Book Reviews

Mok, Ka-Ho (ed.) (2003). *Centralization and Decentralization: Educational Reforms and Changing Governance in Chinese Societies*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong; Dordrecht; London: Kluwer Academic. Pages: 230 . ISBN 962-8093-58-4
Reviewed by Senlin Yang, The University of Western Ontario

This book is part of a series of studies in comparative education published either by CERC (Comparative Education Research Centre) at the University of Hong Kong independently or in collaboration with a long-established internationally publisher like Kluwer. The volume features a collection of selected and revised papers from two workshops organized by the Comparative Education Policy Research Unit (CEPRU) of the City University of Hong Kong in April 2000 and April 2001, as well as papers presented at other international symposia. Themed on Centralization and Decentralization: Educational Reforms and Changing Governance in Chinese Societies, this collection of papers sheds light on how the selected Chinese societies are impacted by a global trend of decentralization in educational development geared to accommodate rising expectations and demand of different stakeholders in society. More specifically, they inquire into the policy framework of decentralization the selected Chinese societies have adopted, covering the concrete political and socio-economic contexts, policy strategies as well as patterns and trends of decentralization/recentralization.

The book consists of 11 chapters arranged in four major parts. In Part One, the introductory chapter of the book, the editor Mok gives a critical review of the notions of centralization and decentralization. He caveats that that centralization and decentralization in educational governance are in reality complicated processes that appear in great variations, as reflected in the volume. Then, he outlines the structure and highlights the major arguments of the different chapters in the book.

Part Two, Education Reforms and Changing Education Systems, includes 5 chapters that examine recent reforms and changes in education systems in different Chinese societies. In particular, the authors conceptualize and reflect on the kind of strategies the governments of the selected societies have employed to implement their chosen decentralization policy.

In chapter 2, Leung presents a case study of school management reform in Hong Kong, which indicates that school decentralization is a highly political process. Chapter 3 by Weng gives a comprehensive review of educational reform and policy changes in Taiwan over the past two decades, and draws attention to some disparities between intentions and outcomes of adopted decentralization policy or strategies. In Chapter 4, Tang focuses on the social origins and developments of Macau's educational system, and identifies a co-existence of the paradoxical process of centralization and decentralization regarding education governance. Similarly, chapter 5 by Ngok and Chan also note a co-existence of decentralizing and centralizing trends in the most recent educational policy change in the metropolitan city of Shanghai. According to them, the paradoxical

processes reflect the government's concern over such conflicting issues as autonomy and quality assurance. In chapter 6, Kwong highlights an imbalance between the educational developments and educational opportunities for women in mainland China. The author argues that women have not benefited commensurately from economic growth and subsequent educational reforms over the past decades.

Part Three, *Changing Governance in Higher Education*, contains 4 chapters that concentrate on issues of governance in higher education. The discussions deal with changing relationships between the state, the economy and civil society. They point to a transition of governance from the conventional state "control model" to alternative modes of "privatization" and "decentralization" in higher education.

In chapter 7, Lee and Gopinathan conceptualize the proposed policy change for university governance in Singapore as a process of "centralized decentralization". Such a process is shaped to balance between such paradoxes as autonomy and accountability. Based on a comparative study of Hong Kong and Taiwan, Lo and Tai argue in Chapter 8 that the higher educational sector in the two societies is also experiencing a mixed process of "decentralization" and "recentralization". In chapter 9, Postiglione reviews recent developments in university governance with reference to Hong Kong and mainland China, and argues for greater diversity in forms of governance. Chapter 10 by Yang reports on some important moves in university governance of mainland China since the 1980s, and illustrates that decentralization policy has resulted in more autonomy on one hand, and on the other hand, a further widening gap between universities in developed and underdeveloped regions.

Part Four presents the editor's conclusion for the book. In this chapter, Mok synthesizes development experiences of the Chinese societies covered in the whole volume, highlighting the similarities as well as differences in patterns and policy implications of decentralization. The author argues that despite some apparent similarities in the trend of decentralization, a closer look into the developments in the selected Chinese societies reveals different political agendas and subsequent motives. It also shows that the nation state remains a powerful actor in efforts to resolve the tensions involved in educational developments at various levels.

