

Learners' privilege and responsibility: A critical examination of the experiences and perspectives of learners from Chinese backgrounds in the United States.

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According to the Institute of International Education (2013), Chinese students from K-12 to higher education account for approximately 25% of all international students in the United States. As a result, it is imperative that educators show concern and support for them, as they are shaped by the culture of their home country and challenged by the culture of their adopted country. While researchers have explored how to help socialize English language learners into the American education system either for learning or teaching purposes (e.g., Harklau, 2003; Reinhardt & Zander, 2011), few have focused on Chinese students in the United States. Ma and Wang's (2014) *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility*, which includes contributions from several international scholars, fills this gap by presenting a wide scope of research topics on Chinese students from K-12 to higher education. This book aims to reveal "the complexity of this group of students and the challenges they face as a whole" (p. xiii), while at the same time suggesting how their academic and social challenges in the United States can be addressed by taking into account their prior educational and social experiences in China.

Indeed, as a book that systematically addresses academic literacy challenges as well as social challenges faced by Chinese students, *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* is well structured and contextualized for educators or interested readers who seek sociocultural explanations for these challenges (e.g., language learning, teaching, and socialization with American peers). The book unfolds in four parts, preceded by a preface that emphasizes its goal and the importance of helping researchers or readers gain insight into the complexity of how Chinese students negotiate their cultural and academic meaning making experiences in the United States. The first part of the book supplies contextual information regarding Chinese students in the United States. The second section focuses on their learning challenges in higher education. The third component highlights their learning experiences in K-12 or community engagement, and the fourth part demonstrates the challenges they face teaching undergraduate courses (e.g., Chinese) and constructing identity in the United States. Indeed, in terms of organization and coverage, *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* presents a wide array of issues concerning the learning, teaching and socialization endeavors of Chinese students in the United States.

More specifically, Part I in *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* includes two chapters. In Chapter 1, Ma and Wang, the editors, begin by illustrating why this book is needed given the increasing number of Chinese students in the United States, and briefly touch on its organization along the way. In Chapter 2, Gordon provides a historical, cultural, and economic context for Chinese immigrants flowing into the United States, which includes details about why and how they immigrate, the personal challenges they face, and how the current generation of Chinese students differ from earlier generations. As the introductory section of the book, Part I provides a solid basis for readers to understand what follows.

Part II of *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* includes five chapters (Chapter 3 to Chapter 7) that focus on the learning experiences and challenges faced by Chinese students in

higher education, tracking these students' home culture for possible explanations concerning their difficulties in the American educational setting. For example, Chapters 3 and 4 both illustrate the academic and non-academic challenges Chinese undergraduate students face at the American university level, connecting their academic performance to factors such as English proficiency, social life, and cultural adaptations. However, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 differ in terms of their research setting and emphasis. That is, Chapter 3 by Lin was set in an American non-research university, emphasizing Chinese students' non-academic financial and emotional challenges. But the study presented in Chapter 4 by Foulkrod and Ma was conducted in an American research university, highlighting Chinese students' academic challenges, such as Chinese students' lack of confidence in speaking up and actively participating in classrooms.

Chapters 5 and 6, on the other hand, address Chinese graduate students' English language learning experiences in the United States. That is, in Chapter 5, Wang and Zuo, through a case study of five Chinese doctoral students who were learning academic English, show that these doctoral students struggle with speaking (e.g., pronunciation of the retroflex *r* sound in English) and listening (e.g., understanding slang expressions in English), hindering their in-class participation and social interaction. Similarly, in Chapter 6, Wang and Beckett report how a lack of presentation skills influences Chinese students' graduate studies. In response to such language challenges, both Chapters 5 and 6 suggest that Chinese students need to reflect on their English learning processes in both China and the United States and step out of their comfort zones to be more interactive so as to improve their communicative competence in English. With a similar focus on language issues, Hu and Smith in Chapter 7 present a Chinese graduate student's experiences of obtaining a teaching license in the United States, including how she negotiates her prior teaching experiences in China and the teaching requirements and practices in the American educational setting, especially in regards to interactions with American students, perceptions of teacher-student or teacher-parent relationships, and language issues.

