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A global perspective on history education policies and politics: A commentary

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Prologue

This article is a recent version of a chapter I was asked to write for an overseas publisher who was compiling a series of chapters on history education to be framed as a 'manual' that would introduce readers to the field. During the writing and editing process it became clear to me that the more senior of the editors was unhappy with my approach which he described as being too much about controversy. His suggestion was that I modify the text to make it less so. My response was to withdraw politely from the project and, until now, shelve the original draft.

I withdrew because, after working for half a century as a history educator, I have learned from firsthand experience, from my research and from the research of others, that history and controversy go hand in hand, especially at the school level where history has long been, and continues to be, seen, as a potential agent of political influence. That a reader of the proposed book would be deprived of access to this interpretation struck me as an unseeing act that denied the reality of political influence in history education curricula around the word.

I would further argue that since the year 2016 when, for example, the United States elected a president who later suggested that there were 'fine people' in a neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, when the a majority of British electors voted for Brexit, a move that led later to an increase in xenophobic and racist attacks across the nation as well as the infiltration of the pro-Brexit party UKIP by neo-Nazis, the role of research-based and professionally-designed history education classes in schools has changed. In my view, it must now take into account and attempt to counter extremist views as best it can by addressing with equal emphasis the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of a study of the past. Not that this is the complete answer, as the reader of this article will discover. In that context, the Netherlands provides a case study, covered in some detail in this article, which shows that the Dutch government moved away from history education towards social education as a more effective way of dealing with racist-inspired social disintegration in a multicultural society. In the Russian Federation, the power of one individual, President Vladimir Putin, can overcome the progressive advances made in Russian history education during the 1990s. Putin's emotive worldview that Russia must resume its lost borderlands and that the Tsarist army would have defeated the Germans in World War One if only the Bolsheviks had not stabbed the Russian army in the back is now the dominant factor in Russian history education. According to the work of Alan McCully and colleagues, Northern Irish school students can write admirably balanced assignments and return to their homes that are situated in divided and mutually hostile communities where 400-year-old grudges are still willingly borne.

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One final point about the role of affect in historical consciousness. As a young history teacher working in a large comprehensive school in peaceful and beautiful county of Somerset during the 1970s, my colleagues and I were teaching the Schools Council History Project which had an optional Depth Study on the modern history of Ireland. During the IRA's 1970s mainland (England) bombing campaign which killed 175 people and injured more than 10,000 others, because of the nearness of the campaign and because of the students' emotional response to images of death and destruction, it proved impossible to teach a course that examined the circumstances which had produced such a violent response.

In conclusion, what I am saying is that it is not enough to create carefully designed, student friendly and inquiry-based classes in history. Teachers and students, especially adolescent students, must also be aware of the nature and strength of the political process, of the power of affective sentiment that arises from prejudice, and of the capacity of students to act rationally in the classroom and behave irrationally outside school.

Introduction: History education as an agent of political engineering

Of all school subjects taught in mass education systems during the past century and a half, it is history education that has been the most susceptible to political interference and history education has remained an object of worldwide ideological interest. There now is a growing tension between what has become an internationally established form of evidence-based history pedagogy on the one hand and globalised political pressure to turn the subject into a propagandist agent of ideology on the other. In examining how this trend works in practice, we can analyse the phenomenon within both pedagogical and political frameworks.

This process commenced with a late 19th and early 20th century use of character and nation building narratives (Taylor & Macintyre, 2016). In one case this approach led to the direst of consequences when, in 1914, the propagandist Serbian nationalist teaching of Austro-Hungarian history was the subject of Clause Three of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Belgrade, a document that helped provoke World War One. 20 years later, the Nazi state apparatus regarded school history and biology as equally important propaganda agents in creating a common German national and racial identity (Korostelina, 2013). At the same time, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia directed history teachers in the Soviet education system to highlight the importance of a common Russian socialist identity within a fact-based pedagogy that had a strong focus on political content (Ewing, 2016), a situation that continued into the late 1980s.

Pedagogically, there are overtly educative (but sometimes covertly ideological) purposes that lie behind history education programs (as in intended curriculum). The documented outlines of these plans show how the programs should be implemented (as in stated curriculum) bearing in mind that there are in-school issues of how a program is managed, taught and resourced (as in enacted curriculum) as well as what its effects are on student learning as well as teacher professional understanding (realised curriculum). These intended-to-realised curriculum elements were certainly an issue for most Australian history educators 1990-2007 when history, an allegedly regressive discipline, was subsumed within an integrated humanities approach (ages 5-16 except in New South Wales) which appeared to be progressive in intent and statement. In enactment, the changes led to a pedagogically blurred curriculum. This was an educational disaster at the classroom level resulting in student and teacher resistance. The integrated humanities approach was replaced nationwide in 2007-2008 (Taylor, 2013a).

We also have an established pedagogical context for any serious discussion of the nature of history education. This framework stems from a well-developed, transnational culture of

transparent and established empirical and analytical approaches to investigation in the field of history education (see for example, Ballard, 1970; Dickinson & Lee, 1978; Shemilt, 1980; Carretero & Voss, 1994; Levstik & Barton, 1997; Taylor & Young, 2003; Seixas & Morton, 2013). Over the past half century, this kind of research has deepened and broadened professional (as opposed to political) understanding of how history as a progressive and inquiry-based discipline is learned and how it should be taught. This understanding informs history education in nations where curriculum development processes are based in whole or in part on autonomous professional design and where curriculum planning is relatively free from political interference. Such a course of action is the preferred approach of socially progressive history educators. This contemporary, open-ended, discursive and evidence-based model operates at one end of a pedagogical continuum that ranges through to a neoconservative traditionalist, closed-ended, fact-based transmission model towards the other end of the scale with authoritarian states and religious fundamentalists well beyond neoconservatives and fundamentalists on that same continuum, bearing in mind that there can be a degree of crossover between adjacent categories.

