

Haiqin Liu • Fred Dervin • Xiangyun Du
Editors

25

26

Nordic-Chinese Intersections within Education

27

28

29

Uncorrected Proof

palgrave
macmillan

30 *Editors*
Haiqin Liu
Department of Teacher Education
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

Fred Dervin
Department of Teacher Education
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

Xiangyun Du
Department of Learning and Philosophy
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark

31 Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective
32 ISBN 978-3-030-28587-6 ISBN 978-3-030-28588-3 (eBook)
33 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28588-3>

34 © The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2019

35 This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether
36 the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of
37 illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and trans-
38 mission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or
39 dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

40 The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication
41 does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant
42 protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

43 The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book
44 are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or
45 the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any
46 errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional
47 claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

48 This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
49 The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Contents

59

1	Intersections in Education: Blending Chinese and Nordic Perspectives	60
	<i>Fred Dervin, Haiqin Liu, and Xiangyun Du</i>	61
		62
Part I	Experiencing Each Other's Education	19 63
2	The Role of the Migration Industry in Chinese Student Migration to Finland: Towards a New Meso-level Approach	64
	<i>Hanwei Li</i>	65
		66
		67
3	Chinese University Leaders' Perceptions of Effective Transnational Professional Development	68
	<i>Xin Xing</i>	69
		70
4	Narrative Inquiry of Beginner Teachers' Experience and Changes in Beliefs in the Danish Secondary School Context	71
	<i>Li Wang</i>	72
		73
		74

75	Part II Nordic-Chinese Intersections: Conceptual and	
76	Methodological Aspects	105
77	5 Beyond Comparative Methods in Research on	
78	Transnational Education Cooperation: A Proposed	
79	Theoretical Model for Examining Contextual	
80	Complexities	107
81	<i>Jin Hui Li</i>	
82	6 Lutheranism and Confucianism Between National	
83	Education and Globalization: A Theoretical Discussion	127
84	<i>Mette Buchardt and Xiangyun Du</i>	
85	7 Twenty-First Century Competencies in the Chinese	
86	Science Curriculum	151
87	<i>Yan Wang, Jari Lavonen, and Kirsi Tirri</i>	
88	8 Policy Intersections in Education for the Gifted and	
89	Talented in China and Denmark	173
90	<i>Annette Rasmussen</i>	
91	Part III Transnational Cooperation in Education: Policies	
92	and Practices	195
93	9 Comparing Doctoral Education in China and Finland: An	
94	Institutional Logics Perspective	197
95	<i>Gaoming Zheng, Jussi Kivistö, Wenqin Shen, and Yuzhuo Cai</i>	
96	10 Experience of Sino-Finnish Joint Degree Provision:	
97	Practitioners' Perspectives	233
98	<i>Yuzhuo Cai, Baocun Liu, and Chujun Xiao</i>	

11	Contemporary Danish Strategies of Internationalisation Through Student Mobility with China: The Development of Instrumentality in Interculturality	257	99 100 101 102
	<i>Niels Erik Lyngdorf</i>		
12	Educational Patriotism Inspired by China?	273	103 104
	<i>Arild Tjeldvoll</i>		
13	Conclusion: Comparing Chinese and Nordic Education Systems—Some Advice	293	105 106 107
	<i>Ning Chen and Fred Dervin</i>		
Index		301	108

Uncorrected Proof

13

Conclusion: Comparing Chinese and Nordic Education Systems—Some Advice

Ning Chen and Fred Dervin

横看成岭侧成峰，远近高低各不同。
不识庐山真面目，只缘身在此山中。

From the side, a mountain range; from the end, a single peak;
Far, near, high, low, no two parts alike.
Why can't I tell the true shape of Mount Lu?
Because I myself am in the mountain.

This famous poem by Su Dongpo 苏轼 (1084/1994, p. 108) summarizes well the final message of this book: Things can look very different seen from different perspectives.

This book represents an attempt to help our readers see and understand Nordic and Chinese education beyond myths, and to consider some counter-narratives and different realities. In so doing, our authors

N. Chen (✉)

Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, Tianjin, China

F. Dervin

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

e-mail: fred.dervin@helsinki.fi

© The Author(s) 2019

H. Liu et al. (eds.), *Nordic-Chinese Intersections within Education*, Palgrave Studies on Chinese Education in a Global Perspective,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28588-3_13

18 were following Michel Foucault's advice: "A critique is not a matter of
19 saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out
20 on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged,
21 unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest" (1988,
22 p. 154). The philosopher continues [a critique is also] "to show that
23 things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted
24 as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such" (ibid., p. 155). We
25 hope that the book has convinced our readers to not take what they hear
26 about Nordic or Chinese education as 'self-evident' and to consider, not
27 their 'true shape', but their different shapes (like Mount Lu in Su
28 Dongpo's poem).

