

Routledge Critical Studies in Asian Education

GETTING SCHOOLS TO WORK BETTER

**EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND
TEACHER SUPPORT IN INDIA AND CHINA**

Yifei Yan



“A compelling study that challenges conventional perceptions of teacher accountability in schools, demystifying the *raison d’être* of poor quality of learning outcomes. Based on an in-depth, empirical and comparative analysis of two large education systems – India and China, Yan deconstructs and re-conceptualizes teacher accountability, designing a holistic approach built not exclusively on bureaucratic but on a professionally motivated teacher support system. With the timely emphasis that a competent and soundly supported teaching workforce is essential for educational improvement, the book offers a fresh, non-Western perspective on educational governance and is an invaluable contribution to the larger theory of public administration.”

Anjana Mangalagiri, *Senior Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi*

“Accountability is a key issue in the field of education. In this timely and original book, Dr Yifei Yan addresses education accountability in two of the world’s largest developing countries, China and India. The book provides a novel conceptualisation of accountability, in which the support provided to teachers is seen as a crucial component. Through surveys and interviews with teachers, school principals, government officials and NGO workers in Beijing and Delhi, Yifei Yan shines a light on support provided to teachers, policy challenges, potential solutions, and implications for accountability. This important book should be key reading for policy makers, teachers, teacher trainers, scholars and others concerned with strengthening education governance and school systems.”

Anne West, *Professor of Education Policy, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science*

“This is a brilliant and innovative book on how to improve school quality and performance through a focus on teachers. Based on a multidimensional concept of accountability 3.0 and a deep, fine-grained, and compelling comparative study of India and China, Yifei Yan shows how it would be possible to improve policy design in support of educators to make schools work better. This is a book that needs to be read because of its ability to show how well-done analysis can lead to promising and potentially highly effective policy solutions.”

Gilberto Capano, *Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Bologna, Italy*



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Getting Schools to Work Better

Yifei Yan's ambitious multi-method case study of government middle schools in Beijing and Delhi provides fresh insights into how educational accountability can be designed to work, in part and as a whole.

Getting schools to work better is a challenge just about everywhere. Many policy experts prescribe measures for strengthening school accountability, either through government command and control or through alternative market and societal actors. Arguing against this conventional wisdom, this book examines how China and India are tackling the challenge with a specific focus on supporting teachers along with traditional accountability-strengthening measures. The book draws implications from its case studies for how education systems can be designed towards the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal 4. It further develops the concept of "Accountability 3.0" to elucidate a novel and more holistic reconceptualisation of the appropriate means needed to fulfil multiple purposes of accountability, in which providing support to frontline workers is viewed as an integral component.

This book will appeal to a wide spectrum of scholars and practitioners in the fields of comparative education, public administration, public policy and development studies, among others. It will be especially of interest to those from the developing world facing similar accountability challenges as described.

Yifei Yan is a Lecturer in Public Administration and Public Policy at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Southampton, United Kingdom. She received her PhD degree from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. Her doctoral dissertation, on which this book is based, is the recipient of the Best PhD Dissertation Award from the Indian Public Policy Network (IPPN) in 2019.

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Getting Schools to Work Better

Educational Accountability and Teacher Support in India and China

Yifei Yan

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Educational Accountability and Teacher
Support in India and China

Yifei Yan



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To my parents, for being there for me as always;

To my four grandparents, for blessing me from
millions of light years afar.



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Foreword

This is an excellent comparative work on education and governance in government-run middle schools in the capitals of the two most populous nations—China and India. Perhaps the first comparative study of the two countries on educational governance and accountability. As against the dominant framework advocated by neo-liberals that considers the focus of governance and accountability on contractual employment and Tayloristic performance measures to discipline the teachers, the argument here is that empowering teachers is key to providing quality education.

This is a book on comparative public policy analysis that breaks new ground on our understanding of accountability and also helps us appreciate the role of local agencies and policy design in shaping education outcomes. Dr. Yifei Yan develops the concept of “Accountability 3.0”, making a strong and convincing case that accountability systems need (i) to be placed alongside existing methods of discipline and control, (ii) to cater to the needs and incentives of the teachers and (iii) to enhance the professional capacity of teachers. She focuses on teacher in-service training and career advancement, two vital instruments of governance that have not received adequate attention in dominant discourses on accountability. Dr. Yan uses the survey method as her base and supplements it with interviews to help us understand how teacher in-service training and career advancement are practiced and perceived in schools, and how such delivery may be dissonant from the policies on paper. The book’s reconceptualisation of educational accountability emphasises the stewardship of government as well as appreciates the local needs, incentive structures and capacity deficits, thereby generating valuable lessons for enhancing education policy design and ultimately, getting schools to work better.

