



Book Review

An Opening to a Secret Garden

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Chinese Youth in Transition

XI, J., SUN, Y. & XIAO, J.J.

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Future lies in youth. While China is attracting more and more attention from the international stage, concerns grow — how will its future be? How are Chinese youth like? Can they carry the future of China on?

That's not all about the case yet. With 367 million out of 2.1 billion children under 18 years old in China, which accounts for 17.5% of world's child population, the well-being of Chinese youth means more than to the future of China alone, but to the world's blueprint as well.

Unfortunately, whilst the number of publications on Chinese youth has been growing these years, they were basically written in Chinese and quite a number did not have substantial research bases due to all kinds of reasons. This made the area of Chinese youth remain basically a secret garden to the eager explorers, especially those who do not speak Chinese. *Chinese Youth in Transition* is thus an exciting find for these eager eyes as a first official entrance. It's a contribution by researchers from or affiliated to CYCRC (China Youth and Children Research Center), the only national research center that focuses on youth and children research in China sponsored by the government. This book attempts to provide a comprehensive outlook upon two age groups in China, 6-14 defined as children in the book, and 15-29 as youth, covering the area from urban to rural. Compared to previous studies in this area, *Chinese Youth in Transition* is a book that speaks with data and the big pictures that editors try to paint are drawn according to these precious data as coordinates, which makes this book an even more precious one and meanwhile fascinating!

The structure that this book employs is quite special: every chapter is written by a local researcher from CYCRC originally in Chinese, and followed by a chapter of commentary written by scholars informed of both Chinese and Western literatures on the topic area. The original chapters focus on describing the status quo of Chinese youth nowadays with some analysis, conclusion and reflections in a Chinese way, and the following commentaries provide some complementary information by reviewing, commenting, locating the commented chapter in a broader or western theoretical framework, making comparison between Youth in China and their peers in US and bringing forward some important points for attention etc. In this way, both insiders and outsiders' views are well bridged together, which makes this book not only very comprehensive but also very interesting to read, it also makes it easier for both people from Chinese background and other backgrounds to understand.

Another thing worth a mention is that each chapter and its commentary chapter together present a particular side of the addressed issue and can be read independently of the others, while all the chapters are at the same time well joined, which makes it an interesting read as a whole too.

It goes without saying that it's mission impossible to be exhaustive on this issue with 273 pages. And there's still quite a lot controversy about this book, not only on the writing, but also on the research method. For example, the way some descriptive data were collected and used, as back up for conclusions is not 100% 'scientific' according to western empirical research standards. Due to the language barrier and so on, there's still a long way to go to integrate the highlights in Western research methods into Chinese holistic thinking style and its mentality on research design and implementation.

There're still more unsaid than said, more unrevealed than revealed and more undone than done on the exploration of Chinese youth. But as a Chinese proverb says: 'no expectation of perfection from one person'. So applies to this book I think. After all, it is a significant opening to a secret garden, and all those who are concerned with Chinese youth may find their own paths there.

Author note

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