

Chapter five puts local Christianity in dialogue with global missionary efforts through a close analysis of one American Christian mission with long-term presence in contemporary Xiamen. While the American mission seeks local links (for example with local Chinese churches), it also consciously positions itself as foreign, aware of the aspirations of local youth in relation to learning English, going abroad, and their yearning for a cosmopolitan lifestyle. While historical missions made great efforts to adapt and assimilate, this is not the case of contemporary foreign missions in Xiamen. The chapter contains very enlightening findings on the role English-language teaching plays in the mission but also about the importance of language in relation to the perceived acceptability of the gospel among the local population. For young people, as Liu notes, Christianity reflects their desire to be in touch with the modern West and to participate in global integration (p. 172) while for older local Christians, their sense of belonging to a global Christianity is facilitated through their yearnings for their Christian past.

In the conclusion, Liu makes some reference to more recent developments while (due to the timing of his research) not being able to fully answer the questions that arise in the reader's mind about the extent to which much of what was true about state–church relations at the local level in the early 2010s continues to hold in the much more restrictive environment following the strict mandate to “Sinify” all religions. Overall, this is a wonderful new resource for all scholars of Chinese religion and historians of China more generally. It is a beautiful example of how contemporary ethnographic work combined with historical archival research can produce some of the most pertinent and insightful portraits of state–society relations and their co-production of memory, history and identity.

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The Chinese Idea of a University: Phoenix Reborn

Rui Yang. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022. 164 pp. HK\$550.00 (hbk). ISBN 9789888754298

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This is a crucial book about the essential ideas inherent in Chinese higher education. The book's title pays homage to John Henry Newman's collection of essays (*The Idea of a University*, Gateway Editions, 1999 [1852]) emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge for its intrinsic value and the belief that the quest for truth is a fundamental aspect of education. There are books in Chinese about the “idea of a Chinese university” (*Zhongguo daxue linian*), but this is the first in English to advocate a major change in course for Chinese higher education.

The subtitle, *Phoenix Reborn*, aligns with the great rejuvenation discourse of confidence and ideological resilience that highlights a rich and glorious educational heritage – one that deserves to be better understood by the global academy. With a focus on broader cultural issues, the book surpasses the conventional discussions around the seemingly incompatible interpretations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy between Chinese and Western cultures.

The book argues that the Anglo-American model is responsible for value chaos and confusion, cultural conflicts and a feeling of homelessness among Chinese academics in universities. For Rui Yang, fundamental epistemological differences prevent Chinese higher education from assimilating with its hegemonic Western counterpart, namely the Anglo-American-German model found almost

everywhere. But he believes there is a space in the global academy for a dignified integration of Chinese and Anglo-American higher education. Reading between the lines, the preference would be for a harmonious integration. Given the many references in the book to cultural conflicts, the alternative would probably be an impact-integration. Whatever form of integration takes place, it had better trigger an explosion of ideas and innovations to address the global crises of our age, including climate change, poverty and inequality, safety and food insecurity, and health and nuclear proliferation.

The five chapters of this book should be required reading for scholars and scientists who plan to engage with Chinese higher education in the coming years. The book is well argued and clearly written. The first chapter provides a concise coverage of the cultural legacy and historical essence of educational institutions, including the *taixue*, *guozijian* and *shuyuan*, as well as the influence of Chinese ideas on Korea and Japan. It traces the educational heritage of a civilization that led the world economy for more than a dozen centuries with a system of educating, examining and promoting talent to serve state and society. Confucianism may have produced a complacency that responded ineffectively to the incursion of West, but what stands out overall is the stubborn resistance and dogged persistence that explains the vulnerability and resiliency of Chinese higher education.

The first chapter also highlights the close relationship since antiquity between education and the government. In the Chinese civilizational state, higher education institutions are a subsidiary body of a bureaucratic system. The second chapter reviews the perceptions toward foreign universities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as new ideas began to anchor themselves in China. The third chapter looks at the academic discussions among Chinese and foreign scholars about the ideals of higher learning in China. The fourth chapter describes the manner in which convergence occurred with the Western model as told by the voices of Chinese academics who work in universities outside of the Chinese mainland.

