of the school is to equip the students with a moderate degree of social self-sufficiency, and this is a purpose which the teachers can at least buy into, through exerting a more than normal degree of patience without dramatically altering their pedagogical styles.

One other concept which has been discussed with refer-

ence to critical pedagogy is relevant to our discussion of special education, and that is the commodification of knowledge. In this instance, one notes the borrowing of IQ tests, constructed in the West, for use in China. In the above case, students were given IQ tests only after their arrival at the Jiankang Road School. It appears that informal labelling processes on the part of teachers as well as parents played the most significant role in segregating the students from the norm group, prior to their initial admission to the special school. Once the tests were administered, the students were left alone and follow up examinations were not periodically administered. To be sure, a member of the Hangzhou University Psychology Department admitted that provincial test norms had not yet been compiled but that workshops funded by UNICEF had been conducted by the department for the purpose of training educators in administering the test. Hopefully, relevant regional statistics documenting the extent and degree of disability will then be compiled. It does appear to this observer however, that the technology of test construction and administration is being willingly borrowed from the West without commersate attention being paid to the incorporation of diagnostic and evaluation methods into school curricula. Along these lines, it is interesting to note that the first special education Masters degree awarded in China at Beijing Normal University, included a thesis which merely surveyed American developments in the field. The mechanical nature of cultural borrowing and knowledge transfer has been attributed to Chinese educational policy. It represents in part, a belief in the efficacy of behavioral modelling as well as a penchant for Western trends. Special education issues as articulated in China, appear to be conforming to the above generalization.

Case Number 2 - The Tianchang Primary School

The Tianchang Primary School is an experimental school attached to the Zhejiang Provincial Education Commission located in Hangzhou. The school has received national

publicity through a description of its operations in China's leading educational journal, Educational Research.[25] The aims of the school include providing students with moral education, intellectual stimulation, physical training, labor experience and familiarity with aesthetics and art. Its notoriety is due to its commitment to experimentation, particularly with respect of pedagogy.

The school includes 802 students, 47 teachers and 18 classes (3 classes per grade for grades 1-6). 42-48 students attend each class, which is comparable with similar class size ratios in urban keypoint schools. The first experimental class at the school was established in 1983. Now all three classes in grade 1 are experimental and one class in each of grades 2-5 is experimental. Pupils in these programs stay together throughout their tenure at the school, which necessitates finding teachers who are able to teach the entire spectrum of grades 1-6, an admitted problem.

Initially, the parents were not informed as to the existence of experimental classes, although now, they are in full support of them. It was admitted that there is some parental pressure to place all of the children in experimental classes for all grade levels, but that the requests can not always be accommodated because of space limitations. Supposedly, parents understand these constraints.

The teachers selected for experimental classes volunteer for the duty and have not received special training, although as has been noted, their ability to teach a wide range of grade levels is one consideration which influences their selection. Originally, $2,000 yuan was allotted to the experimental class; now an additional $1,000 yuan is allotted to these classes.

Students are recruited from the district as a whole, which belies the informal keypoint status of the school. In addition, students are given an admissions test prior to their entrance that examines their use of speech and oral facility as well as memorization aptitude. Teachers tell the prospective students a story; they are then asked to repeat the story and

answer questions about its content.

In actuality then, what was experimental about the Tianchang Primary School? The author observed one fifth grade classroom, where Chinese literature was taught, and viewed separate videotapes showing a similar literature lesson taught by the same teacher, a mathematics lesson taught by a different instructor and an inservice session, given to teachers within the district, where student compositions were discussed and analyzed. The principal of the school admitted that pedagogical experimentation is more difficult to implement for mathematics lessons, and in viewing that videotape, it was impossible for this observer of see any noticeable difference between this class and others he has observed on a periodic basis over the past twelve years.

The fifth grade Chinese literature class was different though. In this case, after a series of teacher directed questions and answers, students were given the opportunity to practice reciting an individual poem in pairs. The classroom became quite noisy for 5 to 20 minutes as this occurred. Once the class was called to attention though, students moved back to their seats, quiet was immediately restored, individual students were called upon to recite their poems in front of the entire class with deference being paid to oral expression, they complied, and the class responded with polite applause. This ritual occurred during the final 20 minutes of the class period. There were a number of indications that such activity was not entirely spontaneous. Although students were rapidly completing the end of the school year, a number of the poems selected for recitation appeared in the first few pages of the class text. In addition, the exact same procedure was observed by a term of British scholars and teachers who visited the school earlier in the week. The videotape which the author observed not only included the same fifth grade teacher, but almost exactly the same sequence of events.

