

Book Review

Dervin, F., & Yuan, M. (2022). *Revitalizing interculturality in education: Chinese Minzu as a companion*. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-0320-7412-2

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ABSTRACT

Dervin and Yuan's (2022) book Revitalizing interculturality in education: Chinese Minzu as a companion challenged the lack of diversity in the disciplinary field of Intercultural Communication Education (ICE) with a detailed exploration and discussion on Chinese Minzu and Minzu education from a "non-Western" approach. By utilizing a case study research design, the authors gave voices to the participants that provided detailed narratives of concepts and practices of Chinese Minzu education at Minzu University of China (MUC). The book explored how the notion of Minzu was deconstructed and prompted readers to reckon Minzu education as a "companion, complement, and alternative" to the knowledge of interculturality in education. It added value to the international scholarship on multicultural/intercultural education by offering insights to the views, theories, and practices of Minzu education.

KEYWORDS: Chinese Minzu, Chinese Minzu education, intercultural education, interculturality, multicultural education, superdiversity.

The scholarship on multicultural and intercultural education has been predominantly informed by "Western-centric" notions and perceptions (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 2) since its emergence during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s in response to the demands of ethnic groups for inclusion in the curricula of public schools and higher education institutions. Not only has this domination resulted in the unequal representation of Chinese context in interculturality, but it has also nested "Western-centric" misperceptions towards ethnicities and intercultural education in China (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 2). The book *Revitalizing interculturality in education: Chinese Minzu as a companion* was a direct reaction to the lack of diversity in the disciplinary field of Intercultural Communication Education (ICE) where interculturality is taught and researched. Authors Dervin and Yuan challenged the "old-fashioned" Western ideologies that have been imposed on multiculturalism and discussed and considered anew interculturality that engages diversity in education from dynamic, dialogical, and interactive perspectives (Dervin & Yuan, 2022). Through its detailed exploration of Chinese Minzu education from a "non-Western" approach, this book made its contribution to the paradigmatic movement towards the Western perceptions that inform and underpin the research and practice of intercultural education.

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The authors centered their exploration and discussion on Chinese Minzu education. Minzu has often been translated and considered the Chinese term for “ethnic (group)” in standard English. There are officially identified 56 Minzu groups in China, including majority Han (about 91.51%) and other 55 ethnic minority groups (8.49%) (Zhou, 2019). Instead of using “ethnicity” (the literal translation of Minzu in English), the authors kept the phonetic form of Chinese characters Minzu throughout the book to avoid the extra layer of politico-economic connotation that did not fit the Chinese context. The authors utilized a case study approach to explore the specifics of Minzu and Chinese Minzu education through different individuals at a particular site (Minzu University of China, MUC). Instead of being against and/or rejecting “Western” perspectives on interculturality in education, the authors proposed Minzu as a companion (an alternative approach) to feed in reflections on, new discussions about, and understandings of “us”, “them”, and the “superdiversity” of cultural communities (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 50).

The authors revisited the notion of Chinese Minzu and Minzu education and its contribution to the understanding of interculturality in education through five chapters (two sections). The first three chapters detailed the specificities of Minzu and Chinese Minzu education and focused on the internationalization of Minzu education in Chinese higher education. Chapters 4 and 5 discussed the implications of Minzu education for interculturality. The in-depth analysis and discussion of Minzu and Chinese Minzu education were informed by the authors’ empirical research bonded by the site (a unique higher education institution established to promote the cultures of Minzu groups) where interviews were conducted with the participating scholars and reflection essays were collected from the students. In each chapter, several selected excerpts were included to capture participants’ understanding and interpretation of Minzu and Minzu education through their own experiences and interactions with others. At the end of each chapter, the authors provided a list of questions for the readers to reflect on what they have read, in particular, to prompt the readers to link the participants’ descriptions of Minzu and Minzu education to their own context of interculturality in education.

In Chapter 1, the authors reviewed and explored the notion of Minzu and discussed its multifacetedness and complexity. By providing a brief overview of Minzu in the making of Chinese history and its imperative role in shaping the dynamics of Chinese modern society, the authors laid the canvas for their discussion of the evolution in understanding Minzu, especially how the introduction of Western ideologies and languages forced Chinese scholars to “unthink and rethink Minzu” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 13). The notion of Minzu was far more complex than the mere naming of different “ethnic” groups in China. Minzus were culturally pluralistic and diverse, yet they shared an overarching identity formed through centuries of cohabitation and interaction and they were politically united (Fei, 1988). To help readers deepen their understanding of Minzu in the Chinese context, the authors explored its discourses by scholars in one unique higher education institution (Minzu University of China, MUC) designated for ethnic minorities in China where all the Minzu groups reside, study, and interact together. By using selected excerpts from the interviews, the authors detailed how professors at this specific institution discussed the term “Minzu” and what it entailed through their disciplinary affiliations including Minzu languages, Minzu area studies, and Minzu ethics.

Chapter 2 centered Minzu in the context of education and provided a detailed discussion of Chinese Minzu education from historical, philosophical, and scholarly perspectives. The scholarship on Minzu education and the policies implemented in education (e.g., preferential admissions and remedial programs) were testimonies to China’s passion for an education for all her citizens (Yuan et al., 2020), including majority Han and other Minzu groups. By comparing

the practices with “Western” multicultural education, the authors further asserted that the use of “Americano-centric” ideologies such as Banks’ (1989) discussion on multicultural education and Grant and Portera’s (2010) work on intercultural education could be problematic in the Chinese context because “diversity” was not at the core of Minzu issues in education (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 39). Unlike the “Western” approach on multicultural/intercultural education that has focused on diversity and social equality, Chinese Minzu education has adopted a different policy approach and emphasizes on economic, social, and cultural development of students of all Minzu groups. This chapter ended with the authors’ discussion on teacher education for Minzu education and the significance of developing systematic and coherent teacher training strategies as an attempted contribution to the lack of literature in English language on how Minzu teacher education is organized and implemented in China.

