

Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators

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Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators

by

Ruth Hayhoe

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Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Professor Li Bingde who passed away on May 2, 2005, and thus was not able to hold it in his hands. It is also dedicated to all of the influential educators, and their families and students, who were tireless in responding to questions and providing details to ensure its accuracy. Finally, it is dedicated to the people of China, who have so much to be proud of in their educators and educational traditions.

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Almost all of the photographs in this book are either personal photographs belonging to the author, or have been entrusted to her by the influential educators for the purpose of using them in this book. The second, third and fourth photos in chapter six about Xie Xide have been taken, with permission, from the *Selected Works of Xie Xide* (Shanghai: Shanghai Scientific & Technical Publishers).

Finally, special thanks are due to Ms. Emily Mang for the meticulous care and professionalism that are evident in the book's layout and index.

A Note about Romanization and Terminology

This book has largely used the Hanyu pinyin form of Romanization, which has been officially used in China since the 1950s, and widely used elsewhere since 1978. However, in the case of certain well-known names, such as Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat Sen, the commonly used spelling has been retained. In the case of names of Christian universities before 1949, the form of Romanization used before 1949 has been kept, since this is how the universities are best known. Thus Yenching, rather than Yanjing, Ginling, rather than Jinling, Hangchow Christian University rather than Hangzhou Christian University. In the case of China's best-known contemporary universities, two have chosen to re-instate the Romanization used for their names before 1949, and I have followed their chosen usage. Thus I use Tsinghua University, rather than Qinghua University, and Peking University rather than Beijing University.

A few words about short-forms may also be helpful. The Chinese language lends itself to abbreviation, and a widely used abbreviation for universities is "da" from "daxue" (university). For convenience, and because it conveys a pleasant sense of familiarity, I have used Beida for Peking University, Wuda for Wuhan University, Zheda for Zhejiang University, Xiada for Xiamen University, Kangda for the Anti-Japanese Resistance University. In other cases, initials are the popularly used shortform, such as ECNU for the East China Normal University, HUST for the Huazhong University of Science and Technology, NENU for the Northeast Normal University.

Another needed note relates to the name of China's capital. Beijing was called Beiping while the Nationalist government had its capital in Nanjing ("jing" meaning capital in Chinese). To avoid confusion, I have used Beijing throughout the book. However, this change in name during the Nationalist period explains the name of Beiping University. It was a different institution from Peking University. Beijing Normal University was also called Beiping Normal University during the Nationalist period, but I have used the name Beijing Normal University consistently.

Foreword

Portraits, whether graphic or verbal, have distinct purposes and values. Through deliberate selection, they seek to reveal and, thereby, to illuminate. In their literary form, selection of content and style ensures that they do not presume to achieve the status of fully-fledged biographies. Even so, a carefully brush-stroked, multi-layered and richly textured pen-portrait is capable of revealing much about both character and circumstance. And what it reveals is likely to be different from and far more profound than any insights permitted by other miniatures, such as simple snapshots or polemical caricatures. Professor Ruth Hayhoe has produced a whole gallery of valuable portraits in the present book.

For a book in the present series, however, a key question remains. How and why may pen-portraits of eleven influential educators, from a single country and within roughly the same time frame, contribute significantly to the literature of comparative education? My own answer to this question is simple. This particular gallery makes its important contribution in two main ways and for a number of good reasons.

The 'How?' part of the question clearly involves process, especially methodological process. A portrait typically involves both foreground and background features. Some of the most effective portraits seem to encourage their observers to recognize interplay between foreground and background.

In the present book, the introductory chapter provides the reader with important background information and ideas, methodological, cultural, and historical. Many of these are revisited in the concluding chapter. These are, however, certainly not the only instances in which an outline of background factors plays an important part in facilitating readers' understanding. In each of the portrait-chapters, more specific background factors interact with a foreground that includes the individual subject's life-choices, struggles, ideas, and achievements.

This foreground emerges from an application of the "narrative approach" that is currently becoming a widely accepted alternative to the conventional linear, causation-oriented, and law-deriving methods that have dominated the social sciences for so long. Focusing upon the range

of stories that help give meaning to an individual's life – combining such narratives as those related to an individual's private life, career, family life, and links with institutions, as well as with contemporary local, regional, national, and international developments – accentuates and adds depth to the foreground. Such an approach also encourages consideration of various dialogues and their contribution towards the stimulation of ideas. In the foreground, relevant dialogues include those between the subject of the portrait and members of his/her family, his/her colleagues, and, particularly as far as the generation of data and insights are concerned, between the subject-as-interviewee and the author/portrait-painter, who acted as interviewer. Moreover, the qualitative, more subjective, narrative approach provides grounds for comparisons that transcend the merely numerical.

