

Modern Chinese Humanities Seminar Featuring Michel Hockx – The Shifting Limits of Reform: Literature and Censorship in China since 1979, November 12, 2021

– Hi, welcome everyone to our last modern Chinese humanities seminar of the fall semester. My name is Li Jie and I teach Chinese and east Asian film and media at Harvard. I'm Co-hosting the series with my colleague David Wang, professor of modern Chinese literature. And our hope is to facilitate conversations around new scholarship in the literary media and cultural studies of modern China in the Sinophone world, we are very grateful for the sponsorship and logistical support of the Fairbank center with special thanks to Mark Grady. Today we are really honored to have professor Michel Hockx speak to us about internet and I'm sorry, literature and censorship in China since 1979, professor Hockx teaches Chinese literature at the University of Notre Dame, the department of east Asian languages and cultures, where he also serves as the director of the Lou Institute for Asia and Asian studies. He has published widely on modern Chinese literary culture, especially early 20th century Chinese magazine literature and print culture and contemporary internet literature. His latest book, "Internet Literature in China" was listed by Choice Magazine as one of the top 25 outstanding academic titles of 2015 and is indeed essential reading for all students and scholars of contemporary Chinese culture. And today he will be speaking to us about his new book project on literary and cultural censorship in modern China from the early 20th century to the present day. So during, and also after his talk, if you have any questions, please feel free to type them to the Q and A, and I will be virtualizing your questions after the lecture. So without further ado, professor Hockx.

– Thank you so much. I'm very grateful to professor Li Je and professor David Wang for the invitation speak at this wonderful seminar. So I am going share my screen and then switch to my notes and then I'm gonna start, so one second. Take it you can all see that. So I wanna start with an apology in my abstract for this talk, the very first line of the abstract I give the date, July 30th, 1979 for Deng Xiaoping's famous address to the fourth national conference of Chinese writers and artists. It was of course not July the 30th, 1979. It was October the 30th, 1979. So on October the 30th 1979, Deng Xiaoping addressed the fourth national conference of Chinese writers and artists. And here we see him in the People's Daily of the next day. It's not the picture at the top. That's actually Hua Guofeng meeting Queen Elizabeth in London at Buckingham palace. But it's the picture at the bottom, the rest of the front page entirely devoted to the fourth national conference of writers and artists and Deng Xiaoping's speech there. Towards the end of his speech, Deng Xiaoping stated to what I presume to be collective sighs of relief, that the party's leadership of literature and the arts does not mean issuing orders nor requiring writers and artists to make themselves subservient to political tasks. In doing so, he redefined the relationship between

CCP ideologues and creative producers, which had become increasingly politicized during the first 30 years of communist rule. He also reintroduced the leader speech as an important element of cultural policy. In this paper, I shall look at several examples of such speeches by different post-Mao leaders indicating how they signal shifts in reform era cultural policy, while maintaining the basic consensus about arts' relative autonomy from politics as forged by Deng. I'll discuss the content of these speeches alongside an account of the process of dismantling of what Peri Link has called the socialist Chinese literary system. I shall highlight the changes in censorship and control of literary production over the course of the post-Mao era, taking as my examples to very famous cases, the banning of and the banning of Yan Lianke's or "Serve the People". But first I shall do what almost no scholars of PRC literary censorship have done namely to connect my research to censorship theory. Studies of censorship in the Euro American tradition often start with John Milton's 1644 Areopagitica's speech to the English parliament. In which he launched a devastating attack on the 1643 licensing order, which introduced strict rules for registering print products prior to publication. Milton famously argued for tolerance with rhetorical flourishes, such as this one, "But if all minds cannot be the same and who thinks that they should be, it is undoubtedly healthier, more farsighted and more Christian, if many are tolerated rather than all compelled." But as is well known, Milton effortlessly followed this up with an equally eloquent self contradiction. When he said, "I do not mean that popery and superstition should be tolerated. It destroys all religious and civil rights and independence, and so should be destroyed itself. Also, no law can possibly allow that, which is immoral or evil, absolutely against social conduct or morality, unless that law intends to make itself unacceptable." So from the very beginnings of the resistance against censorship in the Western tradition, there has been disclaim to tolerance, but with a whole bunch of exceptions, and this remains the model for most laws related to freedom of the press in most countries now also including many non Euro American countries, such as the people's Republic of China. Even in cases where a constitution such as the German constitution, explicitly states that there shall be no censorship. This is taken to mean that there shall be no pre-publication censorship, but that certain types of expression can have post publication legal consequences. Most countries, again, including the PRC have further legal stipulations regarding the exceptional freedoms enjoyed by works of literature and art such works can possess redeeming value, which allows them to have content that would otherwise be considered obscene, defamatory, blasphemous, or even seditious. Although the PRC draws the line at sedition, as we all know, as censorship scholar, Nicole Moore puts it. And I quote, "Literature's categorical expression has depended in quotes of law and regimes of regulation on its ability to differentiate itself from the law's proper object. And the ambiguities at stake have seemed to describe literature as such." In other words, literature relies on censorship for itself definition.

All the approaches to the study of literary censorship focused primarily on what Moore calls, the wronged author or the encoded page, i.e. on what censors did to authors or how authors outsmarted them with clever writing. This is still by and large how literary censorship in China is written about if it is written about at all. Most discussions of censorship in the PRC, either fail to discuss literature or refuse to acknowledge that literature is censored by different standards. Censorship in China is deemed always to be political based on standards and methods that are the same, regardless of what type of text or activity is considered transgressive. As an anonymous reviewer for the National Endowment of the Humanities, put it in response to my proposal for a book about censorship of literature in China, "I doubt that professor Hockx's background in literature qualifies him to study Chinese censorship because this is a highly political phenomenon." Yes, these are sour grapes, but it's a very relevant quote in this context, by denying that Chinese literature can be different from many other kinds of texts, when it comes to censorship, such commentators are also implicitly denying that Chinese literature has artistic merit or redeeming value. It's value lies solely in what it can tell us about the political situation in China. This attitude I would argue is in itself, a form of censorship intended to uphold a mainstream consensus about how China differs from the west and how an authoritarian state cannot possibly produce good literature. i.e. literature that can be judged by aesthetic rather than political values. Now I'm not saying anything new here yet. This is all still safe ground. And I'm certainly not the first frustrated Sinologist to make these observations, but there's a wider context here. When I say that a certain attitude is in itself, a form of censorship, I'm referring not to formal censorship, but to structural censorship, the kind of censorship that is based, not on legal codes, but on unspoken rules of social propriety perpetuated by social institutions. It is such an understanding of censorship as embedded in all types of social interaction characterized, as they always are by discursive expressions of power relations. That lies at the core of the modern understanding of the phenomenon as formulated in the 1990s, by an academic movement known as New Censorship Studies. New Censorship Studies drew much of its inspiration from post-structural studies of language and power. And often specifically from a truly brilliant article on the topic by the late Pierre Bourdieu in which he defines censorship as a metaphor for social structures that govern both access to expression and a form of expression imposed on all producers of culture. In a special issue of PMLA published in 1994, the late Michael Hulk who is a scholar of Slavic and comparative literature gave this insight one of its most famous formulations, "To be for or against censorship as such is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship is, one can only discriminate among its more and less repress effects." Around that same time from 1994 to 1995, the series of no fewer than 12 conferences about censorship was held at various universities in California, supported by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and

