Philip G. Altbach, Liz Reisberg, Maria Yudkevich, Gregory Androushchak, and Yaroslav Kuzminov (eds): The global future of higher education and the academic profession: the BRICs and the United States

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The Global Future of Higher Education and the Academic Profession: The BRICs and the United States offers descriptions of higher education systems and their contextual settings in Brazil, Russia, India, and China, as well as their comparison to the US. These descriptions are supplemented with a fair share of analysis and observed general trends in development experienced by each of these national educational systems. No doubt, this is a generalist volume, which to a large extent serves as a sequel to Paying the Professoriate: A Global Comparison of Compensation and Contracts, produced by almost the same editorial team in the prior year, which focused on professors’ salaries, remuneration, income, and employment contracts throughout the world.

The major focus of this volume is the professoriate, which constitutes the core of academia, with its concerns and the challenges faced by academia. The authors represent the regions on which they report and the chapters are lined in accordance with the countries’ positions in the BRIC abbreviation. In Chapter 1, The Prospects for the BRICs: The New Academic Superpowers?, Philip Altbach suggests that the BRICs “remain peripheral in the global knowledge system.” (p. 3) Nevertheless, their ambitions and potential for development are far reaching. According to Simon Schwartzman, faculty in public universities in Brazil enjoy the status of civil servant, which brings a relatively high pay, tenure, job security, early retirement, and numerous other perks and benefits. However, many faculty members work in private colleges and have to teach several part-time jobs in order to maintain their income level at a socially acceptable level. Thus, one distinct feature of all BRIC countries is that their professoriate is clearly underpaid. In this sense, China may not be different from India. This chronic undervalue of academic work, as well as the lack of prospects for professional and income growth, drive talented youth away from academia and cause a significant brain drain. In Chapter 5, The Chinese Academic Profession: New Realities, Ma Wanhua and Wen Jianbo report that “more than one million Chinese students who studied abroad did not return.” (p. 158) Lately, however, “more and

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more fresh foreign PhD holders look for opportunities in Chinese universities—a good sign for brain circulation.” (p. 158) (Altbach et al. 2012)

This good sign is clearly—and unfortunately—not the case with Russia. While describing the situation in Russian education in Chapter 3, entitled Changing realities: Russian higher education and the academic profession, Maria Yudkevich, Gregory Androushchak and Yaroslav Kuzminov use such terms as research provincialism and imitation of research (p. 82). These terms are perhaps among the best possible terms for highlighting the current state of what used to be one of the best higher education systems in the world. A chronic underfunding of research, combined with brain drain and the provincial mentality explain the dismal state of research in Russian regions. Corruption, one of the critically important problems that the Russian higher education sector has been facing for over two decades, is also given some—although not nearly enough—attention. The authors point out that, due to extremely low wages, “informal payments are becoming crucial to keep faculty at universities” and that the university administration “indulges such practices.” (p. 81) The implications of such a symbiosis-based steady state are daunting, as this phenomenon “makes the whole education system vulnerable because it creates pseudo-education, where a system of mutual need between teachers and students upsets a healthier equilibrium.” (p. 81).

In Chapter 4, titled India: Streamlining the Academic Profession for a Knowledge Economy, N. Jayaram names corruption a “big constraining factor affecting higher education in India.” (p. 122) Corruption is discussed most in the chapter on Russia, as if all education corruption is concentrated in just one educational system, which is certainly not true. It would be to the benefit of the book and the reader if more attention were paid to the issue of supplemental income, informal practices, and illicit means of boosting income, to which underpaid college instructors resort routinely in the BRIC countries. As in many other sectors of the economy, in the higher education sector, money and morals appear to be major determinants of the professoriate’s behavior.

Countries of the BRIC face numerous obstacles on their way to becoming new academic superpowers. The book concludes with the notion that, although higher education sectors in each of the emerging global powers is facing constant and significant challenges, working conditions of their professoriate remain discouraging and far from ideal. The authors insist that professors must be adequately paid, but at present this is simply not the case. Aside from the issue of meager and inadequate pay, there are other, not less important, problems, which may be found in realms of research and structural and organizational changes. These include faculty hiring and promotion, which is often challenged by rigid hierarchies. One such problem or outdated practice, namely inbreeding, is extremely hard, if not impossible, to challenge. The practice of inbreeding is shared to a large extent by all countries the researchers consider.

The Chapter on Russia is perhaps the best structured, well-illustrated by the data, and analytically strong. Methodologically, the book is not particularly strong, in part due to the imminent boundaries imposed by the limited space, and in part due to the lack of elaborate theoretical lenses and instrumentarium. In essence, most chapters are overviews rather than deep analytical works. Another shortcoming of the works presented in this volume is that all of the chapters, except the last one, feature rather modest lists of references. This lack of scholarly sources is felt throughout the text, when authors present concepts, facts, data, and other points without actually backing their statements with proper references, sources, or citations.

Overall, the authors try to go beyond mere descriptions and present some burning issues and their implications, but they are not always successful in their attempts. Although the
book claims analysis, some chapters, such as Chapter 6, entitled *The Changing American Academic Profession* by Martin J. Finkelstein and Kevin W. Iglesias, are purely descriptive. Due to its generalist nature, the book would be of use primarily to policymakers, and less so to researchers. Nevertheless, those interested in global issues in higher education, including scholars in international and comparative higher education, will find a wealth of interesting facts and comparisons in this volume.

References