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Chinese Medicine: The Global Influence of an Evolving Heritage

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### Janette Ryan (ed.), *China's Higher Education Reform and Internationalisation*

Londres - New York, Routledge, 2011, 262 pp.

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Translator: N. Jayaram



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# Janette Ryan (ed.), *China's Higher Education Reform and Internationalisation*

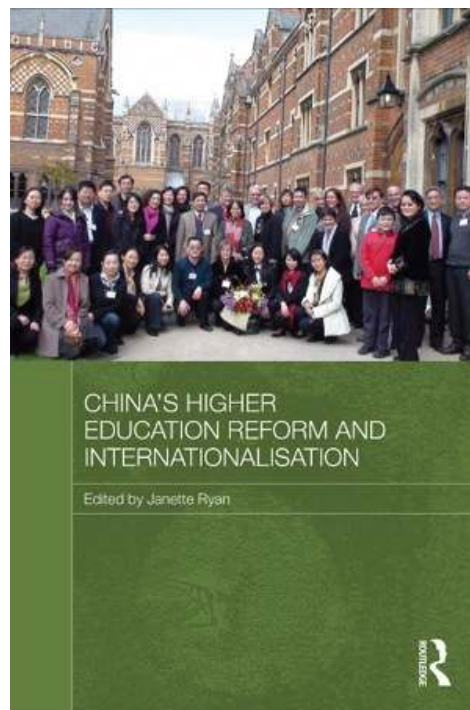
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- 1 As Janette Ryan says in her introduction, the mobility of the educated class is part of China's most ancient tradition. Historians of the higher education system have in their time noted the goading from rulers – counsellors of the Last Emperor Pu Yi, republicans, or even Maoists – to send Chinese students to foreign universities. In 1872, for instance, 120 Chinese students were in the United States, and in 1920 there were 1,600 in France. But from 1980, when China noticed the sorry state to which its university system had been reduced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), there was much greater incentive to go abroad and study Western science and technology. Statistics show an increase in the numbers leaving to study in foreign universities from the turn of the 1980s. But it was not until the late 1990s that the number of Chinese students in foreign universities grew significantly and crossed the symbolic threshold of 200,000. In 2009, the number stood at 229,300. Chinese people came to



comprise the largest number of foreign students in most receiving countries: 128,000 in the United States in 2010, and 60,000 in Britain. At the same time, international students flooded Chinese universities: they numbered 223,000 in 2008, figures show. However the attraction of China's universities is mainly limited to the Asian region. Thus, in 2008-2009, just six Asian countries (South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, India, and Indonesia) accounted for half of all foreigners studying in Chinese universities. Figures such as these illustrate the burgeoning internationalisation of university education in a radically new context: globalisation.

- 2 This book meets the need to analyse the impact of these changes on China's university education system. Different aspects are tackled to offer the reader a wide perspective on the transformations underway. However, it is the teaching dimension that takes pride of place: the dialectics of Chinese tradition and modernity in teaching methods, the difficulties of putting in place programmes with combined teams of Chinese and Western teachers, and the "culture shock" Chinese students confront in a Western context of life and education. The book has 13 contributions presented in four parts. Part I offers a historical and political framework of China's university system and its evolution. The second part concerns intercultural cooperation programmes and pedagogical innovations adopted by Chinese and Western teachers. Two chapters are devoted to Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong, which introduced several "liberally"-oriented education programmes between 2002 and 2008 (p.70) with a view to "strengthening critical thinking," imagination, and the ability to seize initiative. The other chapter analyses difficulties faced by intercultural teams. The third chapter in this part highlights the "culture shock" (p. 107) experienced by teachers unveiling cooperative educational programmes as well as by the students taking them.
- 3 The third part of the book is particularly devoted to Chinese students' experiences in Canadian, British, and Australian universities. Although the countries and their university traditions and exchange programmes differ, there is a striking similarity to the students' observations. First of all, cultural and linguistic shock is at the forefront again, along with Chinese students' lack of integration, to the point of marginalisation and containment in "national" networks. Such networks certainly provide support in the face of the loneliness and myriad problems new arrivals face in the host countries, but also risk seeming like ghettos. Cultural shock is followed by a necessary adaptation to the new context of life into which Chinese students are plunged (p. 147). The result is a reformulation of individual identities. In contrast to the many analyses that depict young Chinese students in foreign campuses, especially Australia's, in a largely negative light, Janette Ryan and Rosemary Viete seek to show how, in interactions with teachers and in learning to write, students manage to make their voices heard through negotiation, appropriation, and transposition of messages they receive into their own culture (p. 157). After all, Chinese students abroad are also creatures of their own identity. But here also the focus of the book's analysis is on individuals. And although these themes of transformation of identity are central to understanding students' strategies and decision-making, they are only dealt with briefly, again by referring to individual particularities with no sociological thesis or hypothesis advanced. The *cultural studies* or interactionist schools could have been tapped: both have contributed greatly to the study of life trajectories and the issue of education and transformation of identity.<sup>1</sup> It would also have been interesting to discuss the idea of transformation of

