

BOOK REVIEW

Education in East Asia

by Pei-tseng Jenny Hsieh (2013), 336 pp. ISBN: 978-144-1140-09-8
London: Bloomsbury.

This is the third book in the series *Education around the World*, a collection of volumes which is ultimately designed to look at education in virtually every territory of the world. Overall, the series is edited and guided by Colin Brock who, in the first book in the series *A Comparative Introduction*, clearly sets the style for what is a group of regional studies - of which the book reviewed here is one. The reader is advised to read the specific studies in the context of the original *Introduction*, which helpfully describes the relationship between international and comparative education and provides a context for reading the subsequent books in the series.

The publication of this book is timely. The region within which the countries exist has, of course, experienced rapid economic development in recent times with the consequent influences on the provision of education in both national and international systems of school and higher education. The growing impact of such centres of excellence in the study of comparative and international education as the University of Hong Kong, several universities in Singapore, China, Taiwan and Japan, together with the relatively newly-created Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education (CRICE) at the University of Malaya, underscores the relevance of such publications as this one, on a regional basis.

The countries represented in the book are China (with Hong Kong), Macao, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan, territories which, perhaps surprisingly, share more significant features of cultural and linguistic homogeneity than may at first seem likely to be the case, with strong Confucianist undertones. Each of the chapter authors has addressed, at some level, the history and development of the education system for the individual national systems represented, together with an analysis of current trends and anticipated futures. That in itself provides a useful source of information for anyone interested in learning more about the general features of the systems of education in this region of the world. But it is in the detail provided by the writers that the reader will also be able to identify the subtle diversities which characterize the unique features of each of the education systems described and the valuable insights gained through the experience of those contributing. It will therefore form a valuable reference source for current developers and researchers.

One of the characteristics normally associated with books of this kind, which set out to present current thinking in the countries involved, is the problem of quoted statistics (employed to justify trends) becoming rapidly out of date. In a region which is growing so rapidly in social, economic and cultural terms that is particularly apposite. A particularly helpful feature in this volume is the provision of extensive references for further reading, many of which source websites which can be accessed by readers for up-to-date information; this will be a boon for researchers especially, as the current emphasis on 'big data' promotes increasing importance in global comparison and competitive studies. The compilation of what is a series of national educational vignettes requires skillful editorial management and this has been successfully accomplished without in any way limiting the individual style and content that each writer has brought to their contribution.

Issues which are explored by many, if not all, contributors include the relationship between compulsory schooling and higher education, the legacies of previous colonial powers, participation rates in schooling, admission and selection for higher education, aspects of vocational training and career preparation in relation to general academic education, language policies, parental expectations, the role of government in its determination of national education, assumptions concerning the assessment of student achievement within such highly competitive environments

arising from the expectations of parents and teachers alike, together with the relationship between national curricula and the prevailing socio-economic forces in the countries described. There is, therefore, a rich offering for readers to reflect upon, especially for those who are operating in largely Western-oriented contexts, where familiar assumptions concerning, for example, styles of learning and teaching will be challenged by the description of the prevailing approaches in the countries included.

Although not a major stated objective of this book, the locating of the valuable information and insights to be gained from these descriptions and analyses of the countries within the framework of the current internationalisation and globalization debate across education more widely, could further have extended the appeal of the book. That slight reservation does not in any way detract from this contribution to the literature from a part of the world that will certainly prove to be of interest and value to all those seeking to understand the rapid developments that are taking place in a region of burgeoning change.

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