It should be noted that neither student chairs nor desks were moveable. Given the constraints of class size, a few

students actually moved to new positions during the oral practice session, where they stood at the end of desks, practicing with their peers. In short, it appears that the students were well cued to play specific roles during the practice session; the fact that they quietly returned in docile fashion to their original desks when the teacher clapped her hands is indicative of the degree to which the exercise ultimately reinforced pedagogic authority, rather than offering the participating students, a truly expressive classroom ritual.

This was not the only example of spontaneity being used to clearly define curricular and pedagogic authority though. During the break periods, in between class sessions, students appeared to be quite wild. They ran in and out of classrooms; played in the hallways and some even played pingpong on the teacher's desk, as the staff looked on and took their own 5-10 minute break. Once classes began in earnest, order was immediately restored. In this case too, spontaneity was tolerated, but only in order to define and clearly delineate formal pedagogic authority, reimposed once class sessions began.

Analysis

In spite of claims to the contrary, the Tianchang Primary School did not exhibit a commitment to experimentation appreciably different from what one would equate with normal pedagogic practice in Chinese primary schools. Through addressing the question as to why this 'experimental school" was in fact "non-experimental," a basic issue concerning the limits of pedagogic reform is implicitly raised. In this case, the social context in which the school operates prevents meaningful reform from occurring. The selective nature of the school, its ability to draw better students from all over its district, and its use of oral examination for initial student screening, promote its considerable institutional reputation and status, reaffirmed by its proximity to the Provincial Education Commission.

Rote memorization is stressed even before students enter the school, given the nature of the oral examination process. None of the teachers received formal training in the use of experimental teaching methods, and as a result, it is not surprising that the very techniques praised for encouraging reform and innovation, serve to reinforce traditional authority roles.

Even if one were to uncritically accept the commitment to experimentation as being authentic, the school's institutional purpose is suspect. Originally, one experimental class out of three was so labelled at the first grade level. Now the experiment has been expanded so that all three 1st grade classrooms are experimental. The abandonment of any control group will presumably continue since it is expected that each experimental class will continue in its present form with the same teacher, throughout the 6 grade levels. Why would authorities eliminate all control groups at the first grade level before the initial experiment has been completed, before the 1983 first graders have graduated and their performance can be compared with that of their peers?

One must assume that parental pressure may have had some influence upon this policy, especially when one recalls that experimental classes receive extra funding. The Tianchang Primary School appears to be a case where the label "experimental" is more important than any actual commitment to experimentation or reform. However, the possibilities for engaging in experimentation are circumscribed from the start, given parental aspiration for their children's achievement (expressed in conventional terms), and the institution's reputation, which is based largely upon its selectivity and its ability to place students in prestigious junior and senior middle schools. Authorities are quick to point out that in promoting greater class discussion, students in the experimental classes show equal or better achievement in the basic curricular areas than do their normal counterparts. What constitutes "experimentation" then is both politically safe and appealing to parental constituencies.

Does a discussion of the terms associated with critical pedagogy further our understanding of the Tianchang Primary School? Perhaps it does, but in an indirect sense at best. The Tianchang case is illustrative of the difficulty of enacting pedagogical reform in China, in spite of official adherence to that goal. The outside observer is made aware of the importance of external context, the creation of institutional reputation, the attempt to use the school as a social reproductive mechanism in the direct sense by parents, in evaluating the limitations placed upon reform efforts. Certainly when the vocabulary defining experimentation is expressed in such a way so as to reinforce traditional pedagogic authority, hegemony occurs.

On the other hand, evidence of student resistance to authority is not present, perhaps because of the social strata from where the children are chosen. In addition, there is no real evidence of the existence of commodification of knowledge or alienation from one's labor, as expressed either by students or teachers.

Conclusion

Together, the cases of the Jiankang Road School and the Tianchang Primary School demonstrate the limits and possibilities for educational reform efforts within China as well as the applicability of critical pedagogy concepts to Chinese educational practice. At first glance, one may be surprised that a school for restarted children exhibited a greater tendency for pedagogic innovation, less distance between teacher and student and weaker curricular classification codes than was true of a primary school labelled "experimental." Both schools can be considered at least somewhat elitist in terms of reputation, selection policies, etc. Both schools claimed to have a strong amount of parental support.