29 According to Ni (2013, p. 15) Chinese civilization has always been
30 very curious about, and open to, foreign ideas and material goods. He
31 claims that "the greatness of Chinese civilization lies partly in its open-
32 ness to the outside world" (ibid.). China is very open indeed, especially
33 in terms of improvement in education; however, China should refrain
34 from merely getting input from the outside but negotiating *win-win* rela-
35 tions: China is strong enough to receive and *to give*. In our own research
36 on Finnish-Chinese edubusiness, we clearly noted an imbalance between
37 Chinese and Finnish partners in co-developing professional development
38 programmes, whereby Finnish partners were unwilling somehow to dis-
39 cuss learning about and from Chinese education (Xing, Dervin, &
40 Fan, 2017).

41 In what follows, we propose four pieces of advice for when we compare
42 Chinese and Nordic education. We also consider the advice applicable to
43 other contexts of international comparative education. A few words
44 about comparison before the advice: it is essential to remember that com-
45 parison is never neutral as it always has a starting point which relies on
46 given contexts, ideologies, imaginaries and even stereotypes about the
47 things being compared. For Radhakrishnan (2013, p. 16) comparisons
48 "are inevitably tendentious, didactic, competitive, and prescriptive.
49 Behind the seeming generosity of comparison, there always lurks the
50 aggression of a thesis".

51 Education is too complex a context to make simple comparisons such
52 as *Danish, Finnish children are happier than Chinese children*—something
53 we often hear from people who have never visited Denmark/Finland or

met a Danish/Finnish kid. As such not two schools are the same, even 54
two classrooms in the same school. In the Nordics, a classroom some- 55
where cannot fully generalize what is happening in smaller and isolated 56
places in other parts of the Nordics. The same applies to China: a school 57
in Zhongguancun in Beijing can hardly compare to a school in an iso- 58
lated part of the country. To compare, one needs to homogenize, and 59
thus create an imagined majority with positive or negative characteristics 60
that can too easily be used to idealize or denigrate someone or something. 61
This also leads to an overemphasis on difference between contexts, which 62
may be biased if similarities are not also considered. This can also too eas- 63
ily lead to stigmatization of difference (“Chinese education is too competi- 64
tive and thus bad for the children”). Obviously, education systems are 65
too complex to be considered homogeneous. 66

Our first advice relates to a very famous quote from the ‘father’ of 67
international comparative education, Higginson (1979, p. 49): “We 68
cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, 69
like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one 70
bush and some leaves from another, and then **expect that if we stick** 71
what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living 72
plant” (our emphasis). So-called good practices elsewhere may not func- 73
tion in a different context, partly or fully. For instance, in Finland, par- 74
ents receive a lot of financial support for their children’s education 75
(education is the responsibility of the state) and thus transferring some 76
practices from the Finnish context to China might require making fun- 77
damental societal changes, which are neither possible nor compatible 78
with current politics in China. Some practices that might appear appeal- 79
ing in Finland may not work in China because of parents’ views and 80
wishes for their children’s education and future (e.g. little testing, short 81
days at school, etc.). 82

The second advice is to bear in mind that whenever we hear “Nordic 83
education is...” or “Chinese education is...”, whatever follows is too 84
general to apply to the generality of the complex educational contexts 85
found in these two contexts. From our experiences of Chinese and 86
Nordic education we think it is fair to say that China and the Nordics 87
both have good and bad systems of education; they both have different 88
schools with different socio-economic statuses (The Nordics: city centres 89

90 vs. some suburbs in cities; rural/urban divide; private vs. public schools).
 91 If we compare, we need to take into account all the different characteris-
 92 tics of the contexts we compare, and look into both differences and
 93 similarities.