The fifth chapter, the jewel in the book, is comprised of new data – the varied voices and nuanced perspectives of contemporary Chinese academics, administrators and senior managers in different Chinese mainland universities with diverse educational backgrounds. The way the interview data is presented and analysed to build theory leaves no doubt in the concluding chapter that the Chinese model will continue to resist mainstream higher education, especially the catch-up mentality and foreign-designed ranking systems. The root of the problem, as Yang sees it, is that Chinese universities “are patterned after the Western model without integrally linking to their indigenous cultures” (p. 113).

It is perhaps ironic that the Anglo-American model of higher education also finds itself under siege both internally, by cultural minorities struggling to re-indigenize it, and externally, by conservative state governments in the US to exorcise what are perceived to be dangerous liberal ideas. Despite the epistemological dissonance referred to in the book, Chinese students remain the most numerous foreign students in Anglo-American universities. William Kerr of Harvard University credits more than ten per cent of US inventions today to Chinese heritage scientists. That might persuade some to argue that cultural conflict and epistemological dissonance are the lifeblood of universities.

Hong Kong is often referred to in this book as an illustrative case – a Western bilingual university system anchored in a Chinese society. With a near equal number of academic staff from Hong Kong, overseas and the Chinese mainland (most with degrees from foreign universities), five Hong Kong universities rank among the world’s top hundred. It is befitting that the book is published by Hong Kong University Press, which belongs to the most international university in the world (according to *Times Higher Education*).

This book speaks to higher learning everywhere and reminds the global academy that no one civilization has the lock on the ideas about equality, rights, autonomy and sovereignty that guide higher education. The thousands of years of Chinese experience recounted in this book provide lessons on how ideas never cease to be claimed, and that it is the struggle to uphold these ideas that matters most.

As the world faces potentially existential challenges, there is a danger of myths abounding about the sacred nature of the Anglo-American or Chinese ideas of higher learning. They are both

“exceptionalism” in different ways. It is better that exceptionalism is rooted in culturally anchored values rather than weaponized for culture wars. Declaring exceptionalism does less to inspire than to actually *be* exceptional.

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The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University

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Daniel A. Bell's *The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University* is a unique contribution to our understanding of China's higher education system and to the field of Chinese studies more generally. Bell, a well-known scholar of Confucian philosophy, was a faculty member teaching courses at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing when he was asked to serve as the Dean of Shandong University's School of Political Science and Public Administration. Shandong Province is the historical heartland of Confucianism, the birthplace of both Confucius and Mencius. The people of the province hold Confucius and his followers in high regard, and, in fact, the Party secretary of Shandong University at the time of Bell's hiring was a 76th-generation descendant of Confucius. Bell's hiring for this position is noteworthy because he is a Canadian citizen with no Chinese ancestry. While many international administrators of Chinese ethnicity have worked at Chinese universities over the past few decades, only a handful of Westerners with no Chinese ancestry have held comparable administrative positions.

As the reference to “confessions” in the book's subtitle suggests, there is a self-critical and light-hearted tone to portions of the book, especially in Bell's recounting of his own “bungles and misunderstandings” as an international dean in Shandong (p. 3). This confessional tone is most evident in chapters on hair dye, alcohol consumption and “cuteness,” but it is also evident in the chapter on collective leadership, wherein he states that he lacked the energy for a key component of the dean's job, to be “always on call and ready for four-hour meetings” (p. 59).

Although the confessional elements of the book are rather light-hearted, Bell's chief concern is to “de-demonize” our understanding of China's political system (p. 17) – a timely, serious and challenging task. Bell's efforts to this end are most evident in the chapters on collective leadership, corruption, censorship and academic meritocracy, which should be read carefully and with an open mind by anyone interested in contemporary China and by Western officials responsible for formulating government policy toward China. In these chapters Bell contends that the Confucian ideal of meritocracy, common to the imperial era although tempered by the strictures of Legalism, is now firmly embedded in the CCP too, and that selection and promotion for leadership positions, whether in China's educational system or in other government institutions, is determined through merit earned in the performance of one's duties. Bell argues the effectiveness and legitimacy of China's form of governance is due to personnel promotion through China's bureaucratic structures based on selection for talent, skills, hard work, and especially through a dedicated commitment to