the Humanities and the Humanities Research Institute of the University of California. This large scale and impressive collaborative program on censorship resulted in what is probably the most canonical publication of the new censorship studies, "The Collection Censorship and Silencing, practices of cultural regulation" edited by the scholar, Robert C Post. The title censorship and silencing shows that much of the debate that these conferences revolved around the question of whether or not some sort of distinction ought to be made between what was traditionally seen as censorship and something larger or more subtle that involves silencing people without necessarily making them aware of what is being done to them. One of the most often cited articles in post collection is entitled, "Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor" and authored by Judith Butler. In the article, she offers the term foreclosure for the type of silencing that seems to be the opposite of formal censorship. Certain possibilities for expression appear to be foreclosed to the extent that they can barely be thought or articulated. However, Butler adds what are in my view, two very important points. First, strict formal censorship and foreclosure are the two extremes on a spectrum that contains a lot of gray area in between. And second, even under extreme censorship regimes, individuals are not mere victims. They are subjects that are being produced by a certain system or institution. And as such, they are never just passive. Both these observations seem very relevant to the situation with censorship, especially censorship of literature in the PRC, much censorship of literature in the PRC takes place in those gray areas. But Western observers often insist on portraying it as located at the extreme of the spectrum and Chinese authors and other cultural producers are subjects who possess agency rather than helpless victims, sadly of the 119 participants listed for these 12 conferences on censorship held in California in 1994 and 1995, not a single one seems to have had specialist expertise on China, for whatever reason. And I would argue that the reason is structural in the sense explained above China was not included in this project and the impact of all these stimulating conversations about the nuances and gray areas of censorship on the study of Chinese culture has been negligible. To my knowledge, at least this body of theory rarely gets referred to by China scholars with some felicitous exceptions, which include Dr. Haley Wheaton and Dr. Michael Choke respectively from Westminster University and Hong Kong Metropolitan University, both of them, former PhD students at SOAs University of London. And they're actually the ones that first alerted me to the existence of new censorship studies. So I want to express my gratitude to them here. To illustrate this situation, here is the result of a Google search for the two terms, new censorship studies and Chinese literature. There is only one search result and that's me. So the situation is actually not that bad. And there is some earlier work that deserves to be looked at. I'm gonna skip that part of my paper, but I'm just going to give a shout out to professor Richard Crouse and his book, "The party and the Arty" in which he makes the very important point that censorship of literature and culture in China is not a case of Godzilla stamping his

foot on Bambi. The censor is not an evil monster and the writers and cultural producers are not innocent doll-eyed little dears. So shout out to that book, I'm gonna remove Bambi and Godzilla now. My recent research has dealt with literature as part of post ma cultural policy bearing in mind, Nicole Moore's definition of literature is that, which is legally excluded from censorship. Deng Xiaoping' famous 1979 speech helped to foster a consensus about literature is that, which is ideologically excluded from politics. But Deng's speech has a lot more content than just that one famous sentence. It is worth taking a closer look at both the text and the context of the speech since it's established a model for later speeches by other leaders. And it helps us understand both the continuities and the shifting limitations of literary production in the PRC during the past four decades. I will not comment on the new policies that have been coming down for the last few months, nor on the start of the new era this week. But I'm happy to talk about that in the Q and A. I have been following those developments. I just haven't studied them in detail yet. So Deng Xiaoping's speech was held at the Fourth National Conference of Chinese Writers and Artists, the first ever National Conference of Chinese Writers and artists, or "Wen Da Hui" as it's commonly referred to now in China, was held in July, 1949. And we see the front page of the People's daily here and in this sort of lower right corner, you see the phrase chairman Mao is here, huh? Because Mao Zedong unexpectedly appeared on stage at that conference. And he gave a very brief speech and I'm gonna cite that speech in full. So Mao Zedong said, "Comrades, I have come today to welcome you. This conference that you are holding is a good conference. It is a conference that the revolution needs. It is a conference that the people as a whole have been hoping for because the people need you. You are the writers of the people, the artists of the people, the organizers of the people's literary and artistic work, you are of benefit to the revolution, of benefit to the people. We have reason to welcome you because the people need you. Let me say it again, we welcome you." And that was the whole speech. And there's something ominous about, a leader coming on stage saying, well, I welcome you, but you know, only because you're of benefit to the people. And maybe one day I will just not welcome you. Two further "Wen Da Hui" meetings were held in 1953 in 1960, and I haven't studied those yet. And so the fourth one was in 1979 Deng Xiaoping spoke, similar to Mao and similar to what would become the standard format for later speeches. He started his speech by expressing his appreciation for all literary and artistic workers, but rather than just welcoming them, he actually assured them of his confidence and trust. He used the word "Xin lai" in Chinese and almost every leader after Deng has also used that same word in their speeches to these conferences. But Deng Xiaoping actually devoted most of his speech to describing what he considered to be the role of literature and arts in Chinese society at that time. Setting very clear limits most clearly in the following passage, "The most fundamental standard for assessing all of our work is whether or not it is of benefit or of harm to the four modernizations. Literature and art workers must work

together with workers in education, in theory, in journalism and in politics, as well as with other relevant comrades to carry out a long term and effective struggle in the realm of ideology against thought habits that are harmful to the four modernizations. In a turn of phrase that returns in later speeches and policy statements as well. He added that workers in literature and the arts have a unique responsibility that others cannot assume. This basic understanding that literature is different from other types of expression was important and paved the way for the reestablishment of literature as a field with its own history, its own values, its own institutions and so on. The final part of Deng's speech and the final part of almost every similar speech by leaders after him is addressed specifically at writers and artists who are party members and the leaders of the various cultural associations guiding them to help and guide their colleagues. And it is in this part where Deng finally makes that famous statement about party members not giving orders to artists and writers, but rather supporting them in creating excellent works. Starting from 1996, the national conference of writers and artists has been held once every five years. At every one of these five yearly meetings, the national leaders have given speeches. Jiang Zemin in 96 and 2001, Hu Jintao in 2006 and 2011, Xi Jinping in 2016 and presumably he will do so again in December of this year. And who knows, he might even give an unprecedented third speech in 2026, but we'll have to wait and see about that. In his two speeches, Jiang Zemin, who you see here on screen reiterated that the party and the state have faith in writers. And he also addressed specifically the party members amongst the delegates and encouraged them to support and guide writers and artists in their important work. He referred back to Deng Xiaoping's 1979 speech. He confirmed the principle that writers and artists do not need to follow slogans, but he also made it clear that they are expected to support the socialist cards. He set out three main tasks, building socialism with Chinese characteristics, achieving socialist modernization, and realizing the great revival of the Chinese nation. He stated that building an advanced culture is a challenge for development countries, such as China, and he strongly contrasted socialist culture with capitalist culture, calling for the active promotion of patriotic collectivist and socialist thinking. And for resolute resistance against money worshiping, hedonism and extreme individualism. Hu Jintao's two speeches to the national conference were relatively short. He was a man of few words. He was generally upbeat about his faith in writers and artists and compared to Jiang he placed more emphasis on the moral aspects of literature and arts saying that this field has always been important for building people's moral character, expressing humanity's beautiful ideals, enriching people's aesthetic enjoyment and promoting social progress and development. Unlike Jiang Zemin, he does not place China's culture in the context of development countries. He talks about achieving a moderately well off or Xiaokong society and says this requires competition, including competition in the realm of cultural construction. He wants China eventually to stand tall, amidst the