94 The Nordics often bring to mind the ‘miraculous’ case of Finnish edu-
 95 cation. More recent critical pieces of news or books published about
 96 Finnish education actually show that Finnish education faces very similar
 97 issues as Chinese education. In her book in English titled *School’s Fault*,
 98 Finnish teacher Maarit Korhonen (2018) shares scenes of her everyday
 99 experiences as a teacher in two different schools in Finland (an affluent
 100 school and a not so affluent one). In the following excerpts, we can see
 101 many problems similar to China:

- 102 • about discussing the children’s future:
 103 (Teacher) But having a great future doesn’t necessarily require money, does
 104 it? It could also mean happiness and achieving your dreams?
 105 (Student) Someone who works as a cleaner can’t be happy. A cleaner
 106 hasn’t made it if he’s a cleaner, this ten-year-old claims.
- 107 • about success:
 108 (Student) My dad works at Nokia and he says that only those people
 109 who do well at school will be successful elsewhere, too. And then
 110 they’ll be rich.
 111 (a student after having received a fairly good grade on a test): “I didn’t
 112 do well enough, sobbing more loudly”
- 113 • about misbehaviour in class:
 114 (...)
 115 a couple of them continue to be difficult the whole term. The conversa-
 116 tion we have is always the same:
 117 (Teacher) — Would you take your book out, please?
 118 (Student) — Do I have to?
 119 (Teacher) — Yes, you do.
 120 (Student) — But I don’t want to.

121 In autumn 2018, many pieces of news reflected the increasing prob-
 122 lems faced by Finnish education. The following headlines give a clear hint
 123 of these issues:

(Yle News 8.10.2018) Integration of special needs pupils adds to teacher workload (teachers feel increasingly stressed and incapable of facing students' individual problems) 124-126

(Yle News 12.9.2019) Teachers' Union: Finnish schools need €1bn to return to Nordic standards to ensure well-being of pupils and teachers. 127-128

The third advice relates to the current global contextual factors that need to be borne in mind when comparing Chinese and Nordic education. These include: (1) global educational systems are governed and oriented by international rankings that have an influence on how we talk about 'good' and 'bad' education, and how we pick 'good' and 'bad' systems of education (e.g. PISA studies); (2) since the early 2010s the Nordics have experienced intensive nation/region branding (packaging the Nordics as a product) and the marketization of its education to the rest of the world (e.g. Finnish education export). Edubusiness is about selling educational services, materials and institutions outside national borders, which might entail using 'white lies' to sell Nordic education. As much as a company like Apple would not admit to their products having potential defects, selling Nordic education might mean camouflaging some of its less successful aspects (e.g. growing achievement gap between social groups, boys and girls).

Edubusiness from Finland, for instance, involves sale of made-to-order trainings, knowledge, services and consultancy to other countries (Cai & Kivistö, 2011). According to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2010), "Higher education institutions will be encouraged to be active and assume a major role as education export operators". This means that scholars' activities and discourses on Finnish education might also be influenced by market-oriented agendas. The consequences might be the development and spread of ready-made discourses on Finland/Finnish education (with the idea that what is heard from "the horse's mouth" must be 'true'); a thirst for Finnish presence in foreign media, which can serve as advertising; (auto-)censorship with a potential loss of criticality, use of white lies and potential manipulation; an overemphasis on Finland as an exotic place; and the development of a specific pedagogical industry: Places and people are chosen for pedagogical tourists (international schools/'normal schools' attached to universities that train student teachers).

159 The next piece of advice will sound naïve, but having met hundreds of
160 educators, scholars and even parents in China, we often feel that this is a
161 problem: There is no ‘paradise’ on our planet! The word *Nordics* seems to
162 bring up certain overly positive images that could easily be questioned.
163 The *2018 World Happiness Report* published by the United Nations
164 Sustainable Development Solutions Network, which was reported glob-
165 ally by the media, placed Finland number 1—the happiest country in the
166 world (the other Nordic countries followed). But what is the meaning of
167 happiness here? A look at the criteria makes us wonder if the whole world
168 understands this notion the same way. The criteria for determining hap-
169 piness in the report include:

170 **Social support** corresponds to answers to the question: “If you were in
171 trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you
172 whenever you need them, or not?”

173 **Freedom to make life choices:** “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your
174 freedom to choose what you do with your life?”

175 **Generosity:** “Have you donated money to a charity in the past month?”

176 Can one *really* compare answers to these questions across national,
177 cultural and linguistic borders? For instance, the words used are necessar-
178 ily polysemic: *relatives, friends, freedom* and so on and can lead to poten-
179 tial misinterpretations. In China, for example, family comprises more
180 individuals than in the Nordics. Charity can mean more than donating
181 money in some countries. So are we comparing apples and oranges here?
182 Considering the high levels of depression, suicide and alcoholism (see e.g.
183 the following study on Finnish adolescents: Torikka et al., 2017), Finnish
184 researcher Martela (2018), specializing in both the psychology and phi-
185 losophy of well-being and meaning in life at Aalto University, explains:

186 What I’m trying to say is that, regarding happiness, it’s complicated.
187 Different people define happiness very differently. And the same person or
188 country can be high on one dimension of happiness while being low on
189 another dimension of happiness. Maybe there is no such thing as happiness
190 as such. Instead we should look at these dimensions separately and examine
191 how well various nations are able to support each of them.

