

“Latest Events, General Trends in
Developing Global Cultural
Industries-Using Technology to
Integrate Modernization/Innovation
with Tradition in Cultural
Development”-

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Some Main Features of the Talk

1. Introductory remarks about topics
2. Technology; modernization/innovation; and tradition(s). Relevance of universities.
3. “Culture” as aspect of description/explanation, and as value-laden judgment. Gansu achievements and heritage.
4. Concepts of “high” or “serious” culture; and “popular” or “marketable” culture.
5. Urban/rural relationships, deserts, architecture are part of cultural heritage.
6. Technology, tourists coming to Gansu, technologically based media communicating about Gansu to outside world.
7. Gansu performances, folk art, craft can be directly experienced in Gansu setting, but also through technologically mediated communication to outside world.
8. In US, art in museums, music increasingly communicated to distant audiences through digital technology; change from culturally significant print media to print/digital or all-digital media in US.
9. US movies: a few examples mentioned here of modernization/innovation, references to and use of tradition(s).
10. General issue of maintaining progressive cultural modernization/innovation, while integrating, incorporating (some) cultural traditions.
11. Universities and cultural industries.
12. Some domestic US issues about role of government in cultural industries. Globalization.

This talk is a set of comments on the concept of culture, and some of its uses in political economy thinking/decisions in relation to the culture industry, cultural development.

The talk (a talk, no animation or graphics!) considers sub-topics such as technology, modernization/innovation and tradition (the need for integration of these in progressive modernization), the arts, environmental topics, universities.

There is not enough time for too much detail here on university issues such as higher education in culture.

Still, universities could be viewed as part of cultural industries in a single nation-state society and in the globalizing world.

US universities are facing very big issues about integrating “modern/innovative” online education with more traditional methods.

- All cultures include some technology, but some cultures increasingly make more use than others of types of complex technology (and more sophisticated use, disciplined by knowledge of relevant values).
- Using complex technology is based on (but has aspects beyond) science, and it's best linked with reasonable values.
- The combination of sophisticated use of complex technology and knowledge of relevant values enables some such cultures to define what is “better cultural development”. This is a value-laden idea rather than solely a description of what is.

- The word “culture” may refer to a variety of phenomena. For many political economy decision-making purposes, what are classified as cultural industries is a pragmatic choice (with implications for conceptualization/planning/action).
- In one sense, culture includes what is described in primarily factual accounts (as in anthropology, economics, and other social sciences) of how a society in fact functions, including its industries (and other institutions).

- Or “culture” may mean what is emphasized by more value-laden judgments (as in arts or other aesthetic judgment, or in some ideas about education that supposedly exposes learners to the best in culture).
- These value-laden judgments are about selected features of what is thought especially valuable in a society’s achievements and/or heritage (e.g., temples, artworks, peoples’ crafts, aspects of spoken and “great” documents of written languages, poetry, stories, historical memories, e.g., about the old Silk Road, Gansu natural wonders, entertainment, sports, games, etc.)

- (1) There can be what is prized mainly as “high”, “serious” culture (may also happen to be commercially saleable, somewhat or very marketable, e.g. a painting “worth” millions of dollars at an auction on the world market, or maybe not; maybe popular, like movie “Avatar”, maybe not)
- (2) And there is what is treated mainly as “popular” and/or “marketable” culture.
- There may be a combination of these two, or other categories altogether.
- The right mix of standards about what to support (or allow), in what cultural environments, what to experience as an individual, is a value choice, whether in collective political economy decisions, or in more individual taste.

- Industries can be conceived and realized to better integrate the industrial and the cultural, as in planning for better urban and rural relationships or in decisions about desert terrain, and in new architecture.
- More complex modern technology can extend the wide availability (to more people in more places) and economic value of cultural achievements and heritage (located in Gansu Province or anywhere else, in China or outside).

- Modern technology can bring new publics to Gansu (from China, with more domestic Chinese consumption, or from the rest of the world), as in tourism made possible by improved travel options; or through technological media communicating what is in or from Gansu to the outside world.
- This can be via movies made about or in Gansu, or computers and digital technology communicating (and simultaneously changing) what is available culturally from Gansu. Some may be motion pictures (photography of “real world”) or animation.
- China-origin television can be marketed increasingly to the West, e.g., by cable/satellite. Different audiences (demographics) will favor different types of shows (e.g., New York City Chinese diaspora, non-Chinese US people).

- There can also be flesh-and-blood performances which through travelling troupes bring Gansu performing arts to the outside world beyond the province.
- There is Gansu folk art and craft, etc. (Art and craft are often hard to distinguish.)
- Both of these examples highlight possible differences between direct in-person experience of cultural objects in their usual contexts, and on the other hand technologically mediated communication of cultural objects to distant audiences.