forest of advanced nations, and also talks about increasing the country's soft power. He also mentions the great revival of the Chinese nation and he advocated for his socialist core value system. He noted that writers have wide social influence and should therefore pursue and transmit truth, goodness and beauty . He encouraged them to be patriotic and to promote national unification, ethnic unity, economic development, and social progress. The main distinctive characteristic Xi Jinping speech to the conference of 2016 is its length. Nearly double that of all previous speeches that I discussed so far. The opening and closing of his speech adhered to the standard format, congratulating the Federation of artists and the writers association, making some sort of statement of trust in writers and artists and encouraging party members to be friends to their non party codes. The lengthy main body of his speech makes four main points, cultural confidence, serving the people, courage and innovation and creation and firm adherence to artistic ideals. Of those four, the first is fairly new in the context of these speeches, calling for patriotic belief in the greatness of the Chinese literary tradition. The second point the literature should serve the people is not new at all and was mentioned in some way, shape or form in all the speeches discussed so far. When encouraging writers to be daring, Xi seems to champion the positive can do attitude. Or that is one of his pet phrases. And when talking about holding onto artistic ideals, he basically repeats what Jiang and Hu had said about maintaining a lofty moral fiber and not giving into vulgar tastes. His references to the great revival of the Chinese nation and socialist core values are also not new. The main difference between Xi and others when looking at these speeches is that Xi in fact talks less about socialism and more about morality and patriotism. Although even that trend had already started with Hu Jintao in 2011. Xi's main gripe and the main limit he seeks to impose is with culture he considers morally corrupt and somehow lacking in lofty social and aesthetic purposes. This explains the Xi regimes increased attention to regulating popular culture and related industries as we have recently seen. And as I said, I'm happy to talk more about that in the Q and A, but by now you will have asked yourself if there were not any speeches between the one by Deng in 1979 and the one by Jiang in 1996, were there no national conferences and no leader speeches during those 17 years? Well, according to the website of the Federation of writers and artists, there was one national conference held in November, 1988. But unlike with the other national conferences, the website does not mention any important speech or congratulatory statement from any of the nation's leaders. It only has a small picture of Deng Xiaoping arriving at the conference. So we know that he was there, but of course there was a speech. Fortunately, the People's Daily database contains the necessary information. In fact, the opening of the fifth national conference of writers and artists, which took place on November the eighth, 1988 was front page news in the next day's edition of the People's Daily. And on that front page, we see pictures of a happy crowd of representative shaking hands with not one but two arriving

leaders. The first of course is Deng Xiaoping. And the second one right behind him for our younger viewers who might not recognize him is of course the general secretary of the communist party, Zhao Ziyang, and the second picture shows Zhao Ziyang seated at center stage flanked by Yang Shangkun who was the president of the PRC at the time and the highest ranking state leader. And on the other side, flanked by Hu Qili, who was the standing committee member in charge of propaganda. The front page of the People's Daily also contains the full text of the congratulatory address, which perhaps surprisingly was not delivered by Zhao Ziyang but by Hu Qili, although as the person in charge of propaganda, he would be considered to be directly in charge of the various cultural organizations. Hu Qili was purged in 1989, like Zhao Ziyang, which perhaps explains why this speech is missing from the Federation website. But in fact, much of what Hu Qili said in his speech was not very different from what we have seen in other speeches. He clearly states that literature in the arts must serve the people, the nation, the four modernizations and socialism with Chinese characteristics. He sums it up in one simple sentence, our literature and art serve the people and serve socialism. They cannot be without ideals, without purpose, nor without social responsibility. Towards the end of his speech, when he talks about the way in which the party and its members should engage with writers and artists, he does state quite explicitly the need for allowing artists themselves to develop the standards that determine whether work is good or bad or whether it represents high or low taste. He urges party members and cadres to join discussions about individual works only as readers or as audience members, not as political leaders issuing orders. So what can we learn from these speeches close reading them as a kind of genre of political cultural production? Well, I would argue that you cannot really understand what is going on in these speeches. If you see them as straightforward authoritarianism, there are clear elements of interaction and negotiation. There's this sort of give and take in terms of, I trust you, but can you please do this for me? There's also a clear development despite the socialist rhetoric towards conceiving of literature and writers as deserving of certain freedoms because of the elevated nature and the social and moral significance of their trade. Over time and over the course of the various speeches, there is also a clear tendency towards expression of global ambitions for Chinese literature, for it to stand tall among the literatures and cultures of other nations. In these respects, the framework for control developed over time during the reform era and into the present era, whatever it will be called, resembles less what we know about former communist countries and more of what has been described by Peter McDonald in his study of censorship in a Apartheid era, South Africa. And I would argue, this is the kind of connection you can make when you start looking into censorship theory and new censorship studies. In studying a cache of 500 decisions made by south African censors, many of whom were active themselves as writers and critics, McDonald arrived at a three point summary of the, of the conception of literature underlying their activity. The first two of

