

English language education in China: A historical, social and economic perspective

Liu Daoyi and Wu Zhaoyi, *English Language Education in China: Past and Present*, Beijing: The People's Education Press, 2015. Pp.xiii + 460. Paperback, ¥198, ISBN: 9787107289484

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Anyone who is interested in China's rise and its impacts on education will find the book *English Language Education in China: Past and Present* fascinating. The book under review tells a unique story of English language education in China, canvassing over 150 years of history. It discusses a wide range of topics including curriculum, materials and resources, instructional approaches, assessments, research, educational technology, teacher education and ELT in secondary vocational education. The editors are successful in bringing these topics together to lay out an impressive and developmental framework of English language education in China.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (Chapters 1–2) offers a historical overview of English language education in China, set along a timeline of Chinese modern and contemporary history. It explores a number of roles played by English and its status within developments in Chinese society. In Chapter 1, Wu Zhaoyi examines the proposition that English language education in the late Qing Dynasty was supposed 'to prepare translators for diplomatic services such as negotiation and translation' (p. 5). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is thus represented as 'a means to understand the West and acquire Western science and technology' (p. 20). The Republic of China envisaged various purposes of English language education related to 'self-strengthening and modernization' that aimed to meet changing social needs (p. 34). Wu, in Chapter 2, further describes China as experiencing dramatic social upheaval from 1949 to 1978, and then rapid development after adopting reform and more liberal policies after 1977. English language

education is seen as having gone through a decline, revival, drop and boom, described as 'erratic and inconsistent' (p. 36). English is now considered a global language, closely connected with China, allowing it to be part of 'a global village' (p. 60). English language learning is then 'no longer just learning a language different from one's own. Now it is acquiring the ability to communicate effectively with people in international and intercultural contexts' (p. 357).

The second part (Chapters 3–10) presents detailed discussions on major issues and progress in relation to English language education. Liu Daoyi, in Chapter 3, presents the development of English curriculum in primary and secondary schools, addressing the importance of some controversial issues in designing English curriculum for the country's development. Her research starts from the Japanese model of 1902–1922, takes in the American model of 1923–1949, notes the pendulum swing during 1950–1977 under the influence of the Soviet Union model of 1950–1957, charts rapid development in the years 1958–1960, high-quality education between 1961 and 1965, and finally describes years of decline between 1966 and 1977 before a revival. She reviews English syllabuses and curriculum standards from 1978 to the present, including restoring order between 1978 and 1990 and integrating with globalization between 1988 and 2000. She also examines deepening reform and innovation from 2001 to the present. In Chapter 4, Liu Daoyi further investigates the progress of English teaching materials and curriculum resources in primary and secondary schools. These two chapters guide readers through not only profound socio-economic changes in China, but also consider their influence on the



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development of English language curricula, teaching materials and curriculum resources.

In Chapter 5, Wang Qiang and Zhang Hong provide a general overview of language teaching methods and instructional approaches over the past 150 years from historical perspectives, stressing the advancements and innovations of major ELT methodologies since 1949. Luo Shaoqian and Huang Jian, in Chapter 6, describe the progress of English language assessment, highlighting a shift from an examination-oriented approach to a competency-based one. The authors consider that English assessment in China can serve as a useful case study for other countries. In Chapter 7, Wu Xin and Liu Ming focus on English language teacher education and teacher development. They begin by examining the role of English teaching to provide a general picture of ways in which English teacher education in China has developed over time. This examination also allows for an understanding of English teachers' identity in China and underlying changing Chinese education policies. It offers further insights into the development of EFL teacher education in China.

In Chapter 8, Zhang Xiaohong discusses issues of education technology by reviewing the related literature. She demonstrates the dramatic improvement of the English teaching environment in parallel to China's economic rise. Cheng Xiaotang and Xie Min, in Chapter 9, investigate relevant research on English language teaching, including researchers, methods, major findings, international cooperation, and their limitations. In Chapter 10, Wu Zunmin examines English teaching in Chinese secondary vocational education from historical perspectives, including English curriculum design and implementation as well as challenges for development. This is based on his assertion that 'vocational education is an important part of general education in China, contributing to the supply of a quality workforce which supports the country's economic development [...] and foreign language teaching has been regarded as an important part of vocational

students' overall cultivation for many years as well' (p. 353).

The third part (Chapter 11), written by the editors with Gong Yafu, Meng Qingtao, and Ding Wenjuan, completes the discussion by picking up current issues and prospective problems of English language education in China. They suggest opportunities for scholars around the world to extend it to a broader global context with their own further research in this field. A review of all the chapters in this book will show that this expectation is mostly met by presenting the Chinese features of English language teaching and learning. The insights provided will significantly enhance our understanding of current issues and problems of English language education in China. The book may accordingly prove to be useful for relevant scholars and educators in EFL/ESL fields in future, and especially for those who contribute to teaching Chinese students outside the Chinese context. As Liu and Wu stress, this book serves as 'a useful reference for educators, researchers and English language instructors in "a world of Englishes"' (p. ix).

If the book has a weakness, it is that the expected audience is primarily limited to those interested in primary and secondary school education in China's mainland, and lacks comparable information on tertiary education. It also overlooks the areas of Macau, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, which somewhat undermines the editors' claim to examine English language education in China as a whole. This book, to some extent, also neglects to focus on the empirical nature of English language education as represented in grassroots, local economic development in international contexts. A broader examination of English language education that covers all the areas and the minorities in China would be desirable to fill these gaps. Such considerations may be taken as part of the wider scope of foreign and second language education in the world, which situates the analysis within the educational systems and sociocultural practices in place in different contexts.