In this context, the term *neoconservative* refers to a zealous form of United States (US) conservatism that came out of Democratic Party anti-Marxists who were disillusioned with US foreign policy in the 1960s. Neoconservatives are in favour of an evangelical approach to the spread of democracy sometimes to the extent of military interventionism. They also have an unstinting regard for the achievements of the West, they support a patriotic form of nationalism, they admire the historic and, in their view, righteous growth of Christianity and they advocate for reduced levels of government intervention combined with support for unrestricted free trade and tax reduction policies.

According to one of its leading lights US writer and commentator Irving Kristol (1920-2009), neo-conservatism is a *persuasion* rather than a specific political movement (Kristol, 2003). What this means is that neoconservatives are more often defined more by what they say and do, rather than by what they call themselves. The preferred strategy of neoconservative politicians in a number of liberal, multicultural democracies is to adopt a narrowly-conceived discipline-based form of history education as an ideological tool in identity politics and in assimilationist cultural engineering policies (Guyver, 2016; Taylor, 2013).

An authoritarian model on the other hand uses a monist, master narrative version of history as an outright nationalistic propaganda tool in societies such as the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. In contrast to the complexities of history education in democratic nations with its debates, its variations and its recurring modifications, history education in authoritarian regimes is based on a simple and inarguable premise: school history must unequivocally serve the needs of the state, as defined by its leadership. In this article the choice of our two authoritarian states Russia and China is based on the annual Economist Intelligence Unit report on government types, the *Democracy in an Age of Anxiety* report (Economic Intelligence Unit, 2015). In the 2015 list, Russia is equal 132nd (with Côte d/Ivoire), China is equal 136th (with Guinea). The most authoritarian regime of all is North Korea at 167, just below Syria.

Religious fundamentalists adopt a different approach yet again where history education is based on divine revelation, divine intervention, and divine purpose explained via an immutable view of the past. This is particularly the case in fundamentalist Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic schools, as opposed to the classrooms of the more mainstream versions of these religions. As for Christian fundamentalism, while the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen a decline in mainstream Christian religious observance, there has been an unprecedented and largely unexpected growth in the number of fundamentalist Christians

particularly in the US where the term fundamentalism originated in the 1920s as a label for a zealous form of Protestantism. Islamic fundamentalism too is on the rise and there has also been a growth on the Indian sub-continent in the influence of Hindutva, an early 20th century Indian form of politico-religious fundamentalism (Lehmann, 2015). Violent forms of religious fundamentalism, examples of which are perpetrated by extremists in each major religion, even Buddhism, fall outside the remit of this article if only because their assertive ideologies follow a form of historical explanation that operates well beyond the boundaries of conventional scholarly or political debate.

Having said that, there are four pedagogical terms that are useful in providing a conceptual template for analysing conservative, authoritarian and fundamentalist curriculum desiderata. The first of these terms is *essentialism*, a belief that a nation's or a religion's past can be summarised by a fixed chronicle of key past events that are to be remembered commemoratively and/or spiritually rather than analytically. The second term is *exceptionalism*, a point of view that a nation's or a religion's history unquestioningly demonstrates the uniquely superior character of its individuals, its people, its culture and its institutions. The third ideologically-situated term is *progressivism*, a certainty that the study of a nation's or a religion's past has a teleological aspect in that it provides a narrative of social, economic, political, and religious progress that points the way to continuing ideologically-based accomplishments. The final term is *functionalism*, the expectation that history education will provide a cultural/political input/output foundation for particular forms of social beliefs and actions.

Moving on, the best starting point for analysing the relationship between history education and ideology is to choose an example from each of the three major geopolitical forms of history education. If we focus on representative case studies from each type, we can construct points of reference for a global understanding of how history education might work in other states. The democratic nations category will concentrate mainly on the United Kingdom (UK), the US, Australia, and the Netherlands with a particular focus on the latter. In the authoritarian nations category the focus will be on the Russian Federation and China. In the fundamentalist religion category, the focus will be on Christianity and Islam.

Democracy: From Cold War politics to the construction of historical canons

The United Kingdom

The modern version of a close and fraught relationship between history teaching and contemporary democratic politics was first demonstrated during disputes about history education in the UK that began in 1988 and lasted, on and off, until 2014. These kinds of difference of opinion also affected the United States in the mid-1990s, Australia for the last decade, and the Netherlands 2001-2016. Initially, they were contestations based on Cold War politics of perceived leftist influence in the history curriculum. After the events of 9 September 2001 however, these kinds of "history wars" (an exaggerated term) shifted more towards dealing with conservative perceptions of internal threats to a nation from Islamic minorities.

The UK's controversial national curriculum in history (with English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish variations) was first designed for implementation in the early 1990s during prime minister Margaret Thatcher's neoconservative regime (1979-1991). The English curriculum's history variant was immediately attacked by Thatcher, by her allies in conservative think tanks and by conservative media, mainly the right wing *Daily Telegraph*. Employing the politics of derision these critics alleged that the new history curriculum was

leftist in intent, lacked 'Britishness,' required more of the right kind of facts, had too much emphasis on skills and focused on woolly-minded 'empathetic' social history.