Finnish education exporters and some Finnish researchers have used and abused the rhetoric of Finnish education being based on the ideology of Joy of Learning/Fun learning, which seems to confirm and go hand in hand with ‘Finnish happiness’. However, this has misled people from outside Finland to believe in this potential white lie.

As a final point, in Li and Dervin (2018), one of us suggests considering any system of education by means of ideological continua (in terms of policy, pedagogy, educational actors, etc.), rather than single indicators. These are examples:

Fun/student-centered learning <.....> teacher-centered learning	201
Inequality <.....> social justice	202
Inclusion <.....> exclusion	203
Parents involved <.....> not involved	204
Motivated teachers <.....> Unmotivated parents	205
“Good” <.....> “bad” teachers	206
Hard-working students <.....> Not-so-hard-working	207
Good school buildings <.....> bad school buildings	208

This is important to avoid creating certain international hierarchies that are not always founded. For example, the idea that Nordic education is more student-centred than Chinese education is not always correct. Many teachers alternate between student- and teacher-centredness or use forms of student-centred approaches which are actually teacher-centred. In a similar vein, some parents in the Nordics are very much interested in their children’s education and offer all the support that they can, while others will rely too much on teachers educating their children for them.

Beyond media, academic and supranational mantras about the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ educational performers of the world, there is a need to dig into wider ecosystems and to systematically dispel myths about the ‘best’ performers. Finally, we suggest that we work with each other to learn *with* each other about what we can each bring to the table. We can all contribute to good education by sharing, negotiating and constructing ‘good’ and multifaceted practices. It means for China to also be somewhat more confident about its (already) admirable achievements in education.

References

- 226 Cai, Y., & Kivistö, J. (2011). *Higher education reforms in Finland and China—*
227 *Experiences and challenges in post-massification era*. Tampere: Tampere
228 University Press.
- 229 Foucault, M. (1988). *Politics, philosophy, culture: Interviews and other writings of*
230 *Michel Foucault, 1977–1984*. New York: Routledge.
- 231 Higginson, J. H. (1979). *Selections from Michael Sadler: Studies in world citizen-*
232 *ship*. Liverpool, Merseyside: DeJall & Meyorre International Publishers.
- 233 Korhonen, M. (2018). *School's Fault?* Helsinki: Into.
- 234 Li, Y., & Dervin, F. (2018). *Continuing professional development of teachers in*
235 *Finland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 236 Martela, F. (2018, May). Finland is the happiest country in the world, and Finns
237 aren't happy about it. *Scientific American*. Retrieved from [https://blogs.scien-](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/finland-is-the-happiest-country-in-the-world-and-finns-arent-happy-about-it/)
238 [tificamerican.com/observations/finland-is-the-happiest-country-in-the-](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/finland-is-the-happiest-country-in-the-world-and-finns-arent-happy-about-it/)
239 [world-and-finns-arent-happy-about-it/](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/finland-is-the-happiest-country-in-the-world-and-finns-arent-happy-about-it/)
- 240 Ni, J. B. (2013). *Medical ethics in China: A transcultural interpretation*. London:
241 Routledge.
- 242 Radhakrishnan, R. (2013). Why compare? In R. Felski & S. Friedman (Eds.),
243 *Comparison: Theories, approaches, uses* (pp. 15–33). Baltimore: The Johns
244 Hopkins University Press.
- 245 Su Dongpo. (1084/1994). *Selected poems of Su Tung-p'o*. Port Townsend, WA:
246 Copper Canyon Press.
- 247 Torikka, A., Kaltiala-Heino, R., Luukkaala, T., & Rimpelä, A. (2017). Trends in
248 Alcohol use among adolescents from 2000 to 2011: The role of socioeco-
249 nomic status and depression. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 52(1), 95–103.
- 250 Xing, X., Dervin, F., & Fan, P. (2017). Truths, omissions and illusions in the era
251 of marketization. Chinese university leaders' perceptions of Finnish educa-
252 tion. *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, 4, 33–56.