

# Anthropological Studies of Education

## **Series Editor**

Amy Stambach  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin, USA

**Aims of the Series**

This series examines the political, ideological, and power-laden dimensions of education from an anthropological perspective. Books in this series look at how society is defined in relation to education. It will delve into the kinds of communities that are imagined through educational policies, curricula, institutions, and programming. Many books in the series will use ethnography to capture diverse educational positions and experiences. The series uses concepts such as social practice, myth-making, political organization, and economic exchange, to address substantive issues pertaining to education in the moment and over time.

More information about this series at  
<http://www.springer.com/series/14767>

Peidong Yang

# International Mobility and Educational Desire

Chinese Foreign Talent Students in Singapore

palgrave  
macmillan

Peidong Yang  
Nanyang Technological University  
Singapore

Anthropological Studies of Education  
ISBN 978-1-137-59142-5      ISBN 978-1-137-59143-2 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59143-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016939234

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Nature America Inc. New York

*For dad and mum*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is based on parts of my doctoral thesis, written at the University of Oxford, 2010–14. I am deeply grateful to my teachers at Oxford, David Mills, Xiang Biao, and Amy Stambach, not only for their sympathy and guidance at various stages of the doctorate, but also for their continuing support beyond its completion. Amy has been instrumental in helping me get this work published, and I feel privileged to be part of her book series. I am also very thankful to my two thesis examiners, Johanna Waters and Yoonhee Kang, for their critical input at the finalizing stage of the doctorate.

On the Singapore side, the help from Prof. C.J. Wee Wan-Ling has been crucial in enabling me to proceed with fieldwork. I also thank Prof. Brenda Yeoh, Prof. Ho Kong Chong, and Dr. Zhao Litao for the opportunities to present parts of this work and to receive useful feedback at the National University of Singapore. Zhang Juan's most sympathetic advice on fieldwork and career matters is remembered and greatly appreciated, and I feel fortunate for having been able to converse with inspiring colleagues such as Fred Dervin and Francis Collins on various occasions.

Several colleagues and friends have kindly helped read parts of the manuscript and provided useful comments and suggestions for improvement: Catherine Gomes, Luke Lu, Hannah Soong, Cora Xu, and Esther Tay. Thank you all very much!

A postdoctoral fellowship at the Division of Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Nanyang Technological University, provided the luxuries of time and facility for me to complete the book manuscript; I thank my advisors Zhou Min, Liu Hong, Wang Jue, and the lively HSS scholarly community.

I shall always remain indebted to the many research participants in both China and Singapore, who generously helped me with this research. I hope this book has done justice to their cooperation. Although their names shall remain unrevealed, I hope this message of heartfelt appreciation gets to them one day.

Speaking of educational desire and mobility as the central themes of this book, I also cannot fail to acknowledge Helen Sampson, Feiya Shao, and Roderick Galam for their roles in enabling or influencing my trajectory of becoming a social scientist, and thus in contributing to this work indirectly.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my parents, for their unconditional love and support always.

A portion of Chapter 4 also appears in a chapter of mine entitled “The PRC ‘foreign talent’ scholars and their Singaporean ‘other’” in *Intercultural Masquerade: New Orientalism, New Occidentalism, Old Exoticism* (2016, Springer, F. Dervin, R. Marchart, and M. Gao, eds). Chapter 5 is a modified version of my article “A phenomenology of being ‘very China’: an ethnographic report on the self-formation experiences of mainland Chinese undergraduate ‘foreign talents’ in Singapore” published in *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 42 (2014), 233–261. I am very thankful to Daniel Dalet for kindly granting the permission to use an image from his website [d-maps.com](http://d-maps.com) as the basis for Fig. 1.1 in this book.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Contexts: Singapore’s Foreign Talent Programs and the Chinese Middle School as a Recruiting Ground</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Selecting Scholars for Singapore: The SM2 Program</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Singlish and the Singaporean: Cross-Cultural Encounter and Othering</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Being “Very China:” Self-Consciousness and Identity Transformation</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Desiring an Education: Scholarly Idealism and Anti-scholarly Entrepreneurialism</b>	<b>113</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>135</b>



# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	City of Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China	20
Fig. 3.1	Eligibility criteria for SM2 applicants	58



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Singapore government sponsored “PRC scholarships”	42
Table 3.1	Numbers of the 6th and 12th–19th batches of SM2 scholars from various Chinese provinces	56