- Increasingly, art (or other) museums in the US are using the internet to broaden access to their holdings and exhibitions, and this has very wide applicability. It can be especially important if travel to museums would be excessively expensive or impractical for certain purposes.
- There are questions and opportunities about what is happening artistically or aesthetically when digital technological means are used to communicate what was initially not intended or totally suitable for that form of appreciation.

- With music, the internet in the US and some other countries has vastly expanded possible access to a much greater variety of versions and quality of songs, operas, other classical compositions, folk and commercially popular works of bewildering variety and global range, music videos, YouTube, etc.
- There is much to think about here: intellectual property issues (which of course may arise with visual images from photography or painting as well), growing willingness for many persons to trade off sound quality (up to a point) for listening encounters with exotic and otherwise unavailable or excessively expensive works, etc., etc.

- Preferably, technology and culturally valuable features need to be integrated with one another; how to do so is not obvious, sometimes difficult to do. Also, distinctly, features of modernization/innovation and tradition may be integrated in progressive modernization.
- Newer forms of technology develop, such as online websites with some music that is composed/realized with technologically innovative settings in mind. A web-based popular music selection/commentary company, such as “Pitchfork” in the US, is now apparently gaining audience share over older, more print-based magazine publications such as “Spin”, currently in trouble in market terms.

- More generally, there are many questions how to combine print media with online delivery of cultural and arts related content. One can see this in elaborations of “The New Yorker”, a well-known print magazine in the US that has increasingly delivered online and technologically interactive content. Evaluating this requires new thinking.
- Recall, the notion of cultural development in one sense implies value judgments about what is better or worse.
- Some balance must be achieved (progressive modernization) between what is valuable from modernization/innovation, and also from the past.

- Other examples: Some US movies, recent “revisionist” Westerns, which may use old stories with new twists (as in a more recent movie variation on older “True Grit”, both based on a novel; “Blackthorn”, a film by a Spanish director, set in Bolivia, not the US, a continuation of older movie “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid”; or classics, e.g., Julie Taymor’s film version of Shakespeare’s “Tempest”).
- These are not to be taken as historically accurate, whether about historical facts or the original artwork! (This is pretty obvious with that movie “Tempest”, less obvious with those Westerns, which some Americans confuse with real history.)

- One fundamental question is how to combine two contrasting aims.
- First, respect and admiration for the real past (e.g., in selected classics studied at universities, or in some tv history shows or online documentaries), and the place of such respect and admiration in the present culture moving towards its future.
- Second, the creation of quite novel modern/innovative elements in the culture, emerging as the future opens up and as it is now imagined at a distance existing in future time (as in some “high”, “experimental” art and in some popular entertainment).

- How the integration of modernization/innovation and traditional elements in cultural development is realized depends greatly on educational theory and practice (broadly understood), including higher education and its contributions to cultural development.
- Unusual combinations of experts and scholars at local, national universities (combining technology, the arts, humanities, and social sciences) can be one source of knowledge and practice about how to harmonize tradition and innovation in cultural development.
- This also includes alliances of universities across national boundaries as globally interconnected organizations.

- Some cultural organizations, or whole “cultural industries”, have evolved with varying relationships specifically with universities, or among other sorts of institutions and collectivities such as movie studios, music conservatories (e.g., the Juilliard School in New York City), artists’ colonies.
- Some of the arts (“high” or “low”) are better off outside universities, or better off connected with special types of schools that may or may not flourish in conjunction with universities; or some arts are better fostered through facilitating creative work by dispersed groups (e.g., of some poets or of “naïve artists”, as they are sometimes called in the US); or more closely knit traditional communities.

- How the categories of “cultural industries” and “cultural development” are constructed is clearly very important for overall political economy planning/decision-making.
- My own belief is that government can have an important and proper role in sorting this out and influencing it through deliberate policy. But that belief of mine would be challenged by many in the US, who would rather leave such questions to “the market” (especially for-profit institutions, i.e. through individual consumer choice) or to educational institutions such as universities, museums, and the like, or purely individual taste, personal choice among cultural attractions that are (by whatever means) available.

There are clearly very large questions in the US about the role of government in cultural development. Whatever one's detailed views about this, the political economy has big implications about what types of cultural resources are preserved, produced, appreciated, and given to the future. This is a huge responsibility. It goes beyond (but also needs to evaluate) numerically calculated ideas about economic growth. It raises issues about the quality of a civilization. This is all in a context of globalization.