
Preface

I welcome the opportunity to introduce this timely book to its readership. The People's Republic of China has seen great changes to its economy and society in the decades since Deng Xiaoping set it on a new course with his call for reform within the country and to open up to the world outside. China is now one of the world's largest economies, second only to the United States of America, and is an important member of the G20 group of advanced countries. It also plays a leading role in international agencies, such as the United Nations, where it is a member of the Security Council, and not least here at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). China's transformation has aroused great interest internationally and there have been many books published in recent years describing and commenting on the Chinese experience in all aspects of economic, social and political life.

The system of education in China with its achievements and challenges has been a very important focus of both academic and policy attention by the Chinese themselves, by other governments, by international agencies, and by foreign scholars, often in collaboration with their Chinese colleagues. Two aspects serve as examples. First, there has been the continuing phenomenon of Chinese students studying abroad in very large numbers, together with related opportunities for cooperation in higher education exchange and development. Secondly, there is great international interest in the success of the Shanghai region in the international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests for schoolchildren. These and other aspects of Chinese education reform and expansion have seen the publication of many academic articles, books and policy reports, together with less firmly based, even sensational, journalistic commentaries.

This book offers something qualitatively different in that it provides, for the first time, a detailed, comprehensive, and critical commentary on Chinese education in all of its many aspects. Each chapter gives the reader a clear account of developments in the specific area of education under consideration, together with a review of research-based knowledge of the problems faced, and possible solutions. The book also considers the economic and social impact of educational change in China, and its role in achieving social justice and a harmonious society. The exceptional cases of the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and of Macau

are also considered. A further significant aspect of the book is that it is an excellent example of academic cooperation between Chinese, British, and American scholars.

The lead editor, Professor W. John Morgan, is very well known for his academic work in comparative education and for his policy work promoting education as a significant factor in international cooperation and development. He has had a long engagement with China, both on the Mainland and in Hong Kong. I have had the pleasure of working with Professor Morgan for years, while he chaired the United Kingdom's National Commission for UNESCO and co-chaired a Senior Experts' Group established a few years ago by UNESCO's Director-General, Mme Irina Bokova. In 2015 the Group published its report, *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (UNESCO Publishing, Paris). This served as a great contribution to the conceptualization of the Education 2030 agenda of the United Nations. Whenever we met, Professor Morgan talked about his research on Chinese education development enthusiastically and shared with me his new findings and far-sighted vision. I sincerely congratulate him on this new achievement.

The Chinese co-editors, Dr Fengliang Li and Professor Qing Gu, are both younger scholars, yet already known for their academic work in this field. Furthermore, I note that many of the book's contributors are based in China and that every effort has been made to draw upon Chinese research and to consider issues from Chinese perspectives. The book is a very important contribution to knowledge and understanding of education in China that will be of exceptional value to the international readership which it aims to reach.

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