these points readily seem to apply to the post 1979 PRC case. Number one, literature which is governed by its own rules and unities constitutes a privileged aesthetic space set apart for more mundane forms of discourse, including pornography, mass market fiction, journalism and political writings. Number two, though it belongs first and foremost to a Volk, that is to a nation understood as a racialized ethno-linguistic community, is not narrowly local or patriotic. A particular literature achieves greatness only when it takes its place within a series of larger spheres, construed variously as European, Western, or universal, like the Chinese leaders saying Chinese literature should stand tall in the forest of literatures. I should add that, especially the first of these points, establishing literature as a separate aesthetic space that cannot be conflated with things such as journalism and political writings is obviously something that I personally also agree with. And that underlies my insistence that censorship of literary expression in China is not the same as censorship of political expression. Similarly, McDonald's two points suggest that those who do insist that literature in China must always be understood in a political context are implicitly denying the possibility that Chinese literature can achieve greatness. The debate about Mo Yan and winning the Nobel prize in 2012, illustrates the forces at work here. The majority of scholars of Chinese literature at the time welcome Mo Yan success based on an independent assessment of the literary quality of his writings. Whereas the majority of journalistic and political critics, as well as his select number of Western writers who had not read Mo Yan's work, denounced the decision for closing the possibility that great literature could ever be produced in a system that practices censorship and censoring themselves from approaching Mo Yan's work by literary standards. I make these points not to settle all scores, but to highlight the need for approaches to the study of censorship that recognize the complexity of the forces at work, especially in today's age of global cultural exchanging. There's one more observation that needs to be made about the leader's speeches. And that is to do with their context, if Deng Xiaoping and Hu Qili talk much about modernization and reform and about restoring some measure of freedom to writers and artists that made sense within a context where the systems for production and distribution of literature, such as the publishing system were not yet undergoing major changes. And the main issue was to provide access to official channels for writers and artists. If Jiang Zemin showed concern mainly for the potential negative effects of capitalism. This made sense within a context where a cultural industry was emerging, that included a large number of private companies culminating in China's entry into the WTO, which allowed foreign players to enter the market and gave Chinese cultural producers the opportunity to market their work abroad. Towards the end of the Hu Jintao era. And certainly during the Xi Jinping era, the globalization of culture looms large in the background of their speeches. They want Chinese culture to be recognized abroad, but their main concern is about a breakdown of moral values as a consequence of

the booming popular culture industry backed by internet technology. Xi Jinping especially seems to see serious writers and artists as allies in the fight against moral corruption caused by popular culture and has gone further than his predecessors in articulating exactly what he expects serious literature or serious culture to be, realistic in its choice of subject matter, conservative in its moral outlook and beautiful in a traditional sense in its form. He is aware that his statements on these matters are heated only by a minority of the country's most acclaimed writers who have increasingly less reason to be reliant on the official state supported system. He leaves those writers largely in peace and continues to allow them to have their own spaces of activity where they can uphold a view of literature as something that can, and should only be appreciated by a small sophisticated elite. And that in fact was the third point that Peter McDonald made about south African censorship. Moving on now to my case studies in the remainder of this presentation, I want to say a few things about two very famous cases of literary censorship, one from the Jiang Zemin era and one from the Hu Jintao era, which I believe illustrates some of the points I have made about the literary sphere during those two periods. The novel "Fado" or "Ruined City" by Jia Pingwa was published by Beijing publishing house amidst the great hype in 1993, Jeremy Bambay has described the building blocks that caused that hype, lavish promotion in media, rumors that the novel would be full of sex, rumors that Jia was paid an exorbitant fee by the publisher. And then after it was published and became an instant bestseller, protracted debate in the media, in an academic circles about the literary merits and demerits of the novel, including its most famous literary device, the use of empty printed blocks, which is seen on your screen to indicate the number of characters that the author supposedly willingly deleted in order to make sure the sex scenes were not too obscene. The use of this device, familiar to Chinese readers from cleansed editions of classic erotic novels, such as Jin Ping Mei made playful fun of censorship adding a risqué element that would not have been provided by descriptions of sex alone. Since that in itself was already no longer a novelty in 1990s China. As Bombay points out, academics and other intellectuals were especially active in the debate, clearly reveling in the fact that for the first time, since 1989, they had a public forum again. Predictably, much of the debate revolved around the world of the market in a recently reformed Chinese publishing system. Jia Pingwa was an established author, very much part of the official literary circuit and even a member of the national political consultative conference. And yet he was selling out or at least so it seemed to exactly those forces of capitalism that the Jiang Zemin regime had created, but was trying to keep away from literature and the arts. On January the 20th, 1994, the Beijing municipal office for news and publications issued in nationwide order to confiscate all circulating copies of "Ruined City". And I'm grateful to professor Li Jie and her research assistant for finding me a copy of that banning order. Thank you very much. Since the publisher was based in Beijing, it was within the

jurisdiction of the Beijing municipal office to make this decision. It also instructed the publisher to hand over any copies still in stock and to refrain from printing new copies. The publisher was ordered to hand over all profits made and pay a fine equivalent to double the amount of profit. The order points out that all these measures are in line with three relevant legal documents issued in the 1980s, one by the general administration for press and publishing one jointly issued by the ministry of culture, ministry of finance and the national trade administration. And one jointly issued by the central committee and the state council. Taken together, these three legal documents supported the case for A, considering the book obscene, B, for local government to issue a nationwide ban and C, for the specific financial penalty to be imposed. Of those three, the first one is referred to the greatest detail, the banning order stipulates the exact clauses of the law, according to which "Ruined City" could legally be considered obscene and therefore banned. Upon inspection, it appears that these legal clauses are part of obscenity legislation introduced to China in the late 1980s, like obscenity legislation in other countries, the regulations in question provide some detail as to what type of description of sexual activity counts as obscene. It also explains the principle of social harm, linking obscenity to potential harm caused, especially to young readers. And in this sense, it is reminiscent of the Hickling test, which formed the basis of US and UK obscenity legislation well into the 1950s. These principles are referred to in the banning order of "Ruined City. Interestingly, the banning order also singles out the device of using empty blocks to indicate words that were removed stating that this was merely a gimmick to attract even more attention to the lewd content. And although I don't support the censorship, I do believe this judgment is absolutely spot on. The one thing that the banning order does not explicitly state, even though the relevant legal provisions would've expected it, is whether or not "Ruined City" can be considered to have literary value. Since possessing such value would've legally excluded it from the category of obscenity. As always with this type of legislation, as we have seen in our discussion of free censorship theory, the decision to label the work as obscene automatically means withdrawing it from the realm of literature. None of this affected Jia Pingwa personally, he continued to write, continued to build a career, both inside the PRC and abroad winning several important international literary prizes. Eventually in 2009, 15 years after the original banning, "Ruined City" was republished. The only change being the removal of the empty blocks as ironies of censorship go, this one is remarkable. By removing blank space, a publication became unbanned. I'm oversimplifying slightly, but I couldn't resist saying that. An English translation of the work by Howard Goldblatt, which reinstated the empty blocks appeared in 2016 in the Chinese literature Today Book series funded in part by a grant from the Chinese government. The case of "Ruined City" shows anxieties about capitalistic exploitation of the literary market, but it also shows a remarkably correct legal process. If the cultural product banned in this way, would've been say a hardcore pornographic

