

Book Review

L2 Selves and Motivations in Asian Contexts

Matthew T. Apple, Dexter Da Silva, and Terry Fellner (Eds.). Multilingual Matters, 2016. 242 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78309-673-2

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As readers of this journal will be well aware, Asia has become a primary focus for scholars interested in language teaching and learning. This development is especially visible in the field of second language (L2) motivation research, where Asia is now the most represented region in the empirical literature (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015). Against this backdrop, the editors of *L2 Selves and Motivations in Asian Contexts* seek to call attention to the diversity in L2 motivation that exists across the continent—hence the plural *motivations* and *contexts* in the title—and to explore the regional applicability of the field’s established theoretical frameworks. In its collection of nine empirical studies and four conceptual chapters, the book includes research and commentary on learner and teacher motivation at primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions throughout Asia.

Studies from Japan, China, and the Philippines address tertiary students’ L2 motivation. In a chapter that highlights the importance of context, Mingyue Gu and Xiaoyuan Qu use Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to explore the intersection of L2 motivation, social milieu, and identity with English learners at a Chinese university. Intriguingly, the authors found pressure to attain wealth and status to be a significant motivational influence, leading them to speculate that, “the conventional view of Chinese society as collectivistic and harmonious may no longer explain current social practices” (p. 147). Also at the tertiary level, Marcos Lopez and Richard Gonzales present a novel investigation into the relationship between L2 motivation and critical thinking motivation (CTM). CTM is the desire to develop abilities that empower engagement in “reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do” (p. 98). In their quantitative study of Filipino university learners of Mandarin, French, Japanese, or Spanish, the authors describe a strong positive correlation between the two types of motivation. This suggests that teachers can enhance L2 effort and persistence in the classroom through activities that encourage students to think critically while learning the target language.

Pre-tertiary learners are also well-represented in the book by research from Taiwan and South Korea. In a qualitative study, Szu-An Chen investigates the motivational fluctuations of Taiwanese senior high school EFL learners, and her results emphasize the capacity of socio-contextual factors—teachers, parents, and examinations—to cause both motivation and demotivation. The influence of Taiwan’s social context is also the focus of Hung-Tzu Huang and I-Ling Chen’s chapter on the motivational dispositions

of junior high school students. Their findings stress the great extent to which young learners integrate societal expectations of academic success into their self-concept, and they state that in the Taiwanese context, the internalization of these requirements promotes motivation.

Three of the book's chapters take on issues related to teacher motivation through studies from Indonesia, China, and India. While reinforcing and adding nuance to the well-established adage that teachers are an essential component of learners' motivation, the research also draws attention to the less-studied role of students in teachers' motivation. Reporting on an investigation of secondary teachers in India, Amol Padwad and Krishna Dixit explain that when teachers implement strategies that enhance student motivation, they in turn are motivated by their engaged learners. This highlights the potential for teachers to benefit both their students and themselves by prioritizing learner motivation.

In addition to the empirical studies discussed above, the book's commentaries on prevailing theoretical frameworks are also thought-provoking. Of particular interest to L2 motivation scholars is the concluding chapter in which the editors address the extent to which motivation theories that originate in Europe or North America are applicable in Asian contexts. They offer an insightful critique of prominent frameworks (complex dynamic systems theory, self-determination theory, Gardner's socio-education model, Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system) and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each model's applicability. For example, the editors call into question the relevance of the *ideal L2 self*, the aspirational motivator in Dörnyei's framework, pointing out that since the native speaker fallacy is prevalent in certain Asian contexts, students might define an ideal L2 user as a native speaker, a target often too distant to be motivating.

Asia is "where the vast majority of the world's L2 learners and L2 teachers live" (p. 228), and from India to Taiwan, primary to tertiary, critical discourse to complex dynamic systems, the book offers a valuable mosaic of L2 motivation research in the region. However, the assorted age groups, target languages, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches deter readers from synthesizing findings across chapters. Apart from its organizing premise of geographic location, the compilation could benefit from a more explicit thematic through-line that links the chapters together. Nonetheless, the book accomplishes the editors' objective of presenting situated perspectives on L2 learning and motivation in Asian contexts. Teachers and researchers will find much to apply to their practice in this collection.

About the reviewer

Aaron Doyle is a PhD student at the Centre for Applied English Studies, The University of Hong Kong. His research interests include L2 motivation and decision-making, and his PhD thesis investigates the motivational development and academic choices of English majors in Mainland China.

References

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