

Chapter 4

Are Professors Prepared to Teach? Are Western Tutors the Best in the World?

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ABSTRACT

Chinese universities hire thousands of Western professors and tutors each year. This is to encourage different outcomes for Chinese graduates in terms of entrepreneurship, leadership, and opportunity. However, students who receive instruction from American lecturers find a very different experience from other Western faculty. So, in 2020 a survey was developed to ascertain the perspectives and instructional processes western tutors brought to Chinese universities. This 3,000-professor survey would determine how much learning knowledge students graduated with prior to becoming a professor, how much development they sought once professors, and how much integration of current teaching and learning methodologies and theorists were brought to the classroom, including online classrooms. Results indicated that faculty who were trained in countries such as Australia, England, Germany, or Spain had more learning knowledge prior to teaching, as well as continuing to seek learning information once teaching classrooms, than their American counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

Premier Deng Xiaoping opened the People's Republic of China to the western world in 1978. As the second most populous country on Earth, China has emerged as a world power. Little more than forty years later, China has become the second largest economy in the world and appears as only a matter of time before it will become the largest.

This economic boom has also seen tremendous growth for higher education. "In China, for example, enrollment has grown a stunning 500 percent since 2000. The country now has 40-million students spread across 2,600 campuses (Paquette, 2021)."

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However, one should not confuse size with satisfaction. Citizens of China are educated in ways that deter creativity, entrepreneurialism, and innovation, seeing early burnout and a lack of satisfying career choices, including lateral and upward movement. Despite China's double-digit, fiscal growth for more than two decades, its economy remains one that is labour intensive rather than knowledge intensive. The growth has been largely fueled by a large and cheap labour force, but not through innovation or technology. In other words, as the "world's factory," China has been making things mostly invented or designed elsewhere (Shenkar, 2006).

Dr. Yong Zhao, born in China's Sichuan Province, received a B.A. in English Language Education from Sichuan Institute of Foreign Languages in Chongqing, China in 1986. After six years of teaching English, Dr. Zhao traveled to the United States where he taught as a Visiting Scholar at Linfield College. He then began his graduate studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 1993 receiving an A.M. and Ph.D. in Education by 1996. Zhao, who has written extensively on the similarities, differences, and disparities between American and Chinese education systems has labeled the deltas as a "paradox (Zhao, 2012)." Currently serving as a Distinguished Professor in the School of Education at the University of Kansas and a professor in Educational Leadership at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education in Australia, Dr. Zhao points out that Chinese leaders consistently request his assistance regarding "American" educational strategies (Zhao, 2012). Specifically, academic, and political leaders from the largest populated country in the world desire more innovators, entrepreneurs, and start-ups, which would generate opportunities and leadership across multiple markets. Yet, concurrently, American academic and political leaders repeatedly ask Dr. Zhao how to create an educational system whereby students perform better on exams and tests, ideally leading to higher rankings internationally for K-20 education. In both contexts, Zhao cautions leaders to be careful what they wish for (Zhao, 2012).

Analyzing the consequences of exam-centric accountability on the creative and critical capacities of Chinese students, author Carol A. Mullen's book, "Creativity and Education in China (2017)" further describes this paradox for Chinese students-turned-citizens and serves as a cautionary tale. But both Zhao and Mullen consistently come back to the tutor, professor, or instructor. Most Chinese, classroom-based, tertiary professors follow a western model of lecture and testing, just as students are used to in their primary education experiences.

BACKGROUND

It is possible that learning is so individualistic, the assumption of mass education might be untenable. As the first chapter of this anthology points out, students demonstrate little measurable learning at all throughout the entirety of their education. Additionally, things that are memorized or learned, seem quickly and easily forgotten. This not only begs the question as to whether it was ever really learned at all, but importantly describes a problem that is not only facing Chinese education, but global education. Therefore, it is plausible that the differences in U.S. versus Chinese innovation, entrepreneurialism, and beyond have little to do with education and more to do with culture and opportunity. Yet the leadership of both nations still place the burden of change on education, with colleges and universities under pressure to produce a different kind of citizen.

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