video, the decision would not have raised eyebrows and would not have received international attention or to give a somewhat less random example. The much later banning on the basis of similar legislation of the Chinese translation of "50 Shades of Gray", drew very little attention among freedom of speech advocates outside China. We may want to ask ourselves if our objection to censorship in China is really an objection to censorship or an objection to the wrong things, being censored. The case of Yan Lianke's "Serve the People", first published in January, 2005 and banned soon thereafter shows how the changes in the domestic and international media and publishing environment played out in a censorship case. Compared to "Ruined City", the description of sex in "Serve the People" is tame. What made the book transgressive was that the novel was set during the cultural revolution and that the sex scenes featured the use of images of and slogans by Mao Zedong as afrodisiacs. Furthermore, rather than a playful reference to censorship, as in the case of empty blocks, "Serve the People" contains the biting satire of censorship through its ending when the entire army unit in which the story takes place is dissolved and all traces of its existence are removed as if it were never there merely in order to cover up the illicit extramarital relationship between a common soldier and the wife of a high ranking officer. Like Jia Pingwa, Yan Lianke was already an established and indeed a prize winning author prior to writing "Serve the People". After he finished the manuscript for "Serve the People", he offered it to various literary magazines and eventually found a home for it with the magazine Huacheng or Flower City based in Guangdong. According to Yan's own account, which I cannot verify the original manuscript was 90,000 words prior to offering it to Flower City, He himself cut out 40,000 words to make it less potentially offensive. The editors of Flower City cut another 10,000. This I can verify before it was published. Nevertheless, when the January, 2005 issue of Flower City came out, it was very swiftly banned by order of the highest authority, the propaganda department of the CCP. Although I have not seen the actual document that was sent down from the propaganda department, it was widely cited at the time as containing blanket bans, distributing, sorry, distributing, reprinting, discussing, excerpting, or reporting on "Serve the People". The people copies of the magazines already distributed were confiscated. Propaganda departments at all local levels were provided with the rationale for the banning, which was that the work slandered Mao Zedong, slandered the lofty purpose of Mao Zedong speech, "Serve the People" slandered the people's army, slandered the revolution in politics, as well as that its excessive descriptions of sex confuse people's thinking and that it spreads mistaken Western views News of the banning spread rapidly mainly through the internet where copies of different versions of the text quickly began to circulate. Chinese language media in Hong Kong reported on the case almost immediately citing the official document from the propaganda department. Hying "Serve the People" as the first banned book of 2005 and even interviewing Yan Lianke himself. And they among other things, asked him the question that I've

always wanted to ask him, did you really not think this was gonna get banned? And in the interview he explained that as an author, Yan Lianke explained that he as an author was free to write whatever he wanted, but that it was the publishers who needed to be careful and might get punished. He stated that he had not been bothered in any way by the authorities after writing "Serve the People". And indeed he later went on to alternate successful prize winning work with other works that received bans. In a later essay about censorship, Yen repeats his claims about his own freedoms as a writer, but mentioned specifically that when "Serve the People" was banned, the responsible editors at the Flower City magazine and those responsible for publishing the magazine have been fined, dismissed, and punished. For those who insist on studying censorship in the perpetrator versus victim or Godzilla versus Bambi model, it might be instructive to realize that in the PRC, the most likely victim of censorship is usually not the author, but rather the publisher. And that this is exactly the same in most Western countries. For instance, in the famous trial of Alan Ginsburg's poem, Hal, it was not Ginsburg who was on trial, but his publisher. Again, we see a space here where things connect across the borderline between what is so often presented as a rigidly binary opposition between authoritarian and democratic systems. By 2008 Grove Atlantic came out with an English translation of "Serve the People" marketing it, as you see here with slogans like, banned in China, the sexy satirical sensation. In its promotional material, the publisher also cited the CCP propaganda department's judgment on the novella, turning the censors language into advertising language aimed at an implied audience, curious to read banned books from China. The translation identifies Yan Lianke as the sole copyright holder of the original text, which means that to some extent, the banning of his work, ironically earned him a substantial sum of money. The case of "Serve the People" definitely does show a more authoritarian side of Chinese literary censorship. As in the case of "Ruined City", the authorities did have a legal avenue available via other country's notoriously strict defamation laws, which unlike in other countries forbid defamation of the reputation of individuals who are no longer living. An argument about defamation of Mao Zedong would almost certainly have resulted in a ban, but perhaps would've taken longer to effectuate and would've been more publicly visible. Moreover in view of Mao's status and the significance of Mao's reputation to the overall identity of the CCP leadership, the novella's combination of Mao's image and his famous slogan with descriptions of wanton sexual activity was simply too offensive for the party leadership. It went past their political and their moral bottom line and caused them to use the most effective measure in their arsenal. The immediate ban coming directly from the propaganda department. Linking this back to Hu Jintao speeches, we see the rising concern about writers and artists not setting the right moral and political examples, which I argued to be at least in part a response to the pressures from popular culture, globalization and the spread of the internet. For sure, both in the domestic and in the global

context, the ban almost instantly became an attraction as well as a marketing tool at a time when international publishers were keen to acquire the rights to any books supposedly or genuinely banned in China, Chinese writers could stand tall internationally with books like that, but it was hardly the kind of international recognition that the leaders had in mind. It was also of course not a form of recognition based solely on literary qualities. Although "Serve the People" was published in English and several other languages, not long after its banning. And although it continued to be available for Chinese readers on the internet until at least 2011 and probably longer, it took until 2020 for a full Chinese language edition to appear outside the mainland, published by City University Press in Hong Kong in 2020. It once again comes with quotes from the banning order printed on the cover as marketing material, as well as the phrase, a banned novel that shook the mainland. The magazine Flower City still exists. Its website has little descriptions of the contents of every single issue it has ever published. So January, 2005 issue is there, but "Serve the People" is not listed as part of the contents. Ironically, given the novella's satire of censorship's powers of erasure, it has itself been erased, at least in this particular context. On the other hand, the tool show database China's largest provider of access to digitized books and magazines does contain a copy of the original table of contents of the Flower City issue in question. And of course, "Serve the People" is listed there. In conclusion, the banning of "Ruined City" is certainly not your average obscenity case and the banning of "Serve the People" is definitely not your average defamation nor are various leader speeches I have discussed typical examples of cultural policy making. Yet what I hope to have shown with this exercise, which is still a work in progress is that at the very least the censorship of literature in reform era China has characteristics that connected to research done on censorship, cultural policy and publishing laws in other parts of the world. Moreover, the behaviors associated with observations of Chinese censorship in the Western world show plenty of evidence of structural censorship of community pressures, foreclosing attempts to bring Chinese literature into productive debates about the massive gray area of cultural control that encompasses all that we do regardless of whether or not we live under authoritarian rule. At the very least, we should be able to discuss these ideas rather than allow them to continue to be silenced. Thank you very much.

- Thank you so much. Okay. Thank you for that. Really illuminating and nuanced talk that also challenges a lot of conventional wisdoms about Chinese censorship. I see that there are already a number of questions in the Q and A, but everyone, as you think about it, please feel free to type in your question. But I think professor David Wang will ask a first question.

