

The Development of Comparative Education in Greater China: A Brief Historical Account

China

The early roots of comparative education of China can date back to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) and the Tang Dynasty (618-906). For example, the introduction of Indian Buddhism to Chinese education. The importation of educational ideas and practices continued with China's increasing contacts with the world until the Chinese Communist Party took power and founded the new China (Bray and Gui, 2001: 454). In the 1950s and early 1960s, comparative education mainly referred to the learning of Soviet educational theories and practices. At the time, comparative education divisions or units were established in universities, and journals like *Educational Translation Series* (Waiguo Jiaoyu Yecong) and *Foreign Education Developments* (Waiguo Jiaoyu Dongtai) were published. Such series were largely abolished during the Cultural Revolution with educational institutions shut down and educators "re-educated" in order to follow the communist ideology (Jing & Zhou, 1985: 241-242).

Comparative education has started to resume its development since the adoption of Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, but what was being studied at that moment was more accurately regarded as "foreign education" than "comparative education". The four major journals in the field were named *Foreign Education Developments*, *Foreign Education*, *Foreign Education: Information and Reference*, and *Studies of Foreign Education*. In terms of research topics of these four journals, "comparative education" constituted only a very small share of the publications from 1979 to 1989, ranging from less than one percent to a little more than five percent (Chen, 1994). It is worth

mentioning that after the Beijing Normal University's journal *Foreign Education Conditions* was renamed as *Comparative Education Review* in 1992, its circulation dropped abruptly from about 10,000 to 5,000, reflecting that the academic circle by then was merely keen on knowing more about foreign education than on a more sophisticated approach of comparative studies (Bray & Gui, 2001: 457).

Although China has opened its door since the 1980s and become more engaging with the rest of the world, the flow of ideas between China and the rest of the world, especially the Western world, has been unbalanced. According to Bray's observations:

Chinese scholars were influenced by Western traditions much more than Western scholars were influenced by Chinese traditions, and the number of books translated from Chinese to English was considerably smaller than the number translated from English to Chinese. (Bray, 2005: 43)

One reason is that there are difficulties for Chinese scholars to reach out to the world due to lack of financial resources and institutional support (Gu, 2003). Another reason is that there are few English publications in the field in China; English academic journals are mostly written by overseas or Hong Kong Chinese experts rather than by local scholars.

Taiwan

Comparative education in the Republic of China dates back to the 1930s, when universities started to launch related courses and scholars wrote and edited academic books. In the 1960s, translated academic works started to appear in Taiwan while local works started to flourish since the 1980s (Yang & Shen, 1996: 385-387). Until the early 1990s, courses about comparative