Creativity is associated with social, political, and economic progress in society. But is creative education even a possibility in China, given its exam-centric education system? Does the notion of creativity within a high-stakes testing culture present a paradox? Moreover, considering the dominance of power and politics in contemporary China, is creative learning an isolated occurrence or even a subversive one? Inspired by America's creative propensity and the corresponding freedom to produce that which is new and valuable, China aspires to become discovery-oriented and inventive. This setting lays the groundwork for the current field study, which is informed by Kaufman and Beghetto’s typology of creativity as well as Csikszentmihalyi’s model of creativity as a process of interaction with one’s domain and field. Within the context of such a framework, the presenter will share highlights from her visit as a Fulbright Scholar to China in 2015. Findings will be presented from data collected from 99 principals, teachers, professors, students, and officials in Chongqing and Jinan. While public conversation about creativity in China is about the obstruction of its development, creativity is being paradoxically expressed within state-controlled educational settings. Graphic images will show numerous examples of creativity from Chinese schools and universities, suggesting a dynamic creative learning environment that contradicts generally-held preconceptions and at times contrasts with the bleakness of surrounding communities. The existence of creativity within learning environments that conform to state standards offers an important basis for discussion of educational goals and strategies. This research continues the discourse of the accountability debate in public education where it has left off—creativity as a countercultural project of education within cultures of hyper-accountability.

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