- Thank you very much, Jie. And thank you very much, Michel, for such a wonderful talk. I think this is an extremely important topic and very, very provocative of course, and also very sobering for all of us

to think of the, this, "the gray area", right, which exist is not only in China and perhaps in other cultural spheres all over the world. For my part, I have a one update for you. And also one question we probably can or think about actually not necessarily a specific answer. The update is that Jia Pingwa, post Jia Pingwa and Yan Lianke are both extremely well established the writers. So in a way it's really a very subtle tug of war between Jia Pingwa and Yan Lianke and the, the censorship agencies on behalf of the government. And of course there is the very intriguing factor of a capital now sort of sneaking into this hole on the market versus the bureaucratic sphere. So the drama is still going on. Just this year, early this spring Jia Pingwa sort of finished two novellas. One is almost kind of a sequel to "Fei du", in this new novella, he literally just gave a kind of a tell all, a kind of fictional sort of a text of just revealing what exactly the story really was behind the writing and the publication of "Fei Du". It turn out that he wrote the novel, according to Jia Pingwa's fictional version. He wrote the novel, which coincided with the, the outbreak of Tiananmen incident. So to me, this is the perhaps the first time a mainstream writer who so blatantly unveiled that the relationship between the movement and the writing of literature. I think this is something interesting. We don't know whether this is a realistic account or a job wise own sort of fiction or reconstruct, but still, this is a, I think this is a bold intervention with the public sphere at this particularly sensitive moment, and no doubt the novel was banned and could couldn't find a place for publication. And so I thought this is very interesting. The story is still developing. And also at the same time, Jia Pingwa finished that another novella, which is a sort of a biographical account of his growing up during the cultural revolution and very intriguingly that novella was banned too. So no publication is likely at this point. On the other hand, Yan Lianke finished his new novel, very, very intriguingly titled "Zhongguo Gushi" "China's Story". And you could tell his intention, right? He wrote literally against the grain of this presidential decree, tell the good China story. Yan Lianke, literally all of Yan Lianke's fictional works are banned right now in China. And I was given to know only a couple of collections of his essays are still made available on the market, but also Yan Lianke has been informed that beyond this, the current print, no other possibilities either. So the whole system of a censorship is very, is omnipresent, is very subtle. It infiltrating into every layer of the market of academia and readership and so on. So it's a developing story at this point, given the current circumstances. So I just wanted to bring this up for your thought. My question, however, is you have addressed mostly the, the governmental part of this whole censorship mechanism today. And I understand that this is a developing project. I just wanted to find out, perhaps you are working on it anyway, how internet, I think this is the, probably the most crucial part of the home, a game now, how internet is playing a, a kind of a role in this new age or new era of a censorship since 2015, since the publication of your book on internet and the literature, how internet could play both the, the

role of a kind of a censorship or a role of agency. So to speak in response to the blocks as established by censors and authorities, particularly online literature with quotation marks, because we understand millions of works are being produced online. And China probably can really boast being the largest sort of producer of a traditional format of literature online serialized the fictions. So forth is a lot of IP industry, the business going on at the same time. So I think the internet has become the latest, the battleground for censorship or anti censorship. So maybe you could share some of your insight with us on this matter, thank you.

- Thank you so much. I love that you're using terms like tug of war and battleground. Which means you sort of already accepted the notion that it's not just Godzilla and Bambi, that there's actually actually struggle going on. That there are forces in competition. Thank you so much for these updates about, Jia Pingwa and Yan Lianke I mean, I'm always reminded of the wise words of my mentor, Bonnie McDoogie when studying censorship, never believe the author, but then very often the author is all we have because it's so hard to find other material substantiating this censorship cases, especially ones that refer to print culture. It's internet is different question. I'll come to that a minute. Yan Lianke has written a lot about censorship, not just of his own work, but in general and some of what he writes is, is very perceptive and other things, I feel the need to want to verify, but I can't, there's no doubt that the pattern he was in, where he was alternating prize winning novels in China with banned novels that found an audience. I think that pattern has come to an end and he is, as you say, it's very difficult for him to study, to publish fiction at the moment, his books are still in libraries that they're still being studied by academics, but he's having a very difficult time at the moment. Jia Pingwa, that's really interesting. And I want to know more about that case. So thank you, thank you very much for that. Again, it's nice to have the author telling us the story behind the censorship, but I'd love to hear from other people as well. And as for your question about online literature, yes, there's a massive amount of literature being published online in China on a daily basis. Most of it is popular genre fiction and like most popular culture that's come under a lot of scrutiny from the authorities for mainly for perceived lacking of sort of moral decency, which sometimes is defined in a very conservative way elsewhere. I've sort of compared it to sort of, 1950s American popular culture, which is sort of, very conservative, especially gender roles, very conservative, no sex, et cetera. But of course there were plenty of ways around that for people who know how to access certain sites, there's a lot going on. Of course, with all that attention for popular literature online, there's still a lot of elite literature or serious literature or whatever you want to call it. Literature for small audiences still being published online and also circulating imprint sort of privately printed. So those spaces are still there and the internet certainly also facilitates those spaces. And I do believe that the regime is less

worried about those spaces, because then the readership is relatively small. And so it will only act when something from those spaces like Jia Pingwa's recent work threatens to sort of become an incident will become a big thing. And especially if it tells the story of censorship, there's nothing that censors ban more frequently than writings about censorship. That is the one thing that censors all over the world have in common, they don't like people writing about censorship. But thank you very much for both your update and your question.

- Thank you so much. I know some, a lot of questions are starting to accumulate, but I really would like to ask, actually have a million questions, but I will try to sort of synthesize them. And so I might actually start with the, the case of "Fado" being republished with those blocks removed. This actually reminds me like, what is it that about those blocks that are so titillating in some ways, I'm reminded of a censorship practice of films from the 1970s of a lot of film projection. Actually, they were supposed to censor a ballet sequence from the Soviet film London in 1918 because it's and also sort of kissing scenes, but they're kind of central to the film's plot. So they're not really cut out. So the projection literally puts his hand in front of the projector and censors those scenes. So everyone looks at the projector, but then at the projectionist who then, sometimes lets go of his fingers so that we can actually see a bit of the film and that actually enhances the eroticism of whatever audiences are supposed to see. So I wanted to use that as a question about the hand of the censor, whether that hand can also be a very creative hand, also, particularly the relationship between censorship and creativity. You mentioned Mo Yan at some point, and I know that he stirred up quite a lot of controversy in Stockholm when he was accepting his Nobel prize and then said in some kind of press conference, I think this is at 2012 when he, he compared censorship to airport security and it's somehow necessary. And then, but in the later interview, he also talked about how censorships' taboos actually made writers kind of implicitly, that it made writers more creative and was saying that while all those taboos made the literary scene, like breaking taboos in the 1980s, made that time extremely interesting and made literary production flourish in some ways. So I was wondering just about those kinds of comments about censorship, whether there's can be creativity associated as a result of censorship, or there can be creative acts by the censor as well, or can there be Chinese censorship theories as well? Like from what you've been reading, are those kinds of speeches, do they also have some kind of theoretical potential, I guess?

