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A REVIEW OF YUHAO CEN'S *STUDENT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION: COLLEGE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN CHINA*

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Book review of <i>Student Learning and Development in Chinese Higher Education: College Students' Experience in China</i>
Background	This book describes and interprets student learning and development as perceived by students in Chinese higher education institutions.
Impact on Society	Overall, this book appeals to higher education scholars from all countries and regions. It is a good resource for faculty in Chinese higher education institutions to deepen their understanding of undergraduate students and to promote their learning and development. Chinese student affairs professionals struggling with how to support the students they work with would benefit greatly from this book. Likewise, Chinese graduate students contemplating a career in higher education/student affairs would also benefit from reading this book. It also provides global higher education professionals a good perspective to understand Chinese higher education under the background of higher education globalization.
Keywords	student experience, student learning and development, Chinese higher education

In her book, *Student Learning and Development in Chinese Higher Education: College Students' Experience in China*, Yuhao Cen describes and interprets student learning and development as perceived by students in Chinese higher education institutions. Building on the work of both the survey data from the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement-China (NSSE -China) and her inquiry and interviews with 64 students in five Chinese universities, this empirical research sets a foundational work for study on college student experiences in China and presents an alternative view of higher education quality from the student perspective.

This book has six chapters and starts with an introduction detailing her writing purpose as describing and understanding the Chinese undergraduate student experience from the students' perspective. The significance of this study is in highlighting the contexts of the quality concerns of Chinese undergrad-

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uate education and the global activities in student learning outcomes research. After a rapid enrollment expansion, Chinese higher education concerns have shifted toward the improvement of quality. With many state and local evaluation programs, a quality assurance system has been established for Chinese higher education. In the whole world, student learning outcome and its assessment have become a critical field in higher education research and policies. Cen introduces some large-scale quantitative studies and influential national reports, especially the U.S. NSSE survey and NSSE-China survey. Then, the author introduces the models and theories of college student development and their cross-cultural investigation. In this chapter, she discusses the two guiding theoretical perspectives, student engagement and self-authorship theory, and seeks to link them in the Chinese case. Lastly, the author explains the mixed methods research design and the core questions surrounding her work and outlines the organization of the book and the following chapters.

The second chapter, titled *Beyond Subject Matters What Have I Learned in College*, discusses student reported learning outcomes in “taxonomy of learning outcomes in four domains: knowledge, skills, intrapersonal awareness, and interpersonal competence” (Cen, 2016, p.15). This chapter addresses one research question: in what domains, and to what extent, Chinese student attained learning outcomes. Before the three sections in this chapter, Cen defines both the narrow and broad sense of “Xue xi” (a Chinese word which is translated as learning or development in English) and explains that her study focuses not only on the subject matter knowledge and skills but on a broad sense of learning and development. In section one, Cen generates a taxonomy of learning outcomes derived from both quantitative data and qualitative data. The survey findings are presented by a factor analysis on the 12 learning outcome survey items in NSSE-China. The interview findings are yielded by the inductive analysis of the transcribed “voices”, which contains 19 categories. In section two, Cen uses student participants’ own voices to elaborate on each domain and its containing categories. The scope of knowledge extends beyond the subject matter; it contains facts, ideas, and the understandings to the external world. The outcome of skills includes learning on one’s own, practical competence, communicating effectively, and reflective thinking. There are five categories in the intrapersonal awareness domain: “understanding oneself, developing qualities and personalities, developing a sense of responsibility, developing a personal code of values and ethics, and appreciating beauty” (p. 83). Social network, teamwork, leadership, and intimacy are some keywords in the outcome categories in Social competence. Section three reports descriptive statistics from NSSE-China 2009 survey and NSSE-U.S. 2009 survey and presents comparisons of self-reported learning outcomes by year in school, across learning outcomes items, and between Chinese and U.S. Students.

In chapter three, four, and five, the author presents the survey and interview responses on student learning and development in six sub-contexts within their college experience: (1-3) curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, (4) work experiences, (5) recreation activities, and (6) relationships. College students participate in activities and start their process of learning and growing in these six contexts. Drawing mainly on the plentiful interview data, Cen implies the depth of each context. What is more, the comparison descriptive statistics of the Chinese and U.S. survey presents an overview of student participation in these contexts from the national and cross-national lens.

Chapter three discusses student learning and development in curricular programs. Curricular context is pertinent to academic study; under this context, there are lots of activities required by the academic program to earn a degree. In this study, curricular activities in Chinese colleges include course assignment, exam, practicum, and the required undergraduate thesis. The survey data reveals that Chinese college students contribute a larger amount of time studying than their American peers; however, their engagement in meaningful activities which benefit their learning and epistemological change is comparatively inadequate. Cen believes that “an over-crowded curricular schedule and overemphasis on rote memorization in coursework” (p. 118) could explain this contradiction. For students, engaging, learning, and development can stimulate experiences in the curricular context. From her inter-

view data, Cen introduces three meaningful curricular activities exemplars: a course assignment, undergraduate thesis, and practicum. These exemplars illustrate how Chinese college students move up from participation in curricular context to learning, and eventually to developmental changes.

