

## **Chou, Chuing Prudence, Ching, Gregory: Taiwan education at the crossroad: when globalization meets localization**

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This book under review combines theoretical as well as policy-oriented discourse of Taiwan's education reforms since 1990s in a context of global–local encounter, coupled with Taiwan's long existing love-and-hate cross–strait relationships with the rising economic giant, China. The indicated purpose of this book is to propose an alternative for why globalization and localization has its limitation in the interpretation of the reform framework and reform outcomes in Taiwan, whose national identity has been overshadowed by Mainland Chinese military threat.

Despite, Taiwan's higher education deserves more attention as a small island renowned for its breathtaking natural scenery, and fast economic development known as one of the four Asian Tigers, namely, Hong Kong, Korea and Singapore, in the last century. After 1949, Taiwan became a shelter for many Mainland Chinese who withdrew from communist occupation. Over the next four decades (1949–1987), the ruling authorities enforced the martial law for fear of Chinese attack. Up to the fall of 1987, Taiwan lifted the martial law and gradually democratized and incorporated the local Taiwanese within the governing structure in response to the demands from a series of social movements. As the island prospered into one of East Asia's fastest- growing economic entity since 1980s, the national identity controversy across the island remained. The question of whether Taiwan's eventual unification with Mainland China or to maintain a “status quo” regardless Chinese official proclaim of its political status as part of China continues to impact its social as well as educational development. In addition, like many counterparts in the region, Taiwan's education has undergone a rapid transformation since early 1990s as a result of more and more interaction and cooperation taken place within and outside the region.

The book can serve as a timely analysis of Taiwan's education reform policies and practices over the last two decades situated specifically in a context of multifaceted adjustment demands from local, national, regional and global aspects. The work is divided into seventeen chapters which covered a wide range of issues and discussion based on governmental document, empirical studies, interviews and surveys, personal observation

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and international scholarship. It is obvious that the authors intended to relate Taiwan's higher education dilemma, in particular, with its neighboring region and the world.

The seventeen chapters can be divided into the following five sections. The first two parts attempt to provide a socio-cultural formation of the current education system and its transformation over the last two decades in which the country strived for global competitiveness. Specifically, a thorough description of educational transition process was analyzed furthermore with an overview of administrative structure, the design of school curriculum and instruction, textbooks and teacher education, budget planning and allocation, shadow education and international exchanges.

The book portrays Taiwan's education system in the third part by featuring "a school day" (or the everyday life) and challenges of students in contemporary Taiwan from pre-school to university level which is unique and interesting from comparative perspective. The fourth part engaged in major reform policies especially from higher education in the context of the world-class university ranking competition. The authors attempt to analyze policy issues such as the adoption of the world-class research university project, the new university funding scheme, flexible salaries, and the quality assurance system. In addition, the new internationalization efforts of higher education institutions include various heated issues such as the controversial academic publishing indicators (i.e., the SSCI and the SCI), and influx of international students into Taiwan. This section covered a wide range of concurrent issues encountered by many non-English speaking countries by challenging how and why higher education is not immune to global competition.

The book concluded its discussion in the final chapter via opening a newly created terminology as of "cross-straitization" with an attempt to layout the recent unexpected warming up higher educational exchanges and academic interaction between China and Taiwan. In so doing, the book proposed that one of the major predicting features of Taiwan's prospective education development relies on a stable cross-strait relationship with China and the Asian region.

The new framework of cross-straitization between China and Taiwan deserves serious scholarly attention and discussion with leading global and local theories while engaging in research on national identity, peace and conflict education among rival states. For example, just over a decade after the 911 the World Trade Center attack, the conflict between the US and the Muslim world has not yet to come to an end. The nuclear threat from North Korea continues to alarm South Korea and the world. The Cold War of the US and USSR ended in an unexpected way along with the unification of the West and East Germany in the early 1990s. And yet not many works have been done in academe to investigate how higher education, especially higher education exchanges, could play a significant role in ending or will eventually resolve conflicts (or even hostility) in the regions full of racial, ethnic, religious and social disputes. As the emergence of internet era and intensified global warming, the knowledge gap between generations and regions has widened and accelerated in an unprecedented pace. The accessibility to information and knowledge has also changed the profile of higher education to a great extent. University in our human society is at the crossroad between individual self- development and technology advancement. The trend of globalization has brought forth good and evil effects to different parts of the world, and thus prompted great debates about who has gained from it, what has and has not changed, why it last so long, who won, and many other more questions yet to be answered. While the impact of globalization tends to penetrate the fortress of nation-states and affect all walks of life, local resistance continues to summon and protest. It is of great demand that discourse should be done in academe in order to see how higher education can fill the gap when dealing with the global-local complex in this on-going turbulent world.

It is worth noting that Taiwan's education overall development concurs with many countries that have also experienced great transition due to this globalization/localization divergence coupled with the impact of neo-liberal principles worldwide since the 1980s. This is the reason why this book is worth reading because it can serve as an ideal testimony to demonstrate how an educational restructuring process can take place in this island. Nevertheless, how the case study of Taiwan's education reform in the book will provide lesson and implication to the world and its counterparts in the similar condition is another question to be answered. It is suggested that the book will be more comprehensive and convincing if some international and local empirical data can be included and further analyzed for comparative purpose. This is even the case when the proposed framework of cross-straitization can be approved with more solid empirical data and thorough theoretical discourse.