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John Dewey, Liang Shuming, and China's education reform: Cultivating individuality. Huajun Zhang. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 181pp., (papercopy), 60\$, ISBN: 978-0-7391-4792-4.

This book combines a succinct philosophical stance with practical implications to address China's modern transition and education reform. The author is driven by a quest for inclusive individuality amidst far-reaching social changes. Readers are invited to engage in the dialogue with Dewey, Liang and the author to consider the tensions between Confucian tradition and westernization, and between individualism and community living.

As I read the book I was captivated by the author's passionate quest, beginning with the discovery of an absence of the self in her own schooling despite her having met all the demands for high achievement. Despite the speed of social, economic, and cultural changes being widely felt, this book has made a valuable contribution to understanding ongoing continuities. A particular focus is the complex relationship between China's *suzhi* (quality) education reform and the examination-oriented education system and the modernization discourse that justifies second-class citizenship for China's rural population. Seeing *suzhi* as a new ideology to govern individuals, the author presents a salient thesis to highlight the critical difference between a self-conducted process of being transformed and a self-transformation process.

The argument for a new concept of individuality particularly resonates, as it is something not ready-made but to be cultivated within each individual. I can see the importance of having a strengthened self so as to thrive under today's worldwide dominant discourse on assessment for outcomes and performance for ranking, which tends to limit the definition of "learning" to measurable outcomes and presses individuals to conform to standardization. The impact of this dominant discourse goes beyond schooling when basic education is aligned with the push for recognition of achievement. Such alignment is happening even within higher education, where the precious space for academic freedom is restrained by self-censorship in various competitive tracks. Paradoxically, those who are proven to be highly competitive champions, having claimed recognition

through various personal credits, are likely to maintain the status quo rather than become change agents in educational reform. For the majority who are not champions in terms of public recognition, what is the focus of their daily commitments and their trajectory of professional living?

The author alerts readers to pursue an awareness of the driving force from within to re-visit the meaning of education reform. With its modest tone, this book invites attention to the inner self amidst struggles between the desire for immediate recognition and a lack of such recognition. Can the well-educated be engaged in dialogue as a way of thinking, to acquire a growing strength in response to a renewed calling of education?

Living in the academia of a modernized world, where accountability demands are intensified with the help of technological advances, I realize how powerfully each individual is shaped with the expanded “ego.” In the name of originality, we want to start a new camp, speak with new jargon and be different from others in order to be better recognized. In the name of collaboration, we want to bring together associates to build our collective identity, to fly our flag, again to be visible through the recognition of our credits. In the name of intellectual property, we guard against the theft of our ideas, and search for ways to clarify the ownership of thought. How is an academic ego accountable to the development of selfhood and the aspiration for the public good? How would freedom to learn as individuals come into the picture of our organizational living? When “individuality” as explicated in this book is differentiated from “egoism,” part of the answer is embedded in the cultivation of a unique but inclusive self.

To me, to be alive in my professional commitment is to continue seeking an understanding of who I am in each episode of my “success” or “failure” to live up to the judgments of various external criteria. My quest has been about how to persevere with a dynamic life of seeking and renewing my focus. With this quest, I hanker for a role model. It has been through a wider space of learning from a range of committed educators within and outside an institutional boundary and a historical era that I have learned to create this role model. The richness of the dialogue with Dewey and Liang presented by the author has encouraged me to look towards a more mature cohesive self with a repeated theme of connectivity. If each of us is well connected from within between the past and the present, through the management of inner conflict and through the changing landscape (be it about being under-recognized or over-recognized), one can be discerning of

unique choices for inward and outward connectivity, as articulated in the concept of inclusiveness. One can develop a sense of deliberateness in making choices for a pathway towards becoming an autonomous professional within the limited lifetime given us to serve.

The book invites readers to become aware of outward connectivity. Each life of the inclusive self carries no boundary. One's "credibility" actually comes from one's own confidence in the quest of understanding relationships with the environment which extend to the free space beyond personal expectations. Many educational workers hanker for such freedom but miss the vivid articulation which this book has provided, inner struggle in a temporary solitude for a renewed self, inner strength from self-transformation with faith in possibilities, a truly aesthetical experience of learning. The author boldly presents a resolution to the problem set out in the beginning of the book through highlighting the power of a narrative approach to self-discovery. The author's critical analysis is conveyed in eloquent writing that will not disappoint readers who are ready to inquire into puzzles arising from ineffective educational practices. While the book has opened up many avenues for meaningful intellectual and practical journeying, the conclusion has come back to the vision for China's education reform with a clear critique of the dominant social culture of exclusive success, which undoubtedly carries global significance for the moral development of all educators in our global village.

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