

Book Review: Higher Education in East Asia: Neoliberalism and the Professoriate

Edited by Gregory S. Poole and Ya-chen Chen.
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Higher Education in East Asia: Neoliberalism and the Professoriate provides comprehensive descriptions and analyses of the impact of neoliberal reforms at universities in East Asia on local professoriate cultures. The book consists of case studies conducted by educational anthropologists that work within higher education institutions (HEI) in East Asia. This interesting attempt to collect insider perspectives regarding the changing processes of HEIs is based on the understanding that these institutions, and their faculty members, continuously face the demands of internationalization and marketization. Although there have been a number of books and articles written on higher education reforms in Asia, most focus on historical development and aspects of policy and structure. Poole and Chen compile a volume of writing that makes a substantial contribution to the field of international higher education by analyzing with a human the changing situation of HEIs in East Asia.

Each chapter provides a case study. Out of eight chapters, five focus on Japan, two on Hong Kong, and two on mainland China and Taiwan. The chapters utilize interviews and the authors' individual experiences to illustrate the complicated relationship between the professoriate and higher education reforms in East Asia. In the final chapter the book concludes by pointing out growing global competition among HEIs. These institutions are driven towards reforms in order to meet national and international standards, measured by shared global criteria for evaluating academic productivity and education quality. Such global competition has the effect of standardizing diverse HEIs across the world.

The focus of Part I of the book is Japan. Historically there has been tension between state control and institutional autonomy in Japan. In 2004, the government corporatized national universities in order to reduce the control of the state. Although corporatization gave individual HEIs more room for autonomous decision-making, it often results in the concentration of power among top level administrators. Some of the book's contributors contrast the Japanese notion of *Rijikai shihai* (management by the board of trustees) with *Kyojyukai shihai* (management by the

faculty) to describe how faculty are divorced from the decision-making process.

In addition to the change of administrative relationship, the newly formed audit culture forces the *uchimuki* (inward-driven) professoriate to be more *sotomuki* (outward-driven). Faculty members who publish more in respected English-language journals, or those awarded contracts with industries, are highly appreciated. This contrasts with the conventional way of judging the quality of work, which is more oriented toward following tradition. Internationalization, marketization, and corporatization of Japanese HEIs, and the appearance of new individuals not traditionally seen in Japanese HEIs, such as females, and foreign faculty members, are having a significant impact on the nature of these institutions.

In Part II of the book, the drive for international standards and the subsequent conflict between Western and local-oriented research in Hong Kong is examined. It argues that the current Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) shows how state-dominated knowledge production has led to a sort of academic suicide in Hong Kong. By being evaluated by the number of English-language publications, academics are forced to draw on Western frameworks of thought, which draws them away from indigenous epistemology. As a result, writing and publishing for local audiences in the Chinese language becomes more and more impractical for academic survival. To complicate the issue, English publications are often not locally read or applied.

In Part III, contributors discuss the political and sociocultural conditions that cause difficulties for academic feminists and feminism in higher education in China and Taiwan. One author's personal experience in Chinese HEIs demonstrates how the adoption of quantitative faculty assessments challenges the quality of faculty members' academic research, and significantly influences their teaching and career development. This concern is articulated throughout the volume. Recently, increasing numbers of academic plagiarism cases and the inflation of the academy in China, paint a vivid picture of the cynicism towards quantified assessment.



The success of *Higher Education in East Asia: Neoliberalism and the Professoriate* is that it utilizes the ethnographic study of individual faculty members to show their micro-level perspective of the current issues associated with higher education reforms in East Asia. The interviews and observations contained in the book present various experiences and attitudes towards the current neoliberal higher education reforms in East Asia, which may help researchers and policy makers to further understand the current situation and adjust reforms accordingly.

Despite its unique approach to research, the book does have limitations. First, although it is a flip side of the rich ethnographic accounts provided by this book, the sample bias sometimes seem to provide unbalanced pictures. For example, reactions of research-oriented and teaching-oriented universities or private and public universities to internationalization are very different. The differences at the institutional levels create gaps in the amount of research grants they get, administrative control, types of students attracted, types of faculty members recruited, etcetera, which eventually cause very different interpretations of professoriate among faculty members. Generalization would not have been the purpose of this type of work. Even so, the randomness of the samples made it a little difficult to find the connections between the case studies. For example, if the authors have focused on the faculty members of same academic field, the differential impacts of institutional responses to professoriate might have been better highlighted. Also, the attentions paid to four East Asian countries/regions are not even. If more case studies of Hong Kong, China and Taiwan were involved, the comparison of the systems would have been more substantial and interesting. Regardless of its limitations, this book provides vivid insider accounts that allow us to continue the discussion on higher education in East Asia.

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