Despite her efforts, the prime minister and her allies were blocked at the professional and academic level and the history curriculum remained largely unaffected by ideological intervention. Thatcher herself, with her popularity already on the wane over other issues, resigned in November 1990 just before she was to be removed from office by her own party. Departing from 10 Downing Street an embittered and disappointed politician, the history curriculum remained a source of grievance for the former prime minister (Thatcher, 1993). Allowing for a renewed but unsuccessful post-9/11 assimilationist assault in 2013-2014 by hyperactive neoconservative education minister Michael Gove, the history curriculum in England has since largely remained free from direct political intervention (Guyver, 2016).

The United States

This UK's *governmental* interventionist approach was mirrored in a US *extra-governmental* intervention during the 1994-1996 US history wars over the innovative 1994 national (voluntary) school history standards. Lynne Cheney, a prominent Republican political figure and a President Reagan appointee as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1986-1993) became the leading critic of the very standards which she had herself commissioned in 1992. Cheney supporters in the 1994-1996 history crusade included fellow Republicans, prominent media commentators, neoconservative think tanks, and a conservative press, mainly the *Wall Street Journal*. Cheney and her allies, also employing the politics of derision, focused on a familiar litany of neoconservative allegations: leftist infiltration; a lack of attention to traditional heroic figures and events; overemphasis on politically correct figures and embarrassing events; an obsessive interest gloomy social history at the expense of upbeat political and economic areas of US history; hostility to the West as a cultural inspiration; and general Un-Americanism. As with the UK, social and national cohesion were seen to be under threat from leftists (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997).

Nationwide controversy faded as the 1994 standards were republished in revised form in a 1996 *basic edition* and were accepted by former Republican governor and congressman Albert Quie who chaired the US history revision group. Cheney continued her radical conservative activities but after 2004 moved on to other causes, including, for family reasons, same-sex marriage. Meanwhile, in the Trump era, conflicts over historical representation and history education continue but, leaving aside the 'Lost Cause' supporters of 1860s Confederate America, they are predominantly at a local level and are mainly about textbook content.

Australia

Australia's neoconservative prime minister John Howard followed much the same ideological path as Thatcher in 2006-2007. Alarmed by an outbreak of inter-ethnic violence (Muslims versus the others) in a Sydney suburb in late 2005, Howard called for an assimilationist "root and branch" renewal of Australian history which, in his view, had been all but eliminated by more than a decade of almost nationwide integrated social education curriculum. The prime minister, supported by the neoconservative think tanks and neoconservative newspaper *The Australian*, a Murdoch media postmaster in political derision, convened a national history summit in August 2006 where his plan, because of its crudely essentialist political intentions, was blocked by professional history educators and academic historians. Recovering from this setback, Howard appointed a small, handpicked panel in mid-2007 which, in October 2007

delivered a national Australian history program for grades 9 and 10 only. It consisted of seventy-seven canonical events backed up by one hundred equally canonical biographies. That attempt failed too when, in November 2007, Howard lost a general election as well as his own parliamentary seat.

The next stage in history curriculum development was the 2007-2013 Australian Labor Party government's creation of a standalone Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority which planned and implemented a professionally-designed national curriculum in 2008-2010. Not to be denied, a successor Tony Abbott neoconservative government (2013-2014) ordered a partisan 'review' of the Australian Curriculum which, having degenerated into a farce, foundered on its own ideological bias in late 2014 (Taylor, 2016c). Since that 2014 intervention, little attempt has been made at this stage to interfere further in history in schools.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a similarly progressive history education reform process occurred during 2001-2009, but with two very interesting variations. The first point of difference was that the Dutch 2001-2009 debates eschewed the politics of derision, centering on historiographical and pedagogical issues rather than ideological matters. In this case, leftists were not the foe. The putative enemy was Dutch historical ignorance about the national past. The second point of difference was that proposed essentialist changes to the Dutch history curriculum were based much more on post-9/11 political and social anxieties about a lack of awareness of Dutch historical and cultural traditions particularly amongst *oldcomer* (established but poorly educated) and *newcomer* (more diverse recent arrivals) migrant communities mainly of Surinamese, Moroccan, Dutch Indonesian, and Turkish origin.

Integration issues were further exacerbated by the traumatic murders in 2002 of populist anti-Islamist politician Pim Fortuyn, killed by a leftist Dutch radical and the 2004 death of controversial critic of Islamic gender politics, film director Theo van Gogh, assassinated by a fundamentalist Dutch-Moroccan. Political, cultural, historical, social, and educational anxieties led to new laws requiring linguistic and cultural integration (1998-2007) and politically-inspired demands for the reform of history education. In principle, the proposed integrative changes in history education were to act as an adjunct activity to the linguistic and cultural integration regulations.

These modifications to how history was to be taught were based on three elements. First, there existed a strong sense of national pride amongst conservative opinion in the Netherlands regarding Dutch historical achievements. This view was balanced by a Dutch post-1945 progressive opposition to extreme forms of nationalism. Second, during the 1990s Dutch conservatives had expressed concerns about a *dumbing down* of the nation's history education, a process blamed in part on thematic historical pedagogy with its alleged lack of focus and its supposedly inadequate sense of chronology. Third, the Dutch solution to these tensions has to be seen as part of a parallel North European assimilationist canonical movement exemplified by the initiation of a cultural canon design process (not specifically historical) in Denmark (Islamic migrant issues) in 2006, and in Latvia (Russian minority issues) in 2007. Sweden thought about a cultural canon but decided not to proceed (see Koivunen & Marsio for a very good Finnish discussion of the canon phenomenon).