To sum up, the Chinese societies covered in this book respond to demands of globalization and a knowledge-based economy with various initiatives of reforms in educational systems in general and educational governance in particular. Those initiatives follow a basic policy of decentralization which is underpinned by prevailing ideologies of neo-liberalism, managerialism and economic rationalism (MoK, 2003:4-6). They involve such efforts as restructuring educational systems, mobilizing multiple social forces and devising new measures and mechanisms for quality control in the educational sector.

On the other hand, the seemingly common trend of decentralization sees variations in motives, strategies as well as patterns of educational developments in the selected Chinese societies. Such variations are found in concurrent processes like "privatization", "marketization", "recentralization" or "centralized versus

decentralization". These varied processes are largely attributed to the specifics of political, social, cultural and historical backgrounds of the Chinese societies concerned.

A recurrent theme in this book is a paradox between implementation of decentralization policy and maintaining quality of education, and a subsequent co-existence of decentralization and recentralization in educational governance. An overriding message from this book is that it is necessary to observe the specifics at individual places while examining global trends of decentralization. This echoes with the reminder given by the editor of this series of studies and this volume respectively that the prevailing policy of decentralization is neither grounded in evidence-informed research nor shared consensus over the relative effectiveness of centralization or decentralization (pp.xi, 3). The book offers the caveat that the existing practices of centralization or decentralization should better not be deemed as universal or irresistible solutions to challenges for educational sectors worldwide.

It is interesting to note that the Chinese societies covered in the papers include the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions (SAR), Taiwan and city-state Singapore at large, as well as cities like Shanghai in specific. And they involve governments at different levels. These societies are chosen out of two criteria of comparability: their "Chineseness" defined by a predominant population of ethnic Chinese and their status as newly industrializing economies in East Asia (p.3). Evidently, the selection of "Chinese societies" in this volume is based more on their comparability of ethnographic and socio-economic backgrounds than their political and ethnic affiliations.

The book is basically a critical review of educational development in the selected Chinese societies in the broader context of globalization and the knowledge economy, and the global trend of decentralization policy in the education sector. It not only furnishes data on recent developments in educational reforms, but also an historical review of the educational systems of those societies, including statistics from official sources available in the tables and figures throughout the book. The volume serves as a valuable source of reference for international readers, particularly academics and educational policymakers/administrators who are interested in the education sector of the selected Chinese societies, but are inconvenienced by access to first hand information or unfamiliarity with the Chinese societies, especially mainland China.

The contributors of this volume are mostly scholars from the selected Chinese societies (and Hong Kong in particular), who have received academic training in the mainstream western traditions. They boast of a unique perspective of an insider and outsider and bi-competencies in the languages and academic cultures involved. Hence, they are able to adequately interpret the educational developments that occur in those different Chinese contexts, and then to represent their research findings in a style of rhetoric familiar to the mainstream international readers. The shortage of such bilingually and biculturally competent researchers partly accounts for a paucity of academic literature on and from the Chinese societies that are readily accessible to mainstream international readers.

Yang (pp.157-200) raises a similar concern over lack of publications from Chinese mainland academics available in the mainstream international research community. In this sense, it is desirable to see a growing body of academic literature on Chinese societies, as well as increasing diversity in its sources, genres, perspectives, methodologies, and arguments.

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Hallak, Jacques & Muriel Poisson (2007) *Corrupt Schools, Corrupt Universities: What Can Be Done?* Paris: Institute for International Educational Planning. Paris: Institute for International Educational Planning, 2007. Pages: 321. ISBN 10-92-803-1296-0.

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The book by Hallak and Poisson summarizes the findings from an international project undertaken by the Institute for International Educational Planning with participating institutions and individuals that represent about twenty five countries around the world. It attempts a synthesis of accumulated knowledge on corruption, including that received from observations, surveys, interviews, discussions, seminars, international symposia, and study tours.

The structure of the book reveals its attempt to grasp a wide variety of misdeeds in education that may be considered as corrupt. The first chapter explains the term corruption and why it is harmful to the society; it reveals its magnitude, places corruption in national and institutional settings and provides initial examples of corruption in education. The second chapter attempts to form a conceptual framework for the research and pinpoint opportunities that exist for corruption in education. The authors apply basics of the method of analysis and synthesis in order to capture most forms and instances of corruption in education.