- Yes they do. I just got a message saying my internet connection is unstable. So I guess the censor is onto us somehow, ] but one, I can still speak, let me say, I referred to the work of Dr Hao Wheaton, who now teaches at the University of Westminster and his dissertation at soars at the time was about television censorship from sort of the beginnings of television in China until the early 2000 or so. And he

was using some of some new censorship theory that emphasizes sort of the productive effect of censorship. Not in the sense that, I mean, I don't necessarily believe censorship makes you a better writer, but censorship, especially of popular culture, often engenders debate, it produces attention to certain things and people talk about it and in that sense, it can have a productive effect. The other thing is, I mean, there's a very famous study from, by Annabel Patterson. I believe "Censorship and Interpretation", I think is the title, which studies English literature and, and going back to the days of Shakespeare and arguing that censorship also was sort of responsible for creating the notion that literally writing needs to be somewhat indirect in how it expresses itself. So that at some point the consensus emerge between writers and censors that if you use a metaphor, I'm gonna pretend I don't understand the metaphor and, and that sort of helped to create literary language as such. So, I mean, these are all really interesting approaches and very rich approaches that I think are there for us to use when we study Chinese literature. And the problem is that we're afraid. I mean, we are sort of censoring ourselves and well, we really take such a relativistic approach to Chinese censorship. Isn't Chinese censorship really bad. And so that's sort of what we struggle with, what I all struggle with still when I give presentations like this as well, because of course there are very serious victims of censorship in China. Most of them tend not to be writers, as I said, most them tend to be publishers or, and if you go beyond literature, then of course it's much worse. And that sort of links back to Mo Yan. And that was part of the paper that I had to cut out, because it was too long that the, that same press conference where Mo Yan was asked about what he thought of the fact that there were so many writers in prison in China. And he said, there's no such thing. I've never heard about that. And people got really angry that he said he just denied that. But so the problem was the question was formulating Chinese using the word "Zhu Jia". And "Zhu Jia" means a very serious elite literary writer who has published works, et cetera. And if you define it like that, you know, then Mo Yan was absolutely right. There were no "Zhu Jia" in prison with maybe the exception of the Liu Xiaobo at the time. But even Liu Xiaobo doesn't necessarily get referred to as a "Zhu Jia" inside China. So there are all these such subtleties about where, and I've written about that in the context of 1930s censorship where sometimes political forces or media forces, they like to talk about how poor writers that are being censored, because that makes a regime sound even more ruthless than if you say they're censoring their political opponents.

- Thank you so much. I think we already have quite a number of questions in the Q and A, so we will get to questions from the audience. So Charles Laughlin has a question, speaking of Hu Jintao, Hu Jintao has mentioned of the social influence of literary authors. Do you think the influence of Chinese writers as public intellectual has declined in recent years and also by the way, I'm really enjoying your talk a great deal. Thank you for giving such a broad and

insightful perspective on contemporary Chinese literature.

- Well, thank you, Charles, and great to know you here. So I haven't thought about that question, but I mean, just in general, I believe, as I said, that the space for sort of serious literature is shrinking in China. That it's very much becoming a space that keeps itself somewhat separate from what is going on in society and in politics. And that's sort of what, what everybody seems to be okay with, writers themselves. I mean, let me put it this way, Yen Enko when he wrote about censorship, he said a lot of things that I agreed with, but one thing he says that I disagree with is he says that censorship creates sort of readers habits, where they're only interested in sort of, middle of the road, sort of insignificant popular writing. And then he says look at how many people are interested in reading "Guo Jimin" and things like that. If only there was no censorship, then we wouldn't have all that bad, popular literature getting so much attention. I don't believe that. I mean, so I think a lot of, a lot of writers would have like, to have more of a social impact as public intellectuals. Xi Jinping if you read his speeches, definitely wants writers to have more of social impact. You know, he goes on and on more so than Hu Jintao even Xi Jinping saying you guys, you are the engineers of the soul. And you are, and you have, so these great moral values and you, you represent truth and goodness and beauty and society needs you to fight corruption. But yeah, I somehow don't think that writers like Yen Enko would want to go down that road. So it is tricky. The forces of the market and the forces of the ideology don't seem to benefit writers, playing a role as public intellectuals in China right now, at least not on the public stage. So, yeah.

- Thank you so much. And there are actually two questions on censor on the issue of self censorship. One from an anonymous attendee. I was wondering if you can kindly elaborate on the role of self censorship in the structural censorship, especially how it relates to the idea, the individual isn't merely victim in the face of official censorship mechanism. And a question from Amanda Shoeman. Thank you for this interesting talk. I heard Yen Enko speak in 2011 at the Bookworm in Beijing. And someone asked him about whether he censored his own writing. He claimed that he didn't, but he also said that he tells his students not to write like he does. What do you think about this? To what extent have authors like Yan self censored, consciously or unconsciously. And do you think that perhaps he has an advantage now that he's known and actually has an audience as a, compared to less known authors, such as students in the future, and that makes him, it makes it easier to write the way he does?

- So if you follow the definition of censorship that people like Pierre Bourdieu are putting forward, then of course, all of us are constantly self censoring ourselves all the time. To the extent that there is no such thing as absolute freedom of expression, there's always a restriction within whatever context on, on what you can say.

So that's, so in that sense, either there is no self censorship or all censorship is self censorship, but a self censorship is a really tricky term. And I always ask my students to imagine, as a thought experiment, imagine, two novels that are completely identical for whatever reason, written by two different authors. And one of them says, this is my life's work. I'm so proud of this novel. And the other one says, oh, I would've written a completely different novel if, if only I hadn't had to self censor myself. And who's telling the truth? You don't know. How do you know, that you're censoring yourself? Maybe you're just making a decision. That means you can get paid more or your books can sell. Or it's really hard to come up with a definition of self censorship that actually works. But if you want to come up with a definition that works, maybe look at present day, Hong Kong, look at the, what is known as the chilling effect. A new law comes into effect and all of a sudden people get really scared and they start changing the way they write. It's still censorship, it's still an authority doing it to you. You're not doing it to yourself. But it is, but it is a direct result of this sense of fear. That's being instilled in you. There's also such a thing, a soft censorship. And that's a term Yan Lianke uses as well and have come across it in new censorship studies as well. Where nobody's really telling you exactly what to do. And nobody's actually sort of banning you, but somehow, the authority has ways of making sure that what you write doesn't attract a lot of attention. So a lot of things don't even need to be banned or take the example of social media. You don't ban actual social media posts, you ban search terms. And then the likelihood that people can find those offensive or dissident post is reduced to such a large extent that it doesn't matter that they're still there. So as for what Yan Lianke said about the way he writes and the way he's not telling his students to write, I think that makes perfect sense. And again, that is something that applies in all kinds of contexts. I think all of us, as professors also sometimes tell our students not to work on certain topics or not to write in certain ways about certain things, because we worry about their careers. And then as soon as we have tenure, like, okay, now I'm just gonna write whatever I want, whatever. So, I mean, that's not necessarily that unusual. I mean, Yan Lianke repeatedly stated that he does not feel that as a writer, he is being restricted in his writing, but the question is, can it be published? And that decision, and it doesn't even have to be a formal ban. It can just be that an editor just feels that where a publisher feels that, it's not the right moment or, well, I can publish it, but remove the following five chapters. And I mean, there are all kinds of ways of making sure that things don't appear.