The Dutch reform initiative had begun in 2001 when a curriculum committee of historians led by Amsterdam academic Piet de Rooy chose ten key historical periods that had influenced the Dutch past. The selected periods, broad in concept, commenced with Ancient Greece and ended with space exploration. These topics, were to be repeated and studied in Bruneresque spiral curriculum fashion throughout a student's school career. The ten periods would, it was

argued, provide a common longitudinal foundation for history education in schools. The topics, flexible at first, were then incorporated into the Dutch examination system leading to an unpopular stress on content, later modified in favour of adaptability.

Although popular with teachers, the ten periods provoked a fierce, short-lived historiographical controversy about significance followed by a demand from the Netherlands Education Council, the peak Dutch government education body, for an essentialist "canon" of "valuable components" of Dutch culture. Distinguished academic historian Frits van Oostrom then chaired a second curriculum committee, mainly of fellow academics and heritage specialists, whose 2006 task was to provide a list of key events in the rich history of the Netherlands to be taught within the ten historical periods. This new list was to be known as the Dutch Canon and was to be introduced into upper primary schools (to be repeated in lower secondary schools) by the (fourth successive) Jan Balkenende Christian Democrat (conservative centrist) coalition administration (2007-2010).

The Canon, which consisted of fifty topics (pre-history through to the European Union) contained within fourteen sections, was presented to the Dutch education minister Maria van der Hoeven in October 2006, revised in 2007 and implemented in the new school year 2009. According to Ronald Plasterk, Labour coalition minister of education at the time, the Dutch Canon was expected to encouraged active citizenship by providing an essentialist introduction to Dutch history and citizenship. The Balkenende government also announced that it would provide additional funding for the thriving heritage-themed National History Museum at Arnhem, a place of Dutch heritage to be linked to the Canon.

This initiative was controversial in character (see for example Grever & Stuurman, 2007). This was mainly because of its conservative political origins, its patriarchal nature, its heritage element, its citizenship functionality, its Netherlands-centrism, and because of its seemingly imposed master narrative character. The Dutch Canon (van Oostrom, 2007) was however less a neoconservative chronicle of self-congratulatory facts (as was advocated in the UK, the US, and Australia) and more a series of topics that were meant to form an overview of a progressive Dutch past from pre-history through to the creation of the European Union. This kind of chronological arrangement is much the same as can be found in varying forms in the curricula of many nations. There was however a preponderance of good news topics in the Canon and the events chosen did seem a little arbitrary and disconnected. Not only that but missing from the Canon were several less celebrated occurrences in Dutch history such as harsh Dutch colonial interventions in Indonesia and the Dutch part in the Atlantic and the East Indies slave trades.

There were though several redeeming features of the Canon which counted against the argument that it is merely a prescribed and politicized chronicle of events in Dutch history. First, the introduction to the 115-page Canon outline, *A Key to Dutch History* (van Ostrom, 2007) stressed its pedagogical flexibility. Second, the catalogue of Canon topics highlighted two controversial, living-memory issues which did not show the Netherlands in a good light. These are Dutch officialdom's collaborative role in the Holocaust and a Dutch UN peacekeeping unit's hapless role in the genocidal 1995 Srebrenica massacre of more than 7000 Muslim Bosnian men and youths. Third, the Canon may, in the hands of good teachers, be studied as a series of contestable milestones although, over a repeated two-year program, that might be hard work even for the very best of teachers. Finally, under the provisions of the freedom of education Article 23 of the Dutch constitution, the Canon is not compulsory in most private schools. These particular schools are independently-founded but state-funded *bijzonder onderwijs*, a large proportion of which are denominational schools (*confessioneel bijzonder onderwijs*) with many of the latter group containing the very Islamist faith schools targeted by the more conservative supporters of the Canon.

As we have seen, though the Canon did have a strongly assimilationist element, it had a moderately exceptionalist character, it certainly had a progressivist viewpoint and it was very firmly functionalist. However, as was not the case in the UK, the US, and Australia, the curriculum was advocated by a centrist alliance. Moreover, the Dutch experience did not result in vitriolic political attacks on schoolteachers and educators by neoconservative opinion nor in mocking media campaigns against curriculum designers, nor indeed has it resulted in the imposition of a hard-edged, dogmatic syllabus. In effect, the Dutch Canon became a pragmatic and even an adjustable attempt at implementing an integrationist approach to history within a broader history curriculum framework. Indeed, the ten topics are currently the dominant mode in Dutch schools with, in many cases, the fifty Canon events having faded into the schools' larger history programs and in some schools, they are only taught in part.

In summary, the Dutch Canon was less politicized and far less rigid than might have appeared at first glance but its clear political purpose and its apparent emphasis on factual knowledge, did not sit well with forty years of history education research and practice. Further, despite the presumed functionality aspect of history education as an agent of assimilation, the research evidence suggests that, in a pluralist democratic society, the irrationality and the emotionality of strongly-held individual, family and community sectarian, tribal and religious beliefs can override the rational and evidence-based classroom conclusions of a cognitively-driven school subject such as history, especially at adolescent level. This is a problem made worse by ethnic and racial segregation in the Netherlands' 500 or so so-named *black schools*, one unintended consequence of the Dutch progressive free parental choice school system (Barton & McCully, 2005; Reilly & McCully, 2011; Kitson, 2007; Hamilton 2015).