Background features include broad, macro-level ones, some of which are derived from a sense of dialogue between civilizations. Thus, in the introductory chapter, an outline of two millennia of Chinese philosophical traditions serves as important context within which to view the lives and thoughts of the eleven educators who feature in the gallery-chapters. A similar function is performed by an identification of the main turning points in the development of education in twentieth century China. And, as noted above, in the gallery-chapters themselves, more specific contextual factors, such as those concerning the individual's family and the institutions s/he attended as learner and teacher (which typically assume a quasi-familial role) provide a background that puts the foreground in even sharper, clearer perspective. Moreover, issues related to background and the links between background and foreground, like those concerned entirely with foreground, certainly provoke interesting comparisons, both implicit and explicit.

The 'Why?' part of the key question identified above is appropriately answered by reference to end products. In this case, the portraits themselves have their own intrinsic value. Each provides and, together, all provide highly nutritious food for thought. At least some of that thought is likely to involve comparisons – intra-book comparisons between the eleven individuals portrayed (eight men and three women) and 'external' comparisons with educators from other societies and other times. Despite differences in personalities, socio-economic status, age, and gender, the educators portrayed all became, often after struggles and hardships, not only successful, prominent, and influential in their own fields, but also people who were, in the best senses of the terms, "noble" and "cultivated" – in the classic Chinese sense, people of *xiuyang*.

The gallery as a whole and the individual portraits stimulate myriad comparisons, at various different levels of focus. Some of these may be considered *micro*-level, involving personalities, family-links, gender, and schooling, for example. Others seem to involve a higher, perhaps a *meso*-level, such as comparisons of institutional affiliations, as well as of the actual historical fates of the institutions, and comparisons of influences, from within China and from outside, on the development of an individual educator's ideas. And some operate at the highest, *macro*-level, involving attempts to understand characteristics of different cultures. It is at this level, at least as much as it is at the levels of greater detail, that *Portraits* makes significant contributions towards the literature of comparative education and, especially, comparative studies of education in China.

Earlier publications by other writers have focused largely on the minutiae of educational practice and on formally promulgated educational policy, often expressed in slogans and associated with the names of paramount political leaders. They have typically adopted the positivist, objectivist, value-free approaches to comparative education. The new work, with its fresh approach, illuminates questions concerning attitudes, values, ideas, and subjective experience. At the macro-level, it shows that the traditional Chinese "Way of the Scholar", which was, to a great extent, endorsed by all eleven of the educators portrayed in the book, has much relevance for educators in other parts of the world. In doing so, it effectively distinguishes between the Confucian concern for the extended self, which tolerates the co-existence of facts with values, and a major philosophical tradition of the West, which includes the rationalism and idealism of Plato, the dualism of Kant, and the focus on causes and laws of the Enlightenment. Many active workers in the field of comparative education will be pleased to note the consonance of the Chinese *Way of the Scholars* not only with "Western" pragmatism and existentialism, but also with the counter-Enlightenment rhetoric of much post-modernist and post-structuralist thought. Indeed, some will be happy to infer that the typically Chinese capacity to tolerate, accommodate, and even integrate the mundane and the heavenly, as well as to incorporate other apparent ambiguities in both daily life and in educational practice, is compatible with the post-rationalist attractions of chaos theory.

Thus, the *Portraits* as a whole and its separate sketches have valuable lessons for people interested in comparative education, around the world. One of the most important of these is that the study of comparative education does not benefit from being confined to largely

quantitative comparisons of educational systems associated exclusively with different nation-states, but that it does benefit from the comparison of qualitative, subjective, and humanist aspects. A more content-specific one emphasizes the growing importance of China in and for the present and future of the global community. It makes clear that this importance not only relates to the political economy, but especially to philosophical heritage and, even more specifically to the synaptic rewards of dialogue between the traditions and typical thought-patterns of different cultures. And a third is that pen-portraits, like most other forms, tend, in their construction, also to involve at least the glimmer of a self-portrait. This is true of the present book, which has been created by a person uniquely qualified by experience, interests, and abilities to do so and a person who, in doing so, has proved that she, herself, is a scholar with *xiuyang*.

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Map of China

