



Culture and policy research

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Policy and politics go hand in hand. Policy is necessarily political, and politics are cultural. Cultural aspects are important since making policy is at least to some extent a cultural phenomenon. While in Western political organization individuals in positions of power have the right and even obligation to transmit their will to others within their jurisdiction through command, the primary mode of maintaining hierarchy in Chinese political organization is through self-cultivation. The Chinese tradition of bibliography or classification differs significantly from Western categorisation. The Chinese library, for example, known as the Imperial Catalogue of the Four Treasuries, classified knowledge into four areas: classics, philosophy, history and miscellaneous works. As more scholars in the Western world begin to study non-Western cultures, more attention and respect has come to the value of alternative intellectual traditions.

This is not to say that alternative cultural traditions cannot converge — what is sometimes termed “travelling policy” or “policy convergence”. Although the so-called “great convergence” has been on the lips of many, interpretations of it differ. Policies do not converge unilaterally. They converge due to a variety of international and transnational forces, especially when driven by international organizations such as the World Bank, and other regional development banks, as well as influential scholars. Peripheral societies are much more inordinately influenced by those in the centres. National governments work with international governmental organizations in differing ways. The approach of the Chinese national government, for example, contrasts with how the Indian or African governments handle development issues of aid and development. That difference, to a great extent, is because of culture. How they make decisions, how they learn from other people — all are influenced by culture.

Universities are essentially Western in concept. Begun in mediaeval Europe and very successfully exported – the style has been adopted almost everywhere. But while the basic concept has been copied, it is not always a good fit culturally. For non-Western societies it needs to be indigenized and that indigenization can be truly difficult, because culturally the concept is Western. During the past two and a half decades, Yang Rui contributed to deepening the understanding of higher education in East Asia generally and in China in particular. His book *The Third Delight* with Routledge in 2002 has remained the only comprehensive study of China's higher education internationalization. His recent work focuses on East Asia's bid for 'world-class' universities, paying close attention to historical cultural factors to argue that without an infusion of traditional education values, East Asian universities risk losing touch with their cultural contexts in their quest for international stature.

Yang Rui's policy research focuses on the cultural foundations of policy. Having grown up during the Cultural Revolution with parents who were teachers sent to the countryside, he left the countryside at 16 years old to go to university. He eventually learned about educational policy from working at the Ministry of Education and State Education Commission. At HKU, he is well positioned to look at China and Southeast Asia. With the university's geographical advantage, his scholarship has worked to reconcile the policy

underpinnings of Western and Eastern approaches to building systems of higher education.

With a track record on research at the interface of Chinese and Western traditions in education policy, Yang Rui has established his reputation among scholars

in English and Chinese national languages in the fields of comparative and international studies of higher education policy, especially in East Asia's Chinese societies. His research bridges the theoretical thrust of comparative higher education and the applied nature of education policy. In 2006, he was among the first to document in English how education policy is researched in the Chinese mainland. During 2008–2009, he interrogated the significant influence of international organizations on educational development in East and Southeast Asia. Since 2007, he has also written on how education policy could and should be compared across cultures.

Yang Rui's research has led to invitations from Japan's ministry of education, non-government organizations, universities, the World Bank, UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank, APEC Summit in Russia, and the UNESCO World Congress on higher education to discuss Chinese higher education.

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