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Curriculum reform in China: Changes and challenges. Yin, Hong-Biao, and Lee, John Chi-Kin (Eds.). New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012. 265 pp., (hardcover), \$148.50, ISBN 976-1-61470-943-5.

This volume, edited by Hong-Biao Yin and John Chi-Kin Lee, consists of 16 chapters concentrating on macro-level curriculum reform in the socio-political context of China; meso-level curriculum reform in different subject areas; and micro-level investigation into the professional development of teachers as active agents in the context of national curriculum reform and the transformation of subject curricula. In their introduction, the editors outline the main rationale for the collection as being to provide rare access to a study that locates national curriculum reform (NCR) in the People's Republic of China in the context of globalization, and that includes a holistic exploration of the challenges and opportunities facing the NCR from national, contextual and individual teachers' perspectives. According to its editors, this volume is also prompted by a belief that a critical examination of current curriculum reform practices will help researchers and educators develop new ideas and reform models beneficial to China's educational system. The editors hope that this volume will spur further research interest and endeavors in this direction.

The volume consists of an introductory chapter by the editors, Yin and Lee, and 15 individual chapters, divided into three sections. The introductory chapter outlines the development of NCR in China over the past decade and asserts that China's curriculum reforms have been shaped by the country's particular historical, social and political discourses and these distinguish them from what is happening in other countries, notwithstanding the global tendency towards convergence and heterogeneity in educational reforms. Thus, diverse Chinese experiences in the implementation & organization of curriculum reform have emerged.

The first section comprises four chapters dedicated to a discussion of the transformation brought about by education reform in China, an analysis of the structure, process and meaning of curriculum making, and the exploration of educational practices in different school contexts in response to curriculum reform. Chapter 2 by Janette Ryan points out that the initial government-oriented top-down approach to reform implementation has resulted in tensions and resistance from various stakeholders, especially school administrators and teachers. For this reason, a bottom-up initiative is recommended as a way to provide opportunities and a platform for teachers to carry out their own research and to improve their teaching and curriculum practices. Chapter 3 by Zongyi

Deng presents a comprehensive view of the curriculum making process and the influence asserted by multiple levels of factors, including institutional and cultural constraints, schools, teachers, parents and students. Focusing on secondary school principals, Chapter 4, by Haiyan Qian and Allan Walker, presents the struggles encountered during the implementation of curriculum reforms and explores the reasons underlying the failure of principals perform the role of “curriculum leaders”. Chapter 5 by Jessica Harris, Yong Zhao and & Brian J. Caldwell traces how five secondary schools in Chongqing, China, have harnessed and aligned financial, intellectual, social and spiritual capital to achieve success. Locating the schools in their own social milieu and the global context, the authors investigate how curriculum reforms, sociocultural changes within China and educational trends worldwide have jointly influenced the governance processes, policies and programs of these schools. This study also yields a breakthrough in understanding governance in an international context by comparing the approaches adopted by these schools and those in Western countries.

While only two chapters in this section (Chapters 3 and 4) deal with curriculum reform empirically (investigating how schools and school principals react to reforms and gain their own voices), this section as a whole presents a perspective that portrays curriculum reform as a set of social, political and institutional practices. Furthermore, Chapter 5 highlights the value of conducting a comparative study on curriculum reform to yield a deeper understanding of how schools exercise their agency in different sociocultural settings.

