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中国的大学 [*China's universities*]. 梅贻琦 [Mei Yiqi]. 北京, 中国: 北京理工大学出版社 [Beijing, China: Beijing Institute of Technology Press], 2012. 215pp., (hardcopy), 28¥, ISBN: 978-7-5640-5944-6.

The early 20th century witnessed the establishment of the first modern universities in China, with their nature and development strongly influenced by the perceptions of Chinese scholars who had studied in Western universities. During this period, as Ruth Hayhoe comments in *China's Universities, 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict*, China's universities engaged in “vigorous experimentation at all levels,”¹ gradually giving shape to the idea of “the university” in the Chinese context and defining its core values, autonomy and academic freedom. Mei Yiqi was a key contributor to this remarkable achievement during his tenure as president of Tsinghua University from 1931 to 1948. Readers will note that Mei's presidency came during a difficult period in China's history, one marked by Japanese aggression and invasion and more than a decade of foreign and civil wars. How was Mei able to safeguard Tsinghua through these violent times and still develop it to the point where it earned great academic prestige for its success in developing teachers and the quality of its research in a wide range of disciplines? Significant clues can be found in Mei's educational thinking and practices.

This welcome collection of works by Mei Yiqi represents his thinking on the ideals, roles, and functions of Chinese universities in general, and of Tsinghua University in particular. Mei's educational thinking is, in many ways, a reflection of the historical development of Tsinghua, where he studied and worked. Tsinghua University was originally Tsinghua Imperial College, founded jointly by the US and Chinese governments in 1911 with funds from the Boxer Indemnity. It was the first school in China that was formally established to send students abroad, in order that they might bring back Western knowledge to speed up China's economic and social modernization. The college was tasked with

¹ R. Hayhoe (1996). *China's Universities, 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict*. New York, NY: Garland, p. 41.

fostering the development of China's future leaders by equipping students with both Western knowledge and Chinese traditional culture. The college was upgraded in 1929, becoming the National Tsinghua University. Mei was a member of one of the first groups of Tsinghua students sent to the US, and he returned to teach at the university after completing his studies abroad. Before being appointed as Tsinghua's president, Mei supervised its students studying in the US.

The book consists of 52 papers, covering four themes. The first theme begins with Mei's well-known essay, *An Interpretation of the University* (大学一解), in which Mei unfolds the meaning and principle functions of a university from a historical-cultural context, giving broad and deep philosophical reflections on Western and Chinese ideals regarding universities. In his speeches to students and staff, Mei addressed a wide range of issues, including professors' responsibilities, scholarly approaches to knowledge, academic freedom, students' personal development and civic engagement, and campus life in the university community. Unlike traditional Chinese scholars, who generally viewed education as a political pathway to a career in government, Mei emphasized the university as a scholarly institution, where academics meet to advance existing ideas, generate new knowledge and culture, and pursue truth. Also, unlike Western scholars, who viewed the university as an "ivory tower," Mei argued that the university should not be isolated from society, but should serve the nation by preparing the various kinds of qualified personnel China needed for its national defense and construction. Mei goes into great detail on how to help students and staff understand and practice Tsinghua's motto: self-discipline and social commitment.

The second theme of the book touches upon more specific issues relating to the internal administration of Tsinghua University from 1931 to 1947, including Tsinghua's developmental planning and underpinning rationales, administrative and curricular structure, financial resources and management, library support, research and development, students' development, alumni network, relocation and reconstruction of the campus. These issues are elaborated on in Mei's various speeches, notes, messages, addresses and reports to Tsinghua staff, students and alumni. They show Mei's respect for democracy in university administration, and for the need to involve staff and students in institutional decision-making processes. Mei's thoughtful elaborations on key aspects of university affairs

offers a vivid picture of campus life during a period in which Tsinghua University enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and had a governing culture dominated by academics.

The third theme of the book gives us a snapshot of Tsinghua after the outbreak of war with Japan in 1937, and the subsequent merging of Tsinghua University, Peking University, and Nankai University into the Yunnan-based Southwestern Association University from 1937 to 1945. Mei provides detailed information on, and the rationale behind, the establishment of research institutes in agriculture, radio communication and metal materials, as well as institutes to study domestic agriculture, industry, and population.

The fourth theme addresses Tsinghua's vision and mission for serving China's industrialization and modernization by strengthening its knowledge foundation and preparing skilled personnel. Readers are shown how Tsinghua was protected during the wars, and how it was able to build its capacity in applied sciences, engineering, and industrial and military technologies to help defend China against the Japanese invasion.

Mei's educational thinking also inspires us to further explore some persistent and significant challenges facing Chinese higher education. China is now the world's largest "exporter" of students for overseas studies, and Tsinghua University, originally a preparatory school for students wanting to study in the US, still ranks the highest among China's universities in sending students abroad to study. Why, given its increased educational capacity for training high-level personnel at home, does China continue to lose its brightest students to the US?

This collection is both readable and well documented, and every chapter is beautifully written, reflecting the scope of the author's scholarship. It will be of interest to students and scholars of China studies, higher education, comparative education and educational policy. It will also appeal to education policy makers and professionals, as well as to a wide readership in the international community.

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