As if to prove the point, on 9 March 2013, *NRC Handelsblad*, a major Dutch newspaper, reported that that Turkish-Dutch youths from Arnhem (a city with a large Muslim presence and, indeed, home of the National History Museum) had, in a February 2013 Dutch public service television documentary remarked that they supported of the Nazi treatment of the Jews. "I am in favour of what Hitler did to the Jews' remarked one youth, who with his companions would have learned about the Holocaust as part of the Canon" (van den Dool, 2013, n.p.). To put this event in a broader context, in 2014 there were 76 recorded incidents of anti-semitic behavior in the Netherlands, up from 61 in the previous year. Incidents of anti-Muslim behavior in the Netherlands rose from 150 to 230 during the same period (Newmark, 2015). As it happens, in 2015-2016, the *Instituut voor Leerplan-Ontwikkeling* (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development or SLO) seemed to have recognized that history education has a limited value as an agent of social change. As part of an overhaul of the whole Dutch school curriculum, it began planning to introduce a generic, non-disciplinary social education program in which socially relevant civics education will play a major part. Currently, the core primary curriculum in the Netherlands comprises Social and Environmental Studies (biology, geography, history, political studies, citizenship, road safety). At the secondary level history is now subsumed within Social Studies.

History education in Authoritarian regimes

The Russian Federation

Although there are some similarities, there are clear differences between our two selected authoritarian regimes. In the first case, Russia's president Vladimir Putin has a very clear view of how Russia's history must be interpreted and how it should be taught in schools. To that end, he has made substantial efforts to intervene indirectly in framing the history

curriculum as an extension of his own presidential worldview (Taylor, 2016b). The Chinese way is different, however. It is the Communist Party of China that determines how history is taught, whoever might be president.

If we start with Putin, Russia's president has taken this unprecedented action to promulgate his historical vision which includes a revisionist version of Russia's glorious past as a great empire at war against the Germans and Austrians in 1914-1917, as the patriotic republic that stopped the Nazis in World War Two, and as a historic leader of pan-Slavism. In that context, history education in the Russian national curriculum is seen almost as a mythic master narrative form of school-level political backgrounding and a justification for Putin's attempt to revive Russia's geopolitical standing and to reclaim the nation's lost borderlands (for mythic see Sherlock, 2007)

To make this happen, Putin has guided (he has no direct executive power over education) the Duma and the efforts of the Russian Academy of Education and Science in devising a nationalist curriculum to be supported by government-authorized textbooks and supplementary materials. Not only that but in 2013, Putin supported a close friend oligarch Arkady Rotenberg in taking over as chair of *Prosveshcheniye* (Enlightenment) Russia's largest textbook publisher, an organisation that has a reputation for producing memorisation-based textbooks. Moreover, in April 2013 Putin went so far as to advocate the use of a single concept textbook, instead of multiple government-authorized textbooks, an idea that was greeted with dismay in the West and cautious criticism in Russia. Not that the Ministry objected to the Putin view. For some time, education bureaucrats had found administering the selection process of fourteen or fifteen history books at each year level very taxing. Three was their preferred number.

The Putin line included a focus on Russia's 'bright spots' such as the greatness of Peter the Great, the victorious 1812 battle of Borodino (Napoleon's downfall), and the Soviet Union's part as the major player in the Allies' victory over the forces of fascism in May 1945. Russia's dark spots too, which include the Soviet horrors of the Gulags and the Putin rewrite of a Bolsheviks revolution as a 1917 *stab-in-the-back* of the Imperial army, can also serve a useful purpose as dire precedents, commentary targeting a resurgent Communist Party of Russia. When braced by Western critics about his nationalist distortions in Russia's approach to history, Putin used a biblical-style mote and beam retort. Pointing out that, "All states and peoples have had their ups and downs through history. We must not allow others to impose a feeling of guilt on us," arguing that Russia had never used nuclear weapons, had not bombed nor dumped chemicals on Vietnam, and had not been responsible for a Holocaust (as cited in Smith, 2008, p.1).

Accordingly, Russia's single concept book with a universal historic-cultural standard for each year level was expected by his critics to provide a Putin-approved and narrow interpretation of Russia's past in the best traditions of the Soviet-era when textbooks followed the Communist Party line (Taylor, 2016b). As it happened, a consensus approach to Russian history was formulated in late 2013 by a trio of historians from the Institute of Russian History (part of the Russian Academy of Sciences) and, in keeping with existing practice, the guidelines were published in an early 2014 manual for publishers. Three publishing companies were then given authority to print the textbooks required for Grades 6-10 with the different publishing companies allowed to vary their interpretations of the 2014 guidelines. They were the publishing giant *Prosveshcheniye*, *Drofa* (a large private publisher) and *Russkoe slovo* (The Russian Word), a smaller private publisher. These officially-approved books are purchased for schools by the state. Other publishers' works may be privately bought by schools. A consensus guide in world history, an optional course of study for secondary school students, is expected to follow this new system.