The second section of this volume, consisting of seven chapters, focuses the reader’s attention on the implementation of curriculum reform in specific subject areas. In particular, recent developments in mathematics curricula are reviewed and the factors contributing to the success of those reforms are discussed (Chapter 6 by Rui Ding & Ngai-Ying Wong). In a similar vein, chemistry curriculum reforms are investigated, and the gaps between intended and implemented curricula are identified as being partially the result of inherent tensions between the learner-centric curricula and the traditional examination culture (Chapter 7 by Bing Wei). Chapter 8 by Shuang Zhang investigates the complexity and contradictions inherent in the integrated science curriculum reform, and argues that science teachers have been placed in a dilemma between “progressive” reform initiatives and the expectation that they will help students achieve high examination results. Chapter 9 by Wenlan Wang, John Chi-Kin Lee and Hong-Biao Yin points out that, while the proportion of ideological political education has decreased in new social studies textbooks, citizenship education

has become the core of the social studies curriculum. In spite of this, a relatively passive, obligation-based approach is still adopted in citizenship education, which may facilitate national stability in the short term, but is not fully conducive to citizen's political participation in governance in the long run. Echoing the study of Shuang Zhang, in Chapter 10, Mark Halstead and Chuanyan Zhu argue that curriculum reforms in moral education also create tensions between teacher autonomy and the retention of the university entrance examinations, which inhibits both teacher development and the full implementation of the reforms. Wen Zhao and David Coniam, in Chapter 11, propose a new framework for examining competence-based vocational secondary English curriculum in mainland China, both vertically and horizontally. In Chapter 12, Shengyao Feng suggests that a "multi-streaming" approach, entailing major-based differentiation in elective courses be adopted in NCR.

A major theme emerging from this section is the contradiction between intended and implemented curricula in different subject areas. One possible solution may be to adopt an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach to curriculum reform, in order to empower teachers by hearing their voices and facilitating their professional development.

As an extension to the second section, the third and final section, consisting of four empirical studies, focuses on teacher professional development in curriculum reform. In Chapter 13, Hong-Biao Yin, John Chi-Fin Lee and Edmond Hau-Fai Law document the emotional geographies of a group of teachers in Guangzhou, based on their interactions with teacher-trainers in different categories (i.e., teaching research officers, university specialists, and expert teachers) of senior secondary school curriculum reform. The findings indicate that, as a consequence of the interaction between professional, political and moral geographies, the teachers developed mixed feelings about their interactions with the trainers. The study highlights the importance of reshaping the roles of teacher trainers, both as learners and trainers. Investigating the relationship between curriculum reform and a group of primary school teachers in rural northwest China, Tanja Sargent, in Chapter 14, identifies the different beliefs held by new teachers supporting a "progressive" curriculum and older teachers who cling to the "traditional" curriculum; while the former emphasizes whole-person development, the latter focuses on content mastery and high examination results. Mingren Zhao, in Chapter 15, argues that reflection facilitates teacher learning and can empower teachers to express their views, positive or negative, on the implementation and value of curriculum reform. Given the importance of linking up curriculum reform in China to globalized

reform trends, it is meaningful to conduct a comparative study on the characteristics of good teachers, as perceived by teachers, students and parents in China and the United States. The study by Shujie Liu and Lingqi Meng, in Chapter 16, does this. In this mixed-method study, four characteristics of good Chinese teachers are identified—teacher ethics, professional skills, professional development and students' test scores—and a framework for future comparative study is proposed.

The studies in section three provide a breakthrough, in that the impacts of curriculum reform on the emotions and beliefs of teachers are investigated empirically, as are the concerns of parents and students. These efforts have extended the curriculum research in China from a macro perspective to a micro perspective, by looking at the experiences of practitioners.

Through a macro-, meso-, and micro- level investigation, this volume presents a holistic and vivid picture of curriculum reform in China. Attention is paid to socio-political influences on curriculum reforms, reforms taking place in different subject areas, and the transformation of individual practitioners in the reform discourse. It is noteworthy that the researchers in this volume have made efforts to address the role of social structure in shaping teachers' professionalism and the interaction between the social and the individual in curriculum reform. How individual teachers draw on their own resources to reconstruct curriculum, re-regulate the power relations contained therein, and gain legitimacy in the community could be taken as future research directions. Finally, a concluding section to this volume to critically evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum reforms conducted in the PRC and to discuss the implications for future curriculum implementation would have been helpful.

Gu Mingyue

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

E-mail: mygu@cuhk.edu.hk

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