Part III of *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility*, which includes Chapters 8 through 11, also explores Chinese students' learning experiences in the United States, but this section specifically investigates this phenomenon in the context of K-12 and community engagement. For example, Chapter 8 by Zheng presents a case study of the writing development of four kindergarten Chinese students in Chinese and ESL classes in an American public school and suggests that students' creative writing in both classes should be encouraged. Liu, in Chapter 9, investigates seven 1.5-generation Chinese immigrants' K-12 educational experiences in San Francisco. Finn, in Chapter 11, focuses on two older generation Chinese immigrants regarding their writing experiences in a community-based adult ESL class in New York. All three chapters imply that educators should take into account students' sociocultural backgrounds, such as their prior cultural experiences, personal goals, and current life situations, because all of these factors impact their participation in the classroom. Interestingly, in Part III, there is also a chapter (i.e., Chapter 10 by Summers, Prado, and Hayes) that details hosting experiences with Chinese visiting scholars in a short-term, summer program while also discussing the pedagogical implications of such a program for Chinese teachers of English as a Foreign Language. This case study suggests that American program administrators should be flexible in preparing logistical arrangements for these scholars, providing opportunities for them to socialize with American teachers.

Part IV of *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility*, which includes Chapter 12 to Chapter 15, differs from the previous sections in that it features autoethnography, a study of researchers' personal experiences, as opposed to a traditional approach that focuses on others. These autoethnographic analyses showcase Chinese graduate students' own teaching challenges (e.g., Chapters 12, 13, and 14) as well as the struggles they face on the way to becoming an American citizen (e.g., Chapter 15). In particular, in Chapter 12, Yu, through the lens of self-development, presents her exploration of works by international educators/philosophers Martin Heidegger, Lao Zi, and John Dewey, and reveals how she learned the importance of cross-cultural teaching differences. For example, classrooms are more teacher-dominated in China while they tend to be student-centered in the United States. Using the same approach, Chapter 13 by Chang, Bhandari and Tilley-Lubbs, provides a study of this chapter's first author (i.e., Chang), an old female adult immigrant's learning experiences in American higher education, and suggests that educators in the United States should take into account students' individual cultural and historical backgrounds (e.g., Chinese believe in the importance of education but many were not able to get an education because of China's Cultural Revolution in the 1970s). In a similar vein, in Chapter 14, Kang presents a case of her socialization process into an American teaching context, suggesting that Chinese culture, with its philosophy of self-criticism as a way of improvement and the belief in the superior authority of teachers in Chinese classrooms, has hampered this transition to being a good teacher in the United States. Following the same analytic framework, Coward, in Chapter 15, highlights her challenges (e.g., sense of isolation in school and community) in the process of adjustment to American culture and becoming an American citizen while striving to maintain her Chinese identity.

Indeed, *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* features engaging content with practical pedagogical implications. However, it also has two minor limitations. First, while the authors of the chapters in this book flexibly adopt different theoretical frameworks (e.g., self-directed learning in Chapter 5 and sociocultural theory in Chapter 7), these theoretical frameworks are not well elaborated on, which could possibly be due to space restrictions. For example, critical readers or researchers interested in the theoretical framework found in Chapter 7 might want an expansion of Gee's (2010) connection to "Discourse" (i.e., language-related social practices) and "discourse" (i.e., language in use) and the ways in which they inform how Chinese students are discursively shaped by their home country and how they adapt to learning in a new culture. Second, the methodology of some chapters is largely limited to case studies (e.g., Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). This approach, despite its wide application in educational research, suffers from limitations of universal generalizability (Yin, 1994). As Wang and Zuo (2014) also acknowledge in Chapter 5, "[d]ue to the limited scope of these investigations, readers need to be cautious in extending the findings to all Chinese students studying in the United States" (p.80).

Overall, *Learners' Privilege and Responsibility* addresses a variety of practical issues encountered by Chinese students in the United States. As such, those who are familiar with international education in the United States will likely find *Learner's Privilege and Responsibility* a crucial addition to research on multicultural literacy in this context. Given my own experiences as a Chinese student and university instructor in the United States, I would particularly recommend Parts I and II of the book to American educators who have Chinese students in their classroom, as it will enable them to better understand and communicate with their Chinese students by knowing how their learning practices are ideologically and culturally

shaped. Equally, I also recommend this book to teachers from China who are teaching in the United States, especially novice ones (e.g., teaching assistants), as Part III in particular should help them gain a fresh understanding of transcultural teaching practices in American classrooms. However, the audience need not be limited to educators, as anyone interested in Chinese student education will benefit from reading this inspiring book given the interesting and highly accessible topics that are covered.

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