## Reviews / Comptes rendus

## Chinese Learning Journeys: Chasing the Dream

edited by Feng Su (USA: Trentham Books Ltd., 2011, 154 pages)

Chinese Learning Journeys: Chasing the Dream is a simple book on the surface. It recounts the life stories of eight Chinese nationals studying in England. At first reading, these interesting but not so unusual accounts seem straightforward and anecdotal: The students travel abroad, study, and become academics or professionals. The apparent simplicity, however, is deceptive.

Recounted in uncomplicated, matter-of-fact language, the protagonists' reflections on their respective experiences are fascinating. As Jon Nixon discusses in the epilogue, these narratives encompass multiple levels of significance and have great resonance. As a university-level language instructor for more than two decades, I have taught many students whose stories are similar to those told in this book. Nevertheless, despite my experience, reading this work proved a rich source for reflection on many of the major cultural and educational issues of our time.

First of all, the stories all have China as a starting point. Although we treat our students as individuals, it is useful to remember the cultural and political context from which they come. All of these students are products of the great social and political upheavals that have shaped China during the last 70 years. They are a small-scale representation of China's entry onto the world stage as a superpower. There are echoes of these dramatic events in all the narratives, and the authors remain profoundly attached to their origins. It is people like these individuals who are now helping to shape what will likely be the major world power in the 21st century. Their "learning journeys" are thus a reminder that the future is always clearly and quietly at work in the present.

The book is also concerned with multiculturalism, multilingualism, and cultural border crossings. Interestingly, the stories show that many of the authors encountered these issues before they even arrived in England: speakers of Cantonese, regional dialects, or minority languages all had to confront the dominant Mandarin culture in China itself. Their subsequent arrival in England obviously presented other linguistic and cultural challenges that had to be faced and overcome. Particularly fascinating in this regard is the story of Mamtimyn Sunuodula, a Uyghur national who became a linguist and researcher.

At its core, this book also offers a profound reflection on learning and the transformational nature of learning. Through their respective experiences, the authors all developed analytical capabilities that allowed them to retain their culture despite adapting to, or at least understanding aspects of, Western culture—of which they are often quite critical. The transformative

nature of the students' learning experiences described in this book implicitly challenges the increasingly narrow and functional approach adopted by more and more Western universities as they apply a "business model" to higher education.

Chinese Learning Journeys: Chasing the Dream contains insights and observations that will appeal to academics, professors, and international students alike. As a complement to this volume, it would be interesting to read a similar collection of narratives about Chinese students who studied abroad but did not "succeed"; such accounts might help identify conditions for success that could be fostered and potential obstacles that could be diminished. Likewise, as more international students are going to China to study, their stories could one day provide interesting comparative material.

There is a Taoist proverb that says, "the journey is the reward." This wonderful collection of learning journeys, in which eight students find their respective dreams, confirms the truth of this saying.

Reviewed by Kevin Callahan, McGill University