

Stig Thøgersen: *Secondary Education in China after Mao: Reform and Social Conflict*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990. 168 pp.

This work concerns itself with Chinese education in the years 1976 to 1989, focusing upon secondary education or the middle school.

Thøgersen provides a summary of the most significant changes in the educational system and analyses the processes of transformation and their immediate affects. He is particularly interested in investigating the social functions of education and the obvious contradictions which arise in China's attempts simultaneously to realize political, ideological and economical goals for education.

Thøgersen's source material consists of Chinese documents and reports concerning educational reform and of the empirical results of his own research conducted in the field in 1984, 1985 and 1987.

In order for the Westerner to understand the historical basis for educational changes, which took place between 1976 and the student revolt in 1989, the author reviews the role of the middle school in the development of Chinese society since 1949 and its roots in pre-revolutionary China. While he does not deal explicitly with student revolt, he refers to political discussions about educational content following the events of 1989.

Thøgersen proceeds to analyse the general political and ideological climate prevailing in these years, in order to identify the contradictions imbedded in the various reforms of this period. The actual status of education in post-Maoist China is similarly reviewed.

In the chapter dealing with school structure, Thøgersen presents an interesting analysis of the double objectives of the middle school, namely, to prepare students for university and to provide a well-qualified labour force. This double function was a novelty in the Chinese educational system at that time. Before 1976, secondary education was, in principle, a comprehensive system. However, reforms initiated after 1976 placed great emphasis upon vocational training. Various methods of selection and encouragement of competition were introduced in order to realize the school's double function. "Key schools" were re-established in order to promote streaming at the secondary school level, despite resistance on the part of many, who feared that children of rehabilitated intellectuals

and cadre members would automatically have the best opportunities for further education. Despite prevailing ideology, university education continues to be prestigious and highly coveted. Neither Deng Xiaoping's assurance that mental and physical labour are equally valued in society nor the official status of academics as part of the working class have been able to alter this attitude.

In principle, the official objective of the key schools was identical to that of the ordinary schools. However, special privileges attaching to these schools gave them an élite status and meant that a greater percentage of their pupils went on to university than those from normal schools. The introduction of fast and slow classes, examinations and tests succeeded in cementing the double function of the secondary school. The author concludes that "the new selection criteria and methods introduced after 1977 transformed China's educational system, in particular secondary education, almost overnight into a meritocratic, competitive and elite-oriented structure" (p. 92).

Thøgersen seeks an explanation for the success of such radical reforms, despite widespread resistance, in the traditional Chinese attitude towards education. He adds that, despite popular resistance to élitism as such, a general acceptance of the need to provide a strong motivation for education was necessary. Finally, a selective and competitive principle was not out of keeping with post-Maoist, market-oriented ideology. According to Thøgersen, "the central principle underlying the examination system that success and failure should be determined by one's own abilities and judged according to objective criteria is identical with the basic idea behind the market-oriented reforms of the economy" (p. 92). The author indicates that, politically speaking, it was not difficult for the Chinese to accept various manifestations of inequality in their educational system, because inequalities are a part of their ideology of modernization based on a belief in an economical down-filtering effect with positive benefits for all, in the long run.

In the section dealing with education and production, Thøgersen provides an excellent survey of various types of secondary vocational schools, intended educational content and various difficulties encountered by the schools in fulfilling their objectives. The central theory/practice problem attaching to educational theory is also

examined. According to Mao's Marxism, participation in production or in practical labour was not only of central importance in moral and political training, it was also an epistemological necessity. Furthermore, Mao believed that the realization of this principle would create the financial basis for general education. Thøgersen considers the Soviet influence upon the Chinese educational system in summary fashion, although he provides no examples of how this influence was manifested in educational practice. Such an exemplification could have provided insights into the background and later development of vocational schools and the processes of reform, not least because the issues of vocationalization, school and production continue to be of vital, international interest in relation to the problems of education and development.

Since the author explicitly addresses himself to "students of comparative education" (p. 12), it is to be regretted that his survey of the content of China's "moral education", while somewhat more thorough than his treatment of Maoist and Soviet influences upon education, lacks a theoretical dimension. This section of his work concludes with a brief discussion of the students demonstrations of 1989, viewed in relation to the explicit moral training which is part of Chinese education. Thøgersen believes that the events of 1989 can be viewed, in part, as an expression of the conflict between the students' continuing loyalty both to Communist ideals and the ideals of the post-Maoist state, which have their origin in the period before the Cultural Revolution. Thøgersen does not pursue the potential effect of what he calls a new "Marxist-Confucian cocktail" (p. 131).

The final chapter is based on empirical results of the author's surveys and includes extensive information from six secondary schools in Yantai.

His surveys investigate educational possibilities in relation to pupils' gender and social class. To date, very few surveys of this kind have been conducted in China. Thøgersen obtained material by means of questionnaires about pupils' age, gender, membership in the Communist youth organization, post held in class, preferred academic subject, future expectations, and parent' occupation, education, income and party membership. The results of the material tend to confirm problems generally characteristic of the

educational system, which arise in the clash between socialist ideas, a revival of traditional values, and the emphasis placed on the selection and competition as part of a modernization process.

Thøgersen's work is readily accessible, cogent and well-organized. It appeals to a wide range of interest in recent Chinese history and educational reform. However, for the uninitiated, it tends to lack precise definition or exemplification of notions and concepts frequently used in the field of education in relation to development. Furthermore, in view of its aim to contribute to studies in comparative education, the book fails to deliver an in-depth discussion of the content of Chinese secondary school education.

Joan Conrad
University of Copenhagen