
Zheng Yongnian and Phua Kok Khoo (eds), Wang Gungwu. Educator and Scholar, Singapore, London: World Scientific, 2013, x, 411 pp., index. ISBN 978-981-4436-62-5 (paperback).

Having studied the Chinese diaspora, notions of Chinese-ness and ethnic Chinese business practices in Southeast Asia and beyond, I find the work of Wang Gungwu a 'must read' for such research areas. The scope of his writing over several decades as well as his deep insights have been a source of inspiration for many researchers. It is on that basis that this reviewer was looking forward to reviewing this book. The book is organized into three main parts. The first deals with Wang Gungwu's engagement in higher education, the second part is devoted to his major works and the final section provides a chronology of his career. The two editors of the book, Zheng Yongnian and Phua Kok Khoo, recognize that it was a challenge to write this commemorative book on Wang Gungwu, who has been so active in many different fields. He is a highly distinguished scholar, has initiated and led a number of internationally recognized research institutions and has been recognized for his exemplary public service. Just to give an example, in Singapore, Wang is concurrently (2013) the chairman of three institutions, the East Asian Institute, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. In addition, he is a member of 11 boards and institutions in Singapore as well as a member of over 30 boards of overseas institutions and international journals. He is a prolific writer of books, an editor and co-editor of several volumes and articles. This makes writing a book of this sort on such a dynamic person quite a challenge.

The first section highlights Wang's publications in the field of higher education. Twenty-four of his articles in this connection have been selected, from his visit to the Australian National University in 1971 to 2008 when he was with the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore. In these articles Wang shares his perspectives on a range of topics: the relationship between the university and community; the issue of funding for universities; the role of universities in Asia as global institutions; the idea of universal standards of excellence in education in the Asia-Pacific region; the need for national education to take into account the value of the scientific tradition; the state of social science study in Asia; the shifting paradigms and their impact on research and writing; the role of the university in shaping modernity in Asia; and the efforts of the Chinese in pursuing higher education in China.

This part of the book, which consists of 229 pages out of a total of 411 pages (including the index), is mainly of interest for those readers who follow the development of higher education in Asia and is to a certain extent wasted on those like the present reviewer who have no interest in this subject. Due to this rather specialized topic, one cannot stop wondering why this received such high priority, given Wang Gungwu's importance for Asian research. I am afraid that many readers who buy this book will be disappointed when reading this section.

The second part of the book, which consists of 77 pages, introduces a selection of over 50 books written, edited or co-edited by Wang as well as those written in his honour. Each selection is accompanied by a short description of its contents, and where relevant, comments by other renowned scholars on the particular book. The selected books cover a wide array of topics including the Five Dynasties (based on Wang's PhD thesis submitted in 1957); the Chinese diaspora and overseas Chinese; Chinese culture, history and civilization; Chinese trade; maritime China; China's ideological battles; the Chinese Communist Party; China's political economy; China's external relations; China and the new international order; Chinese world order, and several more topical books on specific countries such as Hong Kong and Malaysia.

As a reader and admirer of Wang's work, I was particularly looking forward to this section. However, the works are presented as if in an overview from a library search on Wang Gungwu. From each book selected, the reader is shown the front page as well as the back of the book, giving an overview of each book's covered topic. I was rather disappointed, as I had expected to find a selection of his most important academic works and to be able to read about them in more detail. Unfortunately, this was not the case. It might have been a good idea if some of the pages dedicated to Wang's educational efforts had been used in this section on his actual writings, thus giving it more substance. The current almost superficial overview of Wang's books and edited volumes is just a senseless listing, thus giving no credit to the quality and multi-faceted aspects of his research.

The third part of the book provides a detailed chronology of Wang's life from his birth to the present day. The 79 pages allotted to this part, show the tumultuous and challenging times that Wang experienced during his lifetime. It furthermore details historic and memorable moments such as the visit by a delegation of historians, including Wang himself, and China specialists from the Australian National University to China in 1973 just after Australia and China established diplomatic

ties. It was, by the way, Wang's first visit to China in 26 years. After having been a bit disappointed by the first two parts of the book, I was now looking forward to this final section where Wang's life was to be discussed. However, the narrative description I was looking forward to unfortunately was replaced by a chronological listing of events in terms of years and places where Wang has either lived or worked, supported by a few explanatory sentences to make sense of the individual event in the listing.

Taken together, the book's three parts will definitely give the reader insights into the life and work of Wang Gungwu and his immense importance for Asian studies. However, it is a shame that instead of getting a qualitative understanding of this brilliant researcher, the reader only gets a bibliographic outline of a prominent scholar. The life and work of Wang Gungwu thus still constitute uncharted waters awaiting a full exploration.

*Michael Jakobsen
Associate Professor
Asia Research Centre
Copenhagen Business School
Denmark*