

Xing, J., and Hok Ka Ma, C. (Eds.). (2010). *Service-Learning in Asia: Curricular Models and Practices*. Aberdeen, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Review by Siti Kusujarti

Service-learning is a type of experiential education that combines structured and intentional learning goals with community engagement or public service (*Kendall and Associates, 1996; Stanton, 1990; Zlotkowski, 1996*). It is designed to involve students in personal transformation and in critical awareness about privileges, social inequalities, and social injustices. It also provides opportunities for students to be engaged in active learning, the empowerment process, and democratization through dialogue with community partners and agencies, writing critical reflections, and involvement in direct activism. In an increasingly globalized world with complex social problems, service-learning brings about opportunities for creating direct linkages between the academic world and multifaceted social realities as well as for connecting local and global cultures. Various pedagogical methods and learning philosophies are involved in service-learning.

Even though service-learning has been a widespread practice in U.S. higher education, it is a relatively new endeavor in Asia. This edited book is among the first books addressing service-learning in the Asian context. The contributors are the leaders and noted figures who have made significant contributions to the advancement of service-learning in Asia. This is a timely book since there is increasing interest in developing and integrating service-learning in educational institutions, especially institutions of higher education in Asian countries. The authors are administrators, professors, and practitioners from various disciplines who have firsthand experience in establishing, coordinating, teaching, and evaluating a variety of service-learning programs in the United States and New Zealand and in numerous places in Asia, such as India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, the Philippines, and China. The diverse cultural and experiential background of the authors provides a strong foundation for the book to demonstrate how cultural and social contexts intersect with service-learning within their affiliated institutions. As indicated in the introduction, service-learning is not culturally neutral, but deeply embedded in the historical and social contexts of each educational system. Even though service-learning is more closely connected to the Western context, this book details the theoretical conceptualization, understanding, and practices

of service-learning in the context of Asian cultures and societies. Cultural factors influence the structure of the educational institutions as well as how higher education is connected to the larger society. Chapters 5 through 10 present case studies from several different cultural and social backgrounds, providing rich contextual and analytical accounts of diverse service-learning practices in Asia.

The Book's Organization

This book is organized into two main sections. The first section discusses variations in meanings and forms of service-learning, and the second part details the six case studies based on practices in various countries and institutions. Within these two sections, three thematic trends are addressed: service-learning and indigenous traditions; service-learning and social justice education; and service-learning and multicultural education. The sections and themes are interconnected, with the authors showing that the interconnections of indigenous knowledge, practice, and service-learning may take place in various forms and have different meanings depending on cultural and social contexts. Experiential education that fosters social justice and social change can be performed in various ways, and despite the fact that service-learning may have various forms; successful service-learning programs should benefit all parties involved in the process.

Section I

As part of the first section of the book, the authors describe the development of cross-cultural networking for service-learning among Asian institutions. This Service-Learning Asia Network (SLAN) is pivotal in promoting and expanding service-learning throughout Asian countries. The responsibilities of this network include student exchange, implementing and coordinating integrated curriculum on service-learning, sharing and exchanging resources, and providing multicultural and international service-learning programs. Collaboration across different cultures and institutions is important to strengthening and expanding service-learning programs. This is especially beneficial for institutions that have just initiated a service-learning program, but it also strengthens existing programs. This model provides possibilities for institutions that have limited resources to launch service-learning programs by collaborating with other institutions. In addition to providing ideas for networking, this section offers a model

for integrating service-learning into teacher education curriculum to foster holistic learning experiences (*Chapter 3*).

Chapter 4 provides quite comprehensive descriptions and analyses of various models. These models include discipline-related service-learning, course-related service-learning, cohesive curriculum in service-learning, module-related service-learning, and international/intercultural service-learning. An institution may apply more than one model, and this chapter shows how Lady Doak College in India does that. The implementation of various models gives flexibility and options for students and faculty members involved in the program, but it also requires that the institution provide strong institutional and administrative support. In general, the chapters in the first section demonstrate that successful service-learning programs need strong support. The institutions described in the book generally have some type of “office of service-learning” or “center for service-learning” responsible for coordinating, implementing, and evaluating the process. The establishment and sustenance of such an office indicates institutional commitment.

Section 2

The second section contains rich case studies and lessons learned based on experiences of institutions implementing different models and philosophies in service-learning. Most of the case studies, and the book in general, however, focus more on the impact and benefits of service-learning for the higher education institutions and students, and provide limited accounts from the perspectives of community organizations or nongovernmental organizations involved in the service-learning initiatives. This is understandable since this book is designed mostly for administrators or practitioners of higher education, and the authors are mainly from these backgrounds. However, more in-depth perspectives from community organizations would have enhanced this book since strong service-learning programs need to include input and involvement of partnering agencies and communities. Collaboration and partnership among equally important participants, such as faculty members, students, and community organizers, are significant elements in creating and sustaining service-learning programs. To ensure democratic representation and empowerment for all who are involved, diverse voices need to be incorporated into the process.

Despite the limited reflection of the voices of the communities and community organizers, this book is a groundbreaking work in the topic of service-learning in Asia. It shows how service-learning can be reinterpreted and retooled to fit with local cultural and institutional conditions.

The Book's Contributions

This book advances the notion that service-learning must be contextualized within local cultures. The book also provides diverse models and practices of service-learning. Validating local interpretations of service-learning and the roles of indigenous knowledge in service-learning is important. The authors argue that service-learning helps democratize higher education in Asia by bridging the gap between indigenous knowledge and more formal academic knowledge. Through service-learning, faculty members, administrators, and students acknowledge that they are not the only “knowers” and main sources of knowledge. Service-learning helps reduce a student's sense of elitism, and provides opportunities for students to critically reflect on their level of social privilege and status. These are important contributions, especially in societies where access to higher education is still limited to those who are privileged, and when those who are affiliated with or graduated from the institutions are regarded as having higher status.

The book also shows that the Western concept of service-learning can be modified to fit the Asian cultural context. The case studies, however, are mainly from institutions that are heavily influenced by Western and Christian concepts of service-learning, and thus might not represent many other types of Asian higher education institutions. Examples or case studies from institutions influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or other indigenous beliefs would have provided more nuanced analysis of service-learning in Asia. More in-depth critical analyses of the challenges and pitfalls to avoid in service-learning would have enhanced the book. Even though some of the chapters address lessons learned from the experiences of organizing and implementing service-learning programs, most authors do not address how students reflect on their privileges and the resulting power imbalances. As indicated in Chapter 3, service-learning may exacerbate social inequality and power imbalances if it is not applied carefully. Students need to have strong background and knowledge on these issues and intentionally reflect on how their status affects the ways they interact and perform in the service-learning programs. More critical analyses on this important issue would have enhanced the book. Most of the chapters provide descriptions and implementation of the programs, yet interconnection between social structure, social inequality, and service-learning is not addressed sufficiently.

Despite its weaknesses, this book provides valuable ideas, concepts, and examples of service-learning in Asia. This is one of the few books available on this topic, and it provides inspiration and ideas for administrators, faculty members, students, and others interested in the topic to provoke further thinking and, hopefully, writing about service-learning in Asia.

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About the Reviewer

Siti Kusujarti is a professor of Sociology at Warren Wilson College. Her research interests include service-learning, gender and development, rural sociology, disaster and inequality, and gender and migration. She earned her bachelor's degree from Gadjah Mada University, and her master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky.

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