Chapter four reviews what Chinese college students learn and how they develop in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Before exploring the two contexts in detail, Cen delineates the differences between the concepts. According to Cen's definition and classification, outside the regular curriculum, co-curricular activities are complementary academic activities, which aim to enrich academic experiences and/or curricular learning. While extracurricular activities are conducted under the auspices of the school, they are non-academic activities and voluntary for students. On one hand, Cen uses survey data and exemplars to describe student change in co-curricular contexts, such as academic competition, undergraduate research, internship, and study groups. On the other hand, she illustrates how student students thrive through engaging the extra-curriculum activities by sharing exemplary stories of the student experience in student clubs, student government, and other community service activities. These stories reveal that Chinese students spent a large amount of time on extracurricular activities, but they are more likely involved in activities and events offered by their institutions. Survey data and comparable statistics present the proliferation of student organizations and activities and prove that "institutional interests in designing and implementing co-curricular program has been increasing" (p. 158). Cen claims that not only being a participant but deeper engagement in co-curricular and extracurricular activities make Chinese college students flourish in their learning and development.

Chapter five tells stories of student change and development in part-time work, in recreational activities, and while handling dormitory living, romantic, and family relationships. The development in these contexts has little institutional intervention; however, these contexts are indispensable when it comes to college student development, as they benefit students a lot in their real-life after college. The three sections in this chapter explore student learning and development in the work context, the recreational context, and in relational context respectively. The first section is about work context. Compared with internship classified as a co-curricular activity (in chapter four), Cen refers to work for pay in the work context. The survey data shows that more than half senior students had part-time work experience in both China and the U.S. Section two discuss leisure time activities for relaxation and enjoyment. There are various forms of recreation for Chinese college students, including music, arts, sports, cooking, surfing the Internet, and watching movies/TV. Cen emphasizes the positive engagement that happens in the arenas of music and sport; however, Internet overuse among college student rises concerns in China. Section three discusses three key areas that constitute the context of the relationship: dorm, romantic relations, and family. In China, undergraduate students are assigned to the cheap on-campus dorms with three to seven roommates who come from the same major, class rank, and cohort. Learning how to negotiate differences and resolve conflicts with their roommates is necessary and important. The romantic relationship is another relational challenge for college students. For many students, living far away from home helps students form the emotional bond with family members and "experience transitions from dependence to independence and then to interdependence" (p. 182). Cen categories most of the learning outcomes in these contexts into the development of personal awareness and social competency.

In chapter six, Cen concludes her book by summarizing key findings in a pyramid model of student growth and discussing the implications for higher education policy and practice. After connecting the college impact models and student development theories, Cen constructs a pyramid model of student growth. From the bottom to the top, this model has four layers: participant, engagement, learning, and development. She describes the college experience using a metaphor of the climbing process. The first layer is participation and involvement in multiple contexts in college. The starting point of this climbing is participating in activities across various contexts: curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities, work experiences, recreation, and relationships, as explained in Chapters three-

five. To climb up to the second layer, students need to dedicate more engagement with time commitment, cognitive devotion, and emotional involvement. Cen reveals a deeper level of involvement with students' learning environments by examining student's interaction with faculty and peers, campus environment, and quality of student effort. When continuing to the third layer, students' learning outcomes are achieved in the four domains, knowledge, skills, intrapersonal awareness, and interpersonal competencies, reported in Chapter two. The four domains emerge from the survey responses and interview data, and each domain contains specific learning outcomes. Lastly, the top layer reflects the basic concerns for college students transforming from late adolescents to young adults. This layer interprets how students develop in three dimensions of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. These layers integrated student growth and lead "to an intensifying sense of maturity and demanding increasing effort to succeed in college" (p. 188). Finally, based on this model, the author provides six recommendations for institutional practices and three directions for further research.

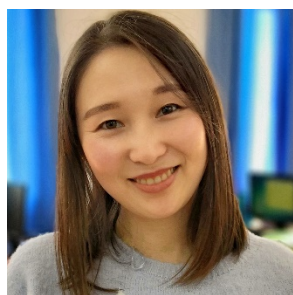
I would like to recommend this book to others. The contents are easy to follow, the examination and presentation of student survey and interview responses are clear and concise. The findings and the pyramid model of student growth proposed by Cen are significant for both domestic and international policy and practice. Besides, this book is a valuable addition to the prior literature. It refers to two interrelated gaps in prior literature, one is about the quality of Chinese undergraduate education, the other is the global literature on college student development.

Cen's book places student perspective at the center stage and contains essential information for faculty in Chinese higher education institutions to deepen their understanding of undergraduate students to promote their learning and development. Chinese student affairs professionals struggling with how to support the students they work with would benefit greatly from this book. Likewise, Chinese graduate students contemplating a career in higher education/student affairs would also benefit from reading this book, as the topic discussed can shed light on student learning and development. This book appeals to higher education scholars from all countries and regions, not just in China. As one of the books in the series of Education and Society in China, Cen's book also provides global higher education professionals a good perspective to understand Chinese higher education under the background of higher education globalization.

REFERENCE

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BIOGRAPHY



Mu Zhang, M.A.E.d, is currently a student in the doctoral program in Higher Education Administration & Policy at the University of Florida. Her research interests include student development, international students, and comparative higher education between China and the United States.

Ms. Zhang has worked as a college counselor in the office of student affairs at Shanghai Civil Aviation college in Shanghai, China for two years before study in the U.S. Her career objective is to become a college professor and a researcher in higher education administration.