A key difference though, was the level of expectation placed upon student performance. In the Jiankang Road School example, expectations for student achievement were relatively low. Teachers used traditional pedagogical techniques,

reflecting in part, the traditional aversion to differentiating amongst students' learning abilities and cognitive styles. However, teachers taught with "patience," allowing students more time to grasp the fundamental skills to which they were exposed. At other times, small group interaction, requiring less overt use of pedagogic authority and a greater use of facilitation techniques, was in evidence. Such a flexibility of approach was possible within a social context whereby teacher and parental expectation level was quite low. The fact that these children were in a school of any type made their circumstances exceptional. Without the prospect for obtaining advanced education, a well paying job or even becoming eligible for marriage (prohibited by law), parents and teachers aspired to simply teach these children the basic skills necessary to function within society at a rudimentary level. And given the existence of comparatively low levels of aspiration, some pedagogical flexibility was tolerated.

It is interesting to note that historically Chinese educational innovations have occurred under similar conditions where constituent aspirations were leveled. Work-study schemes developed in Yan'an and institutionalized in the form of minban or half-work, half-study schools during the 1950s, are particularly illustrative. Nor is the connection between aspiration and curricular and pedagogic style limited to a Chinese context, if one examines Basil Bernstein's efforts to associate loose framing and weak classification with working class alternative type schools for British students, already socialized out of the mainstream.

If the association between leveled aspiration and curricular/pedagogic reform is an important relationship which occurs in the East and the West, the dynamics of class conflict, as played out within schools differs dramatically. In the Chinese case, it has been argued that the conflicts which are expressed are illustrative of a society beginning to incorporate capitalist elements into its social framework. Calls for increasing competition and placing a greater emphasis upon individual achievement contradict pervasive patron-client

relations. In a sense, current class for increasing educational competition are reminiscent of campaigns which extolled the virtues of "emulation" (or competition based upon proper role modelling) in this country during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[26] In both cases, it can be argued that certain elements of a capitalist ideology were emphasized although total compliance with its basic tenants was not forthcoming.

Critical pedagogy as applied to Chinese educational practice asks us to view pedagogy within a broader social context than would normally be apparent and that is a strength. The different terms of reference with respect to social class composition and dominant- subordinate conflict within China, demand that one use the analytical tools of critical pedagogy in non-conventional ways however. Teacher deskilling in China could be used as a functional terms, only if it was defined according to the full range of constraints and limitations placed upon teacher patronage outside as well as within the classroom. The concept of alienation from one's labor would have to be similarly redefined so as to include the sense of instrumentality, which characterizes motivation to work within China. Instances where knowledge bases are commodified and then reified would have to be examined within a framework which sensitively analyzes cultural borrowing and technology transfer in terms of those lines of dependency which are easily created and reinforced. The special education example for instance, demonstrated more of a willingness to borrow tests and test construction methodologies from the West, than it did a willingness to incorporate individualized instructional methods or clinical, prescriptive models within the classroom.

Similarly, examples of resistance to pedagogic authority would have to be viewed in a context where institutional structures are malleable and weak rather than autonomous and where familial and parental influences upon student behavior are strong. The use of the school as a mechanism for perpetuating social reproduction is quite visible; the ways in

which schools actively mediate external influences are more difficult to determine. As a result, direct instances of student resistance to pedagogic authority within the school setting may be more difficult to observe.

If the concepts of critical pedagogy can clarify the limits and possibilities of educational reform in China, they must be repeatedly scrutinized, and redefined, given the rapidly changing social conditions of that country. Conceptual frameworks, when rigidly drawn, can create a static world view which ignores the essence of social conflict and social change. This paper has argued that while the application of critical pedagogy to Chinese educational practice is not without its problems, such an application holds a considerable degree of promise in elucidating those basic assumptions involved in Chinese education, that heretofore may have not received their due attention. Through analyzing two specific cases in this manner, an attempt has been made to sketch parameters for future discourse. The task of painting a complete canvass has yet to be explored, although it is deserving of substantive consideration.

1. See for example, Henry Giroux, **Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling**, (Philadelphia, Temple U. Press, 1981); Michael Apple, **Ideology and Curriculum**, (London, Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1979); Michael Apple and Lois Weis, ed. **Ideology and Practice in Schooling**, (Philadelphia, Temple U. Press, 1983); Peter MacLaren, **Schooling as a Ritual Performance**, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).
2. Irving Epstein, "The Politics of Curricular Change" in John N. Hawkins, editor. **Education and Social Change in the People's Republic of China**, (New York, Praeger, 1983): 77-94; Ruth E. S. Hayhoe, "China's Higher Curricular Reform in Historical Perspective," **China Quarterly**, number 110 (June, 1987); 196-230. For Bernstein"s conceptual framework see, Basil Bernstein, **Class, Codes and Control: vol.3**, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