- Yeah, thank you. Actually, on the note of like banning search terms and also following up on professor Wang's question about internet, graduate student here is asked, I have a question about censorship technology as OCR and automatic keyword extraction have become normal practices of censorship for any form of writing on the internet. What's the position of technology in the logic of censorship in China

today. And if I may sort of connect, although this may be asking something different, right. Interested in a question from Amor Felt saying, have you found clever and innovative ways the writers used to circumvent some of the censorship? So I think together the question is like, does technology make censorship more powerful or does it actually make writers more, it provides writers more agency to circumvent censorship.

- So, I mean, a lot of the, I mean, there's a lot more of this happening outside the literary sphere. So I am trying to sort of to keep my project as much as possible focused on the literary sphere in part, because I do want to make that argument that censorship of literature in China is not necessarily the same as censorship of other things. And also that there are certain things about literature and censorship that you come across in, in other countries as well. And that deserve to be studied in comparison. But yeah, having said all that, of course there's a huge potential in tracking people and their expression online. I mean, ironically China has, according to the experts, which I'm not, China has just issued a, a really good data protection legal framework that is far ahead of the US and the EU and any other countries. So it doesn't necessarily provide protection for political dissidents, but it certainly provides protection for privacy online in many areas that are not yet protected here. So that is, and again, that's something that we're not supposed to say, but it's actually true, right. In terms of writers doing really clever things to get around the censorship. But I haven't really studied that. That's sort of more of a conventional way of studying censorship is look at, what's being done to the author or what the author is trying to do to sort of get published anyway. I've never been, as you both know much of a text scholar. I tend to sort of look at all the people that are involved in these various processes. But I mean, online, I think it's getting harder. It's getting harder to, of course you could still, intentionally miss write words or add in, hyphens or asterisks or put the text in an image. But even that is not necessarily gonna help you put it upside down. I mean, there are all kinds of ways. I do believe that in the end, what it comes down to is that, is that whatever the artificial intelligence finds still has to be looked at by people to decide whether, I mean, in that sense, it's no different from sort of, Facebook content moderation. I mean, they're just people who sit there behind the computer, looking at things that have been identified by the filters as potentially problematic and have about three seconds to decide remove, don't remove, remove. I mean, a lot of it is still based on human labor like that. And it's similar in China. So part of the challenge, and that's why I envy people like Peter McDonald and also Robert Downton who worked on east German censorship, part of the challenge is to actually find those human beings who are doing that because in the case of sort of serious literature, it's quite likely that those human beings are actually people like us. Scholars, or maybe other writers or critics, et cetera. And those would be interesting conversations, but I've, I've never been able to

identify any of these people so far.

- Thank you. Another question from a PhD student, Hans Christopher, thank you for the excellent talk of Butler's concept of foreclosure is really interesting while the role of state censorship is relatively easy to investigate via bans and the agency's own publicized reasons for a ban. It is hard to investigate what is foreclosed. What do you have any thoughts about how to execute this kind of history of absence when it comes to what is foreclosed in the PRC literary world?

- Yeah, it is really hard. And as I said, Butler does see that as an extreme. Because, so if something is foreclosed, because there's really a sort of heavy taboo on it that we ourselves don't even recognize. And of course we can't really study it, but what you can study is the gray area in between. And I think that's, so for instance, what we see as authoritarian measures, Chinese leaders or authorities saying certain things about literature at the level of discussions, taking place in publishing houses, for instance, they often work more as, structural types of censorship. It's like, well as we all know, probably certain things we should avoid or, do a little bit of that. And there are a lot of things that don't even need to be said and people sort of understand. As you go sort of further down into the actual nitty gritty of the system, it's much less about people being told, do this. It's more about sort of editors doing their daily job and sort of knowing what they can and cannot get away with. And acting in accordance with sort of that understanding. And that just becomes part of their discourse and, part of what they believe in probably in many ways as well. And that's sort of part of, I suppose, the argument I want to make is to say that, it's not just authoritarian formal censorship. There's a lot of structural censorship taking place in these negotiations about literature, and we should acknowledge that and we should try to document these cases, but of course it is really difficult to document them.

- Thank you so much. Well, questions keep coming, but I think we probably have time for just, I read out two more questions, that's last questions. One from Sabina Knight. Thank you for a very informative and thought provoking talk. Could you comment on translators and reviewers roles in challenging or unwittingly reinforcing censorship and then another one from Eva Troth, can you say more on the fact that it's the publishers who suffer when their books are banned? So both questions having to do with other than authors, but rather reviewers, translators and publishers.

- Yeah. I mean to start with, thank you both for these questions, start with the second one. I really think it's really important. I don't necessarily have more to say about publishers, but I think it's really important to realize that, the publishers, the editors are the ones that are, that are under pressure, that are responsible for putting things out into the public domain and they make, and they make

decisions that are in part commercial, in part moral, in part political. And that whole mix is very difficult to understand. And they also have, there's personal risks for them involved as well. And that is not often recognized because the attention always goes to the author. So the author is often seen as a victim, even though the real victim is the publisher. That goes back to the entire sort of myth about the author is creator that the wonderful Pierre Bourdieu has described in some of his other works as well. Yeah, I love the question about translators and reviewers and I don't really have a good answer to it. I think we've passed the stage now where banned in China is a reason for choosing to translate or review something. I think publishers in the US and Europe have sort of moved beyond that point. So, but yeah, the entire system of certain things being published by certain publishing houses and then being reviewed by certain reviewers and maybe ending up being translated, of course, is again, is a system that has inherent structures in equal structures that mean some works and some authors get more attention than others. So that's, again, something that doesn't get a lot of attention because all the attention is on what the Chinese government is doing. But so a lot of these structural inequalities, such as for instance, the lack of diversity, I mean, contemporary Chinese literature that the serious lack of female authors, female critics, the sort of also lack of translators of work by women, I mean that's and how that's sort of seen as something that's just okay by a lot of male authors and male critics. I don't think enough is being written about that. And so, I mean, you can't blame everything on the Chinese government and when you start looking at these structures of inequality, then you're delving into longstanding social and moral habits and conventions that deserve to be studied rather than trans placed onto the government.

- Thank you so much for this. Yeah and on that very sobering note, I think I'm probably not speaking just for myself. And I say we probably won't be thinking about Chinese censorship in quite the same way. And also thank you to everyone for tuning in had a really lively Q and A, and yeah. And thank you again to professor Hockx for this illuminating lecture.

- Thank you very much.

- Thank you, bye.

- It is good. Thank you, thank you, Mark.

- Thank you.

- Thank you.

- Thank you, Mark, thanks everyone.

- It was very good.