The third chapter focuses on possible methodological approaches to study corruption, including those used in field research, and tools to estimate and diagnose corruption in educational institutions. The fourth chapter deals with issues of educational funding, including diversification of sources of revenue and decentralized financing. The fifth chapter presents a set of suggestions for educational management and administration, including issues of transparency, accountability, and code of conduct. The sixth chapter continues consideration of managerial issues in education, focusing on auxiliary enterprises, essential for the education sector, such as construction, provision of textbooks and teaching materials, and even school meals. This chapter reveals possible niches for abuse in

subcontracting, procurement and disbursement, and provides initial examples of embezzlement and fraud. The seventh chapter concentrates on higher education, including corruption in access, educational process, and credentials, and considers design and proper implementation of standardized national examinations aimed at curbing corruption in admissions and reducing inequalities in access to higher education. It also emphasizes academic integrity and honor codes. The eighth chapter outlines causes and consequences of private tutoring for education and offers suggestions for regulating private tutoring and reducing the need for it. The final chapter aims to provide some specific suggestions and guidelines for countering corruption in academia, including the twelve recommendations to policy-makers and educational managers.

The book is more managerial than theoretical in its content, structure, and language. It uses operational definitions of education corruption, even though there are some attempts to form a conceptual framework. The book uses language of a report rather than of a scholarly inquiry, but at the same time extends far beyond the report.

The book does not contain such terms as professional inadequacy, conflict of interest, white collar crime, marketization, commercialization, and commoditization. This is explained by the fact that the book does not consider corruption in education in the socio-economic context. Corrupt practices presented by the authors are not contextualized. Corruption is an interdisciplinary subfield, but the authors seem to ignore the multiple lenses that can be applied to corruption in education. As a result, an interdisciplinary approach is absent. There are some problems in terminology as well: embezzlement of public goods is by definition impossible. The authors simply included public goods with public resources (p. 30) and public services (p. 46).

Mapping is the most significant section of the work and presents a wide range of corrupt practices and opportunities. The book is unarguably the most comprehensive source of knowledge about education corruption to date, pointing to numerous niches where the abuse may be found. Nevertheless, some significant areas are left unattended.

First, the book does not touch on the issue of corruption in doctoral programs and conferring of doctoral degrees, even though some of the aspects of corruption in doctoral education potentially fall into the presented categories, such as access, entry examinations, and such. This is a huge issue that has deep historical roots and now accounts for a significant portion of abuse in education. So far there are no scholarly publications on the issue, but there are a few media reports including those focused on diploma mills, accreditations, credential evaluation, and mutual recognition of academic degrees.

Second, abuse of public property is narrowed down to embezzlement, mismanagement, and usage of school premises for private tutoring. The book

misses the whole section of public property abuse in terms of renting out educational facilities for unrelated purposes, including student dormitories, premises, and land. The land issue is fundamental and is faced by the educational sector throughout the world, since education systems are predominantly public in most of the countries. Property rights of educational institutions are of key importance for the transition from public to private, from state to market.

Third, little attention is paid to standardized national tests. Such tests are considered as instrumental in fighting corruption in admissions, but appear to be vulnerable to corruption themselves. While the issue of property rights delineation is fundamental, the tests are crucially important for successful reforms. Private tutoring takes a whole chapter that points to such factors as fatigue of teachers, low quality of instruction, and tutoring as a form of extortion. However, private tutoring is common not only in schools, but in colleges as well and often constitutes conflict of interest.

The question posited by the authors in the title of the book 'What can be done?' anticipates a political activist agenda. Suggestions are focused mostly on control, transparency, accountability, and personal and organizational ethics while the real solution to the problem of education corruption may be in the market reforms.

Despite certain pitfalls and omitted areas, the book is groundbreaking, because the authors enter the uncharted waters of the world of academia, once known as the ivory tower and now riddled with corruption. It is an encyclopedia of corruption in education rather than a scholarly work. It constructs a complex mosaic of facts and references and represents the first attempt to systematize accumulated knowledge about education corruption throughout the world.

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