The Putin-supported cultural heritage website *Russkiy Mir* (Russian Community) has characterized these universal historic-cultural standards as simply a recategorization with, for example, the Russian Revolutions and their aftermath combined into the Great Russian Revolution divided into three stages, the February 1917 revolution, the October 1917 socialist revolution, and the Civil War of 1917-1923 (Loshchikhina, 2015). Indeed, the 2015 books do not appear to follow closely a Putinist line. For example *Russian History Grade 10* (Bustard, 2015) written by N S Bodinov, head of the history department of Moscow State University, is the first of a two-book series on Russia from prehistory to the 19th century. Its online publicity (Bustard, 2015) features "priority attention given to key events: the formation and development of statehood, the peculiarities of [Russia's] socio-political development, the positional changes of our country in the world." The book's blurb seems guardedly open-ended,

> Modern Russia is a complex and contradictory society, one feature of which is what is usually called an identity crisis. Society today has no clear idea not only about their (sic) future, but also about the past. Both are seen quite differently in the light of various political opinions and personal assessments (Bustard, 2015).

The list of fairly predictable key events even includes the story of the Kievan Rus, a controversial area for Russian ultra-nationalists. The 2014 guide did not however deal with 21st century Russian history, a period that saw Putin's ascendancy, the 1999-2009 Second Chechen War and insurgency campaign, the 2008 Russian conflict with Georgia, the 2014 onwards proxy war in Ukraine, and Russia's 2015 intervention in Syria.

On the face of it, the Russian consensus textbook system bears a resemblance to the Dutch Canon in its character if not in its origins and intent which, in the Russian case, include unsubtle pressure from Putin himself and from leading members in the majority United Russia party, Putin's political followers. Not only that but in terms of enacted curriculum, both United Russia officials and teachers permeate the Russian education system, a phenomenon which could well affect how history is taught in the classroom, whatever the textbook authors write. Having said that, in a 2013 Australian Research Council national survey of Russian teachers (Taylor & Zajda, 2015) a majority of Russian teachers thought that even the pre-2015 textbooks were biased in favor of Putin's 'bright spots' which suggests that top-down influence over the writing of textbooks pre-dated Putin's contentious single concept idea.

The Chinese dream

When faced with similar criticism of its history education culture, the Chinese government also uses a finger-pointing tactic against Western criticism. Unlike Russia however, the People's Republic of China (PRC) does not need to interfere directly in history education in attempting to correct any 1990s Russian-style adventures in pluralist explanations. While current president Xi Jinping has given his opinion about the singularity of the Chinese historical, social, cultural, and political experiences, an opinion that precludes multiple interpretations of the past, China does not need an activist head of state with an historical bent: that work is carried out by clear directives from the Ministry of Education.

In a pedagogical approach to the past that goes back to the nationalist Kuomintang era (1928-1949) history education in China has two clear duties. The first of these is a moral-ideological responsibility for recounting the past. In the case of Communist China, school history is meant to combine Marxist theory with Chinese revolutionary praxis as a way of producing citizens with the right political consciousness. The second duty of history education within a Kuomintang or a Communist party framework has been to maintain the unity of the

Chinese nation through the development of an appropriate historical consciousness (Jones, 2005).

At the same time, while Putin's Russia may quickly pass over or make use of controversial past events because they took place during the discredited Soviet period, the PRC has no such luxury. From a Communist Party of China (CPC) point of view, modern Chinese history, from 1949 to the present must therefore be seen as an ongoing succession of Mao-inspired party achievements, with a few mistakes along the way that are passed off as temporary errors or natural misadventures. That being the case, the arbiters of what is taught in schools in China remain the Communist party and the Ministry of Education, as has been the case since 1950. Further, the two duties of history education cited above currently form part of the basis for President Xi Jinping's *Chinese Dream* in which, by 2049, China will become a strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious nation enjoying unprecedented prosperity (Xi, 2014). To help reach that *dream*, Xi Jinping's program of educational advancement has been presided over by hardliner Yuan Guiren, a former academic who was appointed minister of education in 2009. As an indicator of his intentions, in a January 2015 address, Yuan advised an education conference that young teachers and students were key targets of infiltration by enemy forces and that China must by not allow schools to use classroom material that propagates Western values (Osnos, 2015).

In support of the party line is the People's Education Press (PEP), a Ministry of Education subsidiary and the largest supplier of textbooks in a textbook-dependent school system of 182 million primary and secondary school students. The general tenor of the PEP's approach to history can be found on its high quality website which is part of the China Culture.org site (People's Education Press [PEP], 2016a). On that site, China's recorded history, which stretches back to the 21st century BC is outlined in nineteen eras 2100 BC to 1949 AD, with the Communist Party's era commencing in 1949. One section of the PEP's current summary of the Communist Party era indicates the government's general approach to controversial foreign and domestic topics. It glides over the Korean War (presumably for contemporary diplomatic reasons) and passes off CPC-instigated disasters the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as, respectively, a Mao-free natural disaster and a Mao-free economically problematic people's revolt (PEP, 2016b).

Going well beyond euphemistic characterizations of disastrous events, modern Chinese history education focuses on China's former humiliations at the hands of 19th and 20th century Western nations and Japan, contrasting the vicissitudes of that era with the China's modern accomplishments. Not only that, but in line with the preservation of the CPC's reputation at all costs, the Ministry of Education has banned from all textbooks any mention of the most traumatic event in modern Chinese political history, the violent June 1989 suppression of reformist demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Five years after Tiananmen, a Communist party policy statement (directive really), *The Patriotic Education Campaign* told Chinese educators,

> We must turn patriotic thought into the underlying melody of society and create a rich atmosphere of patriotism. We must make it so that throughout all aspects of daily life—wherever, whenever—people will be subjected to patriotic thought, feeling and influence (as cited in White, 2015).