personal identity in light of discussions relating to the formation of a “cosmopolitan identity.”<sup>2</sup>

- 4 The book's fourth part pertains to “intercultural education” (p.169) and has four chapters. The word “incomprehension” is common to the first two – incomprehension between Chinese students and Western teachers in an Australian university, and incomprehension and deprecation between Chinese and Western professors working on a programme on English teaching in a university in China. But the expression “hidden curriculum” that Phiona Stanley uses<sup>3</sup> could also facilitate understanding the nature of this incomprehension: in this instance between Chinese students' quest for ensuring academic and professional success – and therefore requesting that teachers keep to a straight framework – and the latter's preference, especially at the doctoral level, for innovation, imagination, and a critical mind.
- 5 The second chapter in this part analyses the experience of English language teachers in a university in China. Two pedagogies coexist: a Chinese one geared to students' aspirations, and the other Western. In Chinese students' and teachers' eyes, the first is serious and efficient, with real content. The second is seen as amusing and distracting. In sum, Chinese students' culture is deprecated in Western universities, while in China it is Western teaching methods that are looked down upon.
- 6 The last two chapters deal with the central issue, that of economic determination, which is indispensable to understanding the internationalisation process in university education systems. Many scholars have analysed the *marketisation* of the university education system. But looking beyond the market, what are students' aims and expectations in terms of international mobility? And since it is a question of the market and an economic approach in the actors' decision-making, is studying abroad really worth it? The reply was definitely positive for those who did part of their studies in the 1980s or even 1990s. It is likely to be much more complicated for the current generation. The cost of study abroad – as in Oxford University, considered in this book – is exorbitant. Parents and grandparents have to contribute towards their children's studies. But this investment is made rationally, the salary expected at the end of studies conforming to what former Oxford students earn on average (p. 222).
- 7 The book's four sections thus touch on different aspects of the internationalisation process of Chinese university education, but its dominant orientation clearly concerns pedagogical difficulties encountered by teachers, students, and the institutions themselves in a context where different cultures and aspirations meet. Whereas the pedagogical aspect is analysed with great care and an abundance of precise information, it is regrettable that the reflections and analyses presented rarely leave these confines. Although the title contains the term “reform,” the policy content is limited to the book's first two chapters, whereas it should have figured in all of the chapters. The “economic” dimension, for its part, is quite simply evaded. Finally, there is mention of the lack of Chinese students' integration in host universities, of the “culture shock” they experience, of the feeling of isolation that sometimes stays with them throughout their stay, and of the necessary readjustment they make in their identities and cultures. There is abundant literature on this. It would therefore have been interesting to reflect on how such experience affects the “socialisation” of young international students and the formation of their identities.<sup>4</sup> To what extent does the movement of students into foreign universities facilitate the formation of “cosmopolitan identities,” and to what extent do these identities play a part in

transnational networks developing now? These are some issues that could complete the work done on the internationalisation of university systems.

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## NOTES

1. Anthony D. King, *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
  2. Maria Montserrat Guibernau, *The identity of Nations*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007.
  3. Phiona Stanley, "The hidden curriculum: A critical analysis of tertiary English teaching in China," Chapter 11.
  4. Jean Charles Lagrée, "Asian International Student Mobility: The Issue of Identity amongst Overseas Chinese Students," in Anand Singh (ed.), *Youth and Migration*, *Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 10.
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