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On: 29 May 2014, At: 06:33

Publisher: Routledge

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History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

Taiwan education at the crossroad: when globalization meets localization

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Published online: 27 May 2014.

To cite this article: Jonathan Spangler (2014): Taiwan education at the crossroad: when globalization meets localization, History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society, DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2014.913698](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.913698)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.913698>

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BOOK REVIEW

Taiwan education at the crossroad: when globalization meets localization, by Chuing Prudence Chou and Gregory Ching, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, xxiii + 291 pp., £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-11089-2

With an account dating back to the pre-1626 influences of the Chinese imperial examination system, *Taiwan Education at the Crossroad* endeavours to document the historical development of Taiwan's educational system and, in more recent years, how the forces of globalisation and localisation have shaped this. As the interconnectedness between societies increases, educational reform has become a key concern of policy-makers across the globe. Development successes in East Asia have caught the attention of researchers everywhere, and it is no secret that educational systems in the region have played a crucial role in this process. Indeed, no demographic or geographic group is left untouched by their pervasive influence. Taiwan's educational system and its regional context offer an invaluable subject for a detailed case study of these trends, particularly at a time when countries the world over are struggling to ensure that their policies keep pace with the changing nature of education.

The text opens with an analysis of the impacts of globalisation and localisation on education worldwide. That these two forces have led to unprecedented reforms and new dilemmas in educational policy-making in Taiwan is one of the major guiding themes throughout the book. The next few chapters delve into the evolution and historical development of the Taiwanese educational system and its place in a global context. Covering nearly a 400-year period of history, the authors manage such a daunting historiographical undertaking by confining their analysis to aspects that relate to the overall themes of the book. These include the historical trends of Japanisation, Sinicisation, de-Sinicisation, localisation, globalisation, and internationalisation, as will be discussed later. The subsequent chapters, comprising the central third of the text, detail the structure of the educational system in Taiwan. The final section of the book addresses recent and ongoing educational reforms, the future of the educational system, and the crucial role of globalisation, localisation and politics in this process. Historians, policy-makers and educators involved in educational reform will find this an important reference for their work.

The impacts of globalisation and localisation, as made explicit in the book's title, set the foundation for the content that follows. Most notably, the text highlights a series of intertwining trends and how these have been central to the evolution of curricula and educational policy in the Taiwanese context. Trends covered include Japanisation, as a modern educational system was first developed under imperial rule (1895–1945); Sinicisation, as Taiwanese education struggled to return to its Chinese cultural roots in the postcolonial era, while simultaneously embracing Western economic rationalism (1945–1987); de-Sinicisation, as civil society began to challenge the Kuomintang's centralised control of education after the lifting of martial law (1987–); and internationalisation, as the educational system today

continues to grapple with the demands for competitiveness in globalising world (1990s–). The influences of these major trends are returned to throughout the text in detailing the history, structure and reform of Taiwan's educational system. Moreover, the book makes clear that historiography, education and identity are inseparable and that this has significant implications not only on the island, but also in East Asia and the world as a whole.

Another trend, however, has emerged in recent years in response to the changing relationship between Taiwan and mainland China. 'Cross-straitization', as it is termed by the authors, is a product of improving economic ties and political relations, and its impact on policy in Taiwan has only begun to emerge. Unique to educational development in Taiwan, this shift in relations has been ongoing since the 1990s yet has become more pronounced with the election of a mainland-friendly leader in 2008. The Taiwanese education system has not been immune to the impacts of these changing relations. 'Cross-straitization' involves the deepening of educational and cultural exchange between Taiwan and mainland China, which will eventually drive educational reform to new levels. As the authors attempt to shed light on the 'cross-straitization' of education, however, it is clear from the text that the concept remains as much a question as a concrete process or analytical framework. As scholars and policy-makers struggle to grasp the significance of this heretofore unnamed trend, it is here at the nexus of history, education and policy that the book has the potential to serve as a foundational reference for future research.

While past research, such as that of Patricia E. Tsurumi (*Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895–1945*, Cambridge, MA, 1977) and Stephen Kosack (*The Education of Nations*, Oxford, 2012), has detailed certain historical eras or aspects of the history of education in Taiwan, this book is the most comprehensive account to date of the forces shaping its educational development. Its analysis of the impacts of globalisation and localisation on education is a common thread throughout, and this is a topic of relevance to educational systems worldwide. While not new phenomena by any means, the text goes deeper than past research by relating how these forces have affected not only the curricula of educational institutions, but also their objectives, governance, financing, equitability and evaluation in a global system where education is being transformed from a national responsibility to a commodity in the international marketplace.

Though an invaluable resource for all interested in the history of education in an increasingly interconnected world, the text does have its quirks. Paramount among these is its determined attempt at impartiality, which leaves the book curiously devoid of criticisms, even when the educational reform policies discussed may have had significant positive or negative implications. This impartiality threatens to give it a weakened applicability to the educational systems of other countries, and the lessons and policy implications it could provide in a global context are thus reduced. In a similar vein, there is sparse mention of cross-national and cross-regional comparisons in the text. Inclusion of such comparisons could shed light on the similarities and differences between the histories of educational development in Taiwan and elsewhere. As Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa point out, education in mainland China, for example, has undergone a related process of 'nativisation' or *bentuhua* (*Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*, Chicago, 2009). Surprisingly, there is no mention of this important similarity in the text. Furthermore, one of the key contributions of the book, the conceptualisation of 'cross-straitization', has a long way to go before it

can be adequately theorised and incorporated into the academic canon. There remains, here, an important opportunity for future research.

Despite its limitations, the book will undoubtedly serve as an indispensable reference for those seeking to understand not only the historical evolution, structure and future of the Taiwanese educational system, but also the powerful influences of globalisation and localisation on educational systems worldwide.

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<http://doi.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.913698>