3. The association is made in my review of R. Kent Guy's **The Emperor's Four Treasuries**, in the **History of Education Quarterly**, (Fall, 1988): 472-476.
4. Giroux, p.29.
5. Michael Apple, "Curricular Form and the Logic of Technical Control" in Apple and Weis, pp. 143-165.
6. See Jean Anyon, "Ideology and United States History Textbooks," **Harvard Education Review**, 49, no.3 (August, 1979): 361-386; Francis Fitgerald, **America Revisited** (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, Little Brown, 1979).
7. Robert Everhart, "Classroom Management, Student Opposition, and the Labor Process," in Apple and Weis, pp. 169-192.
8. Zygmunt Bauman, "Officialdom and Class: Bases of Inequality in Socialist Society" in Frank Parkin, ed,. **The Social Analysis of Class Structure** (New York, 1974): 146-147.
9. Richard K. Kraus, **Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism** (N.Y., 1981); Teh-wei Hu, Ming Li and Shuzhong Shi, "Analysis of Wages and Bonus Payments Among Tianjin Urban Workers," **China Quarterly**, no. 113, (March, 1988): 77-93.
10. Merle Goldman, "The Zigs and Zags in the Treatment of Intellectuals," **China Quarterly**, No. 104 (Dec. 1985): 709-715; Merle Goldman and Rudolf Wagner, "China: Intellectuals at Bay," **New York Review of Books**, (March 26, 1987): 17-20. 11. In addition to Kraus, see Stanley Rosen, **Red Guard Factionalism and the Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou**, Boulder, Westview Press, 1981.
12. Ruth Hayhoe, "China's Higher Curricular Reform in Historical Perspective," pp. 209-220.
13. Stanley Rosen, "Restoring key secondary schools in post-Mao China: The Politics of competition and educational quality" in D. Lampston (ed.) **Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China** (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987): 321-353.

14. David L. Shambaugh, "China's National Security Research Bureaucracy," **China Quarterly**, no. 110 (June, 1987): 276-304.
15. John Meyer, "The Effects of Education as an Institution," **American Journal of Sociology**, 83 (July 1977): 55-77.
16. Lowell Dittmer, "Ideology and Organization in Post-Mao China," in Kingyuh Chang, ed. **Perspectives on Development in Mainland China** (Boulder, Westview Press, 1985):36-60.
17. Irving Epstein, "Behavioral and Psychological Attributes of Juvenile Delinquents in the People's Republic of China," **Asian Thought and Society**, no. 35, (November, 1987): 243-253.
18. Stanley Rosen, "The Impact of Educational Reform on the Attitudes and Behavior of Chinese Youth," **Interchange**, nos. 3-4 (1988): 60-75.
19. Yu Qihong and Yin Zhijing, "Bu Yukuai, taoye, zing uiuo dui Beijing she 21 suo bufen zhongzueshen de diaocha," **Dangdai Qingshaonian** Yanjui, no.1 (1988): 10-11.
20. "Hangzhou yiwei funu xiezi xuanliang," Renmin Ribao [Overseas Edition] (October 18, 1988):4; "Qinghai yi yuetong jingbei shengmu dasi," **Zhongguo Qingnian Bao** (December 29, 1987):1.
21. Arthur F. Wright, "Values, Roles and Personalities" in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (eds). **Confucian Personalities** (Palo Alto, Standford University Press, 1962): 3-23.
22. Bi Tianzhang, "Yinru jingzheng jishi dui jiaoyu lilun tichu de jige wenti," Jiaoyu Yanjui, (July, 1988):19-20; Feng Zhonghan, "Jingzheng jizhi buyi yinru xuexiao," Jiaoyu Yangjui (July, 1988): 21-22.
23. With respect to business management programs in particular, see Malcolm Warner, "The 'Long March' of Chinese Management Education, 1979-84," **China Quarterly**, no. 106, (June, 1986): 326- 342.
24. "Li Tieying Meets Special Educators," **FBIS-CHI-88-226** (November 23, 1988):32.

25. "Peiyang xiaoxuesheng 'sanzi nengli' de gouxiang he shijian," **Jiaoyu Yanjui**, no.4 (1988): 45-50.
26. Phyllis Vine, "Preparation for Republicanism: Honor and Shame in the Eighteenth Century College" in Barbara Finkelstein (ed.) **Regulated Children, Liberated Children** (New York, Psychohistory Press, 1979): 44-62; Nancy Green, "Female Education and School Competition: 1820-1850," **History of Education Quarterly** (Summer, 1978): 129-142.