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EXPLORING CROSS-NATIONAL ATTRACTION IN EDUCATION: Some Historical Comparisons of American and Chinese Attraction to Japanese Education. By Jeremy Rappleye; series editor, David Phillips. Oxford (UK): Sumposium Books, 2007. 92 p. (Illus.). ISBN 9781873927168.

'Cross-national attraction' is a term that has been explored particularly by David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs at the University of Oxford's Department of Education. This is where Jeremy Rappleye's comparative study on American and Chinese attraction to Japanese education takes its starting point. The underlying question of the study is: 'Why is it that particular countries become interested in the educational systems of particular other countries at particular times?' (21) 'Attraction' is defined as 'a systematic and explicit attempt to understand the other.' (19) Through comparing two instances of attraction over time – the United States and China – Rappleye intends to identify 'variables in attraction' (21). The time frame of the study spans from Japan's Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the present. As if this project was not exciting enough, Rappleye legitimizes his study by linking it to issues of globalization and to the emerging 'Asian century' (10).

Rappleye proceeds, after a short introduction, by discussing the models that have been designed by Phillips and Ochs to conceptualize educational transfer. These models depict rather ideal types of countries looking at one another. In the four-step sequence of attraction, decision, implementation, and internalization, there seem to be clear-cut inter-national boundaries, and decisions appear to be taken deliberately. In part, this picture reflects the wishful thinking of the actors themselves who are involved in transfer processes. For example, Rappleye quotes the eminent Chinese comparativist Gu Mingyuan: 'Only those cultures that are beneficial to China should be selected, absorbed, transformed and ultimately integrated into China's cultural system.' (55) Is this going to work? Of course it isn't. Doing culture is not like building a house and choosing the right materials for it.

Rightly, Rappleye points to the mechanical notion of 'attraction' in these models. Likewise, he criticizes the absence of human agency. He takes up this point in practice when analyzing, in chapters 3 to 6, American and Chinese attraction to Japanese education. Particularly in chapter 4, Rappleye succeeds in showing that the intense American attraction to Japan in the 1980s was not merely a consequence of Japan's economic boost, but also reflected 'the Far Right attack on American public schools initiated by the Reagan Administration.' (39) No new finding, as Rappleye himself admits, but a good reminder that the Self is as crucial as the Other when 'attraction' takes place.

Rappleye is less convincing in the Chinese case. Although he does mention 'conservatives' and 'liberals' (48) as two different groups of actors who were attracted to one and the same, the Japanese, model, human agency remains underexplored. While the study avoids to speak of the 'United States' as a collective actor, we frequently find China in exactly that role: a 'China' that was slow or lazy in launching reforms, a 'China' that hosted Confucianism over 'two thousand years of inertia'. (65) This not only neglects all the past actors who over the centuries practiced different notions of Confucianism and the state. It also points to two more severe problems of this otherwise illustrative and readable study: time frame and sources.

Given the brevity of the study, the time span of 150 years is extremely ambitious. Rappleye is right to underline the importance of the historical dimension. But it might have been wiser to narrow the focus down to a specific topic. Otherwise, important correctives to Rappleye's story get lost. For example, there was no 'long period of neglect' (48) in the Chinese attraction to Japanese education between 1922 to the late 1970s. On the contrary, there was a continued, if not intensified interest in Japanese industrial and vocational education in the 1920s and 1930s, and even in the 1950s and 1960s, amidst anti-imperialist propaganda, central journals like *People's Education* printed articles on Japan. This leads to the second problem, the sources. Since Rappleye relies entirely on other scholars' research for

his analysis of past developments, his study is, strictly speaking, an investigation of how Chinese or American scholars view their country's attraction to Japan. Only insufficient knowledge of sources can produce erroneous statements like 'in the Chinese case, linguistic, geographic, and social similarities with Japan have never been cited as a reason to borrow.'

(66) In his famous pamphlet on studies abroad from 1895, the well-known reformer Zhang Zhidong presented exactly geographic proximity and linguistic affinity as motivation to study in Japan. Even more importantly, Zhang recommended Japan since it had already sifted through Western knowledge successfully and could therefore spare the Chinese students much effort. Decades later, this argument was reiterated with regard to the Soviet Union – a parallel that is overlooked in Rappleye's study.

Comparing cross-national attraction is a highly fascinating undertaking. Rappleyes's trio deserves much more space to test the insights and hypotheses that are discussed in the concluding chapter and that are skillfully linked back to Phillips's and Ochs's theoretical models. There is much inspiration to be drawn from ideas and models also outside the field of comparative education, such as ethnology, where 'transfer' is conceptualized in much more dynamic ways. Hopefully, we will hear more about this.

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