The Tiananmen Square protests have not only been blotted out of school textbooks altogether they have also been banned from general discussion, from everyday and scholarly reading in China, from the print and electronic media and from the once-lively Chinese sector of the Internet, the latter suppressed by the ironically-titled *Great Firewall of China*.

From a CPC point of view, this all makes perfect sense because history education in China is based on a historic Chinese form of social and cultural communalism where shared needs and ideas overrule the needs and ideas of the individual. The consequent collective historical

consciousness of such an arrangement serves all individuals by contributing to the political and social harmony of China's now-prosperous one-party state. To a Party official, the logic is unassailable for, as prime minister Wen Jiabao remarked in 2005 to a visiting US Congress anxious about the fate of a dissident Chinese academic, "I don't know the person you spoke of, but as Premier I have 1.3 billion people on my mind" (as cited in Osnos, 2015, n.p.). From a Party perspective therefore, individual human rights must always give way to the needs of the party and of the state. In that context, during the year following Xi Jinping's accession to the presidency, the president required party cadres to watch a documentary on the violent collapse of the USSR with its consequent secession of the nationalities, the death of the Soviet-era Communist party and Boris Yeltsin's mismanagement of Russian individualism during what became known as the 'Roaring 90s.'

From a conventional western point of view, and from the point of view of harassed and imprisoned dissidents, such a tough-minded arrangement seems to be an incomprehensible and unconscionable infringement of human rights. Xi Jinping took that step however because he is head of a state that for example, has serious Uyghur Islamic minority issues in the autonomous region of Xinjiang and a resentful Tibetan Buddhist colony. He also faces an unfriendly Taiwan across the straits with an antagonistic Japan beyond, a mere 3000 kilometers away. Closer to home is the sometimes unruly special administrative region of Hong Kong. Not only that but Xi Jingping runs a nation under internal and external pressure for democratic reform.

It comes as no surprise therefore to see Xi Jinping's regime, now regarded as the most authoritarian since Mao, insists that history in schools maintain its place as an assertive agent of Chinese political and cultural assimilation and exceptionalism, as well as an important element in achieving the Chinese Dream. Unlike China's fellow authoritarian but multi-party neighbour Russia and unlike democracies elsewhere, Xi Jinping's nation does not need a specially convened panel of historians to design a history program for schools. The party line is a sufficient enough guide.

Religious fundamentalism

Christian fundamentalism has been explored in great detail since the 1990s particularly by US scholars and authors (see for example Provenzo, 1990; Menendez, 1993; Carpenter, 1997; Apple, 2006; Wacker, 2008; Osborn, 2010; New, 2012; Marty & Appleby et al., 1994-2007). Islamic fundamentalism however has been a more recent branch of study for western scholars (see for example Armanji, 2012; Davidson, 2013; Wood & Harrington Watt, 2012) and much of it is tied to the politics of global terrorism. One crucial conclusion however is that, diverse as they are, fundamentalists have one belief in common which is opposition to modernist ideologies and cultures.

As for history education, Christian and Islamic fundamentalists both follow, in their different ways, a transcendental approach to the past in direct contrast to a modern approach to the study of historical scholarship as a persuasive rational activity. Not only that but fundamentalist beliefs are founded on three ahistorical and unbending principles, the central and unquestionable importance of divine revelation, the reality of divine intervention, and the overarching power of divine will, with the latter often including a divinely-ordered Manichean triumph of the good (the sect or religion promulgating these beliefs) over the evil (atheists and believers in other religions). Accordingly, fundamentalists form, or attempt to form, *exclusive and homogenous* societies where beliefs are based on internal logic and where they dispute the spiritual validity of *inclusive and diverse* secular and/or mainstream religious

societies and communities. As far as fundamentalists are concerned, this split is irreconcilable.

The term *fundamentalist* has now become a subject of debate about discourse and meaning, and, in an attempt to clarify the character of religious fundamentalism, academic Grant Wacker of Duke University's Divinity School has drawn up a valuable set of cultural and behavioural categories of what he terms "generic fundamentalism" (Wacker, 2008, p. 37). These categories of anti-modernist thinking include a belief that the modern secular democratic state is the enemy because of its lack of connection to spirituality, because of its materialism, its ungodly educational culture and its pluralistic mentality. Fundamentalists generally regard a theocratic form of government as the solution to these issues. A second feature of fundamentalism is its reliance on the literal truth of revelatory sacred texts which are not to be interrogated and are not subject to interpretation. Gender relations too are governed by fundamentalist traditionalism with women occupying an unalterably subordinate role. Finally, religious belief has the same or even higher standing than scientific explanation.

As categories go, these attributes of fundamentalism place themselves in an unequivocally antithetical relationship to the study of history as practiced in contemporary democratic societies. They also sit in opposition to the Western-based pedagogy of history that, as noted above, has arguably been the global benchmark for authentic history education since the 1970s. For example, when it comes to women's rights and gender identity rights, because of a literal acceptance of traditionalist sacred texts, any fundamentalist patriarchal and/or gender-biased historical analysis of progress in these areas is duty bound to take on a regressive aspect. In addition, major religious fundamentalist sects are evangelizing in nature.

