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Book Review: Spotlight on China: Changes in Education under China's Market Economy

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Book Review

S. Guo & Y. Guo (Eds.) (2016). *Spotlight on China: Changes in Education under China's Market Economy*, Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, pp. 408. ISBN: 9789462098794, \$99.00 (hardback), ISBN: 9789462098800, E-Book ISBN: 9789462098817

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In the past 30 years, China has been experiencing tremendous social, economic, and educational transformations. China has become one economic superpower in the world. How do China's economic forces influence its education? *Spotlight on China: Changes in Education under China's Market Economy*, edited by Shibao Guo and Yan Guo, provides an insightful analysis of the impact of the profound social and economic transformations on education in China. The volume starts with the editors' comprehensive introduction and ends with a short postscript by Allen Luck who states that "Spotlight on China provides a state of art picture: dynamic, partial, full of contradictions and tensions, and as we speak, in movement and local reconfiguration."

The main part of the volume consists of five sections, 20 chapters in total. Section I contains five chapters, focusing on changes and challenges associated with the curriculum reform in China. Charlene Tan and Vicente Reyes lead this part with a critical discussion of neoliberal education policy through a case study of curriculum reform in Shanghai. They argue that the unique feature of Chinese neoliberalism, increased marketization alongside state control, created many challenges in implementing the curriculum reform, such as student-centred curricula versus exam-centred pedagogy, and the de-professionalization of school personnel versus autonomy of the educators.

In the next two chapters, Wing-Wah Law and Margaret Zeegers and Xiaohong Zhang highlight the shifts of curricula serving from political to economic purposes. Law examines three tensions challenging the citizenship education curriculum in China: the struggle between citizens' rights and social stability, between the rule of law and the rule of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and between socialism and traditional Chinese culture. Zeegers and Zhang draw our attention to the English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum. They point out the latest EFL curriculum reform of the 21st century in China is the most controversial curriculum because of its possibility for linguistic imperialism. Jinting Wu's chapter investigates the tensions between curriculum reform and rural development in Southwest China through an ethnographic study on suzhi education reform ("quality education"). Wu illustrates how the quality education reform became market-driven and instrumentalized to promote ethnic tourism. Therefore, suzi education serves as an "uplifting" force rather than "equalizing" force. In the last chapter, Wei Zhang and Mark Bray, from a global perspective, explore the emerging patterns, trends, and concerns of social inequalities of private tutoring over three decades.

Section II investigates teachers' perspectives on teaching and living under China's market economy through case studies. Shibao Guo begins this section by examining the experience of migrant teachers in Shenzhen and Zhuhai. His research shows that migrant teachers' teaching and living conditions became worse despite the economic miracle. Yan Guo's chapter explores middle school English teachers' lived experience in Zhejiang Province. Her research reveals the trends of English education as marketization and privatization and teachers' concerns over poor living conditions and declining social status. Gulbahar Beckett and Juanjuan Zhao turn the focus to indigenous teachers in the northwest China, a less developed region. In their study, indigenous

teachers were concerned about the negative impact of bilingual education, more workload, and stress under the market economy. Ying Wang and Raymond Chan examine private tutoring, the same topic as chapter six in Section I. They illustrate the commodification of private tutoring and argue that the illegal position of the private tutoring agencies may result from the defects of controlled decentralization policy.

Section III explores how the market economy changes the higher education in China. Lei Zhang, Ruyue Dai and Kai Yu analyze national policies since 1977 to document changes in higher education, particularly its expansion, privatization and decentralization. Fengqiao Yan, Dan Mao and Qiang Zha's chapter illustrate that decentralization has increased the massification of higher education but restricted education equality among regions, while the enrollment expansion has resulted in financial constraints and public critiques, lowering education quality and setting unrealistic goals. Hongxia Shan and Shibao Guo's study continues the discussion of massification and marketization in higher education under the globalized context. They argue that mass higher education led to unequal educational opportunities. Heidi Ross and Yimin Wang shift the discussion to innovation in higher education. Using discourse analysis, they compare how innovation was used in the national policies, academic discourses, and higher education institutions in China and the United States. Their analysis shows that innovation was used as an unquestioned aim in educational reform in China whereas in the United States it was applied differently depending upon the function of the university. They raise concerns about viewing innovation as an instrument or an outcome of higher education.

Section IV explores the transition from education to work. Jianghua Yang, Cheng Cheng and Yanjie Bian investigate the influences of family backgrounds on educational achievement, career placement at job entry, and career mobility. They find that the expansion of higher education increased inequalities due to family backgrounds. Guided by Bourdieu's habitus and capital theory, Yixi Lu and Li Zong examine how the socioeconomic status (SES) affect university graduates' transition from education to work. They conclude that the university degree is not sufficient for finding employments. Their findings confirm the family background's influence on social inequality through the transmission of social and culture capital. Limin Bai continues to examine university graduates' employment condition. She maintains that the massive expansion of higher education may release employment pressures temporarily, but create a vicious circle in the long term.

The last section explores social and educational inequalities related to the market economy in China. Hillary Parkhouse and Xue Lan Rong examine the inequality factors of compulsory education in two decades. Their findings indicate regional differences in educational attainment and existences of inequalities in ethnic minorities, females, and rural residents. Li Wang explores the inequality between rural and urban education. His analysis reveals how the economic growth of China had widened the gap between rural and urban education. The last two chapters both explore the social and educational inequalities in the urban settings. Yochim's study investigates how 15 families in Shijiazhuang built different cultural, economic and social capital in the new economic development, which led to unequal educational opportunities for their children. Charlotte Goodburn investigates the education barriers migrant children in Shenzhen faced. This study shows that urban migrant children faced many challenges in access to public schools. As an alternative, these children went to migrant-run schools with poor conditions and low quality of education.

A remarkable power of this volume is its rich data from a wide range of educational domains including compulsory schooling and higher education, public schools and private

tutoring, urban and rural settings. Moreover, it explores educational inequality in access, participation, and outcomes. The innovative volume makes an excellent resource for researchers because of its timely research topics and practical implications. Besides, the rich information and methodologies in this volume suggest areas for scholars and graduate students for future studies. Policymakers in and outside China may find it a valuable reference book as they develop new policies for compulsory and higher education.