The structure of the book includes a chapter on the theoretical framework, an overview of the two countries’ education governance, detailed findings from Delhi and Beijing respectively, a comparative assessment, and a concluding discussion on theoretical and policy implications. The elaborate fieldwork in two difficult cities with very different governance structures is well negotiated. The empirical findings are top rate, especially the comparative assessment. Usually, scholars just touch upon the respective case studies and fall short of a crisp comparative assessment. Overall, Beijing does much better

than Delhi in both in-service teacher training and career advancement. Dr. Yan argues that beyond this rich comparative snapshot, there is much to learn for the two education systems from one another, whereas their experiences and lessons on making accountability work would also be insightful for the developing world at large. Given the constraints of the specific comparative structure of what is originated as a doctoral dissertation, the book does not dwell on existing comparative literature on education among different states within India, or draw comparative federal lessons from states like Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka that have consistently done well in school education, or dwell on the emerging literature on the role of local governance for better educational outcomes. These are the potential venues that can be followed up in future research.

I congratulate Dr. Yan for presenting us with a very innovative concept to look at education that goes beyond the existing neo-liberal agenda and rightly focuses on policy capacity and the ways in which educators can be empowered for better educational outcomes. This book provides us with a fresh lens to look at the governance of government-run middle schools around the world.

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Little did I know then how this ending has opened up a new beginning: a precious opportunity for me to revisit dissertation materials through a fresh and more polished lens as I continued to conduct research on policy design and especially policy capacity. For that, I would like to first convey my sincere gratitude to S Gopinathan, former co-editor of Routledge's *Critical Studies in Asian Education* series, for encouraging and inviting me to submit my book proposal. Encouragement and support from former colleagues at the London School of Economics, especially Michael Barzelay, Shuang Chen, Sonia Exley, Tim Hildebrandt, Lucinda Platt, Isabel Shutes, and Anne West are much appreciated as well. As the initial development of the book took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, I am all the more grateful to friends and colleagues for helping me navigate through these challenging months. In particular, I wish to thank Azad Singh Bali, Mousumi K. Bhattacharjee, Kerem Çoban, Wolfgang Drechsler, Claire Gordon, Biao Huang, Vanessa Hughes, Linda Chelan Li, Chris Maggio, Anjana Mangalagiri, Sam Mohun-Himmelweit, Amelia Peterson, Jiwei Qian, Stuti Rawat, Magda Rossetti-Youlton, Kidjie Saguin, Vicente Silva, Will Swann, Alfred M. Wu, and Lina Vyas. I am also grateful to Katie Peace, Khin Thazin and Kendrick Loo, my editors at Routledge, for their patience and always timely and professional support throughout these trying times.

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Looking back at the book-writing journey, I am once again amazed and humbled by the support and encouragement I received each step along the way. I also remember to have been reminded—at multiple times, from various sources—that getting the book done is more important than making it perfect. The closer I am moving towards the finishing line, the more clearly I see how this important piece of wisdom has offered a powerful and much-needed push. That said, I am well aware that the completed version is far from perfect, especially as this is my very first single-authored book. In that sense, it seems not only movies can be regarded as an “art made of regrets”, as a film director in China used to put it. Which is why I consider myself very fortunate to have worked with Radhika Jolly and her team at KnowledgeWorks Global (KGL) for the last mile of the book's publication, whose incredible patience and dedicated hard work helped save as many “regrets” as the publication timeline allowed for. Still, I acknowledge that I alone should be held accountable to any errors and imperfections. Yet, in the same spirit as Leonard Cohen's song goes, “there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in”, I genuinely welcome and appreciate constructive comments to cast lights for future research.

Abbreviations

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party*
BEC	Beijing (Municipal) Education Commission†
BIE	Beijing Institute of Education†
BNU	Beijing Normal University†
BRC	Block Resource Centre*
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education*
CCP	Communist Party of China†
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CNU	Capital Normal University†
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre*
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Scheme(s)*
DDE	Deputy Director of Education*
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training*
DoE	Directorate of Education*
DSEL	Department of School Education and Literacy*
GoI	Government of India*
HoS	Head(s) of School
MACP	Modified Assured Career Promotion*
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi*
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development*
MLA	Member(s) of Legislative Assembly*
MoE	Ministry of Education†
MT	Mentor Teacher*
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training*
NCTE	National Council of Teacher Education*
NEP	National Education Policy*
NPC	National People's Congress†
NPM	New Public Management
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration*
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (in the United Kingdom)