Chapter 3 shifted the focus to the internationalization of Minzu in higher education through the lens of “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007) by exploring the experiences of incoming international students to the MUC (the “site”) and their perceptions on intercultural learning while engaging with Minzu education in China. The authors first explained the rationale of adopting Vertovec’s (2007, 2017) concept of “superdiversity”: the connotation of the term used in Chinese language to express pluralism and multiculturalism indicates diversification of diversity which was somewhat similar to “superdiversity” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 50). According to the authors, using the approach of “superdiversity” to discuss study aboard experiences in China, especially within the context of Minzu education, could potentially help scholars revise established differences and hierarchies related to the discourses of multiculturalism and interculturality (Vertovec, 2017) and add layer upon layer of complexity in relation to sociolinguistic issues (Kell, 2015, as cited in Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 53) which in this case, referred to the notion of Minzu.

The authors then presented the methodological information on their research interviewing 17 international students purposefully selected from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, a program for international degree-seeking students to study Chinese as a second language) at MUC. Using discourse analysis, the authors identified the similarities in the way superdiversity has influenced (or not) the participants’ descriptions and perceptions of their stay in China and their engagement with Minzu education. Through the excerpts and analysis, it was evident that participants’ experience of Minzu superdiversity has been limited to linguistic and cultural aspects of it and their knowledge and awareness of the important aspects of Minzu in Chineseness have developed significantly as students learnt more from the university which in turn helped modify their perceptions of China being imagined monocentric (Blommaert, 2015). This chapter concluded with the limitation of the research, implications for ethnic-serving minority institutions, and authors’ recommendations for future research.

In Chapter 4, the authors zoomed in on the intersection between Chinese Minzu education and interculturality through analyzing students’ reflection essays on the meaning of “being good at interculturality” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 72) after taking a particular course on Minzu education and interculturality. This chapter started with the authors’ synthesis and analysis of “interculturality” as a complex concept and “a multidimensional space of encounters between different policies, practices, philosophies, and economic-political ideologies” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 73). The authors then presented a 3-step approach in using interculturality as a critical and reflective tool to guide students in this course to deal with issues of diversity. Based on the thematic analysis of 37 reflection essays, the authors provided students’ discursive constructions and discussions about diversity and interculturality within the context of Minzu higher education, more

specifically, the factors contributing to “being good (or not) at interculturality” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 79) and student perceptions on how to develop interculturality.

In the final chapter, the authors redefined the multifaceted phenomenon Intercultural Communication Education (ICE) and provided approaches to intercultural education in a superdiverse context like Chinese Minzu to raise the awareness of the diverse ideologies in interculturality. The authors highlighted the essentiality and complexity of ICE in today’s education context. Reflecting on their own experiences of jointly developing and delivering an ICE course to a group of 17 Chinese second-year education students at the unique higher education institution in China (MUC), the authors (part of a Chinese and Finnish researcher group) proposed the notion of “intercultural as a variable ideology” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 96) and demonstrated how it was influenced by local, regional, and international policies, and beliefs, values, and experiences of educators themselves.

A Critical and Reflexive Literacy of Intercultural Approach which included three closely related elements: *the fold*, *the handshake*, and *the magic mirror* (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 100) was proposed to offer students the opportunities of exploring different ideologies, of learning how to analyze them, and to decide about their value and usefulness on their own. To further illustrate how their approach worked in real-life intercultural education context, the authors provided examples of each component of the model including group projects and excerpts from students’ reflections. Chapter 5 concluded with the authors’ call for intentional and continuous efforts to “identify and transform genuinely diverse paradigms and ideologies to create a space for inclusive educational and research dialogues”, which could lead to further “discursive multivocality on interculturality” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 116).

Overall, this book provided a comprehensive analysis of how interculturality has been lived and perceived in China, a society often considered and stereotyped as monocultural and monolithic in “Western” perceptions, through its detailed narratives of concepts and practices of Chinese Minzu education in a specific context that the authors conceptualized as a “microcosm of Chinese diversity” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 96). Based on a bottom-up approach that gave voices to different groups: scholars, experts, and Chinese Minzu and international students, the book reviewed how the notion of Minzu was deconstructed and prompted readers to reckon Minzu education as a “companion, complement, and alternative” (Dervin & Yuan, 2022, p. 118) to the knowledge of interculturality in education, which overlapped with what has been known as multicultural education or intercultural education in the “West”. The book also added value to the international scholarship on multicultural/intercultural education by offering insights to the views, theories, and practices of *Minzu* education.

However, the lack of critical analysis of the impact of China’s politics on Minzu education and its interaction with Minzu groups was one notable limitation of this book. In countries (e.g., China) where politics often leaves footprints on almost all facets of its social life, it is awry to overlook the imperative role of its politics and national policies on the relationship and dynamics between ethnic groups (e.g., Minzu) and the practice of ethnic education (e.g., Chinese Minzu education). In addition, while this book encouraged and established a valuable “dialogue” between the “West” and “non-West” on multicultural/intercultural education, it would be more beneficial to include ideas beyond “Western” ideologies in the discussions and stimulate different ways of re-thinking about interculturality by adding “other-than-Western” voices.

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Notes on Contributor

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