In practical terms, what this means is that while, in western democracies fundamentalist views of history education are generally set apart from more tolerant views, there have been several high profile, if isolated, evangelical attempts to influence mainstream education organizations. The first of these has come in the form of fundamentalist entryism where secular or quasi-secular school systems are infiltrated by believers. This has been the case in Texas where from 2010 onwards, a Republican-dominated Texas State Board of Education took an increasingly interventionist Christian approach to curriculum which, for example taught that the Founding Fathers were influenced by the Bible and that Moses was the inspiration for democracy in the United States (Kopplin, 2014). In the UK too, the Operation Trojan Horse conspiracy, investigated by the government, was an attempt by Salafist radicals to gain management control of a group of Birmingham's secular state schools. The intention was to radicalize the curriculum by, amongst other matters, teaching history from an anti-US and anti-Israel perspective (Wintour, 2014).

A second form of intervention has occurred for example in Australia where, within a secular government school system, the controversial fundamentalist Christian movement Access Ministries received conservative government funding and permission to teach religious classes within school time. Less noticeably controversial than these examples, faith schools have been established in many nations as self-contained alternatives to secular schooling while other fundamentalists have withdrawn their children from state schools to provide religious home schooling.

On a broad scale, thanks to the history textbooks of A Beka (sometimes Abeka), a US fundamentalist Christian publishing house, we can gain a glimpse of how history students in the US fundamentalist system are taught. Overall, the history of the United States is portrayed as a spiritual narrative with pure beginnings but with the US falling into decline in the 20th century because of the rise of secularism. Christianity is seen to be at war to reverse that decline (Osborn, 2010). On a much smaller scale, but as an example of how this can play out in class, an Australian inspector of faith schools reported to the author that during the 1990s

she had sat in on a Christian primary school's so-called history class where the students were told that the animals went into Noah's Ark two-by-two, as had the dinosaurs.

It is quite clear therefore that fundamentalist versions of history education and modern curricular practice in democratic societies are mutually incompatible.

Conclusion

While creating sporadic political and media excitement, the UK's history wars were a damp squib, the US history wars petered out, morphing into localized battles over textbook-defined curriculum, and the Australian history wars ended with a rebuff for conservative interventionists. In summary, these ambitious interventions failed mainly because their essentialist campaigns were confined to a political elite, were blatantly partisan, were educationally impracticable in terms of enacted and realised curriculum, and were hindered both by overreach and by the resilient blocking character of the democratic process. What was significant during this period 1991-2006 however is the neoconservative shift from anti-leftist apprehensions to anxieties about potential internal Islamic cultural secession as occurred in the Netherlands.

What happened in the Netherlands from 2006 onwards was the first major attempt by a Western democracy to use history education to deal with its potentially alienated Muslim community. The Dutch experience therefore is a significant study in the complexities involved when a customarily progressive nation is faced with divisive, historically-framed cultural differences. On the face of it, the Netherlands authorities abandoned the idea that history can be an agent of social cohesion in favor of a broader social/civics education approach. If the Australian experience is anything to go by, this social studies approach may turn out to be another consciousness cul-de-sac. At the same time, it may well be the case that in liberal democratic societies, history as a school subject lacks any capacity to act as an agent of social engineering.

In an authoritarian but multi-party Russia, the conclusion is that there are two games being played out over history education. The first game is that Putin's extra-curricular interventionist pronouncements and political actions are devised to pressure education authorities, schools, and teachers into a compliant line of pro-government thinking. The second game is the careful pedagogical response of many academic and professional educators whose opinions seem to be cautiously at variance with the personal views of a president who, in theory at least, can only last another eight years in office. Again, and even in an authoritarian regime, prudent, professionally moderated curriculum seems to have the capacity to block manifest political interference.

This is not the case in China where history education is part of a totalitarian regime. Backed by an ideology that is carefully balancing the unbending demands of Chinese Marxism with a more flexible approach to social improvement, the Communist Chinese mindset is based on the long view in which history education is a crucial guide on the long march to the Chinese Dream.

As for fundamentalism, there is little more to be said except that its relationship with history education is based on faith while modern historical study is still largely based on an appropriate and considered use of evidence, despite incursions into its territory by dogmatic and obscurantist proponents of theory (see for example, Eagleton, 1996, Evans, 2002 and Scull, 2007).

To come to the point, an authentic version of history education, by which I mean a research-based, open-ended model of inquiry that is not tied to ideological principles, nationalist sentiment nor to political opportunism, needs to be defended resolutely by

members of the history community worldwide. To reinforce that point, in 2018, and since I started writing this piece, the government of Poland led by nationalist populist politician President Andrzej Duda amended *The Polish Act on the Institute of National Remembrance* in which a new Article 55a made it illegal (a) to promulgate negative references to Polish involvement in genocidal and other controversies that had occurred during World War Two, and (b) to promulgate Holocaust denialism. This is no less than an attempt to impose an official government restriction on historical interpretation, however uncomfortable or misguided it might be. Hungary too, under the auspices of right-wing prime minister Viktor Orbán, has been struggling with its past as represented in a new government-supported House of Fates Holocaust Museum which has been accused of underplaying the role of Hungary's late wartime regime led by prime minister Sztójay, his Minister of the Interior Andor Jaross and his state secretaries, László Endre and László Baky in collaborating with the deportation of over half a million Hungarian Jews to death camps during World War Two.

To put matters succinctly, as far as the misuse of history is concerned, it appears that what was old will always remain new, again and again and again.

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