



Review: [Untitled]

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Social Transformation and Private Education in China by Jing Lin
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questioning the issue of Chinese medium education and national unity. The question remains: How can these countries adequately promote national unity without threatening the ethnic identity of their multicultural communities?

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Social Transformation and Private Education in China by Jing Lin. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999. 248 pp. \$69.50 (cloth). ISBN 0-275-95590-7.

This book presents an in-depth analysis on the reemergence and development of private education in China during its transition from a socialist economy to a socialist market economy, beginning in the early 1980s. Jing Lin carefully traces and critically examines the problems and issues confronting the newly emerged private education sector.

In the first three chapters, the author explains why private schools and universities, which had disappeared for nearly 3 decades (early 1950s to the early 1980s) in China, could successfully reemerge and make significant growth in just over 1 decade. She contends that their reemergence and development are rooted in the specific historical, cultural, social, economic, and educational contexts of China, and, more important, she argues that these private education institutions constitute an integral part of the ongoing educational reform and social transformation in China.

In chapters 4–8, Jing Lin focuses on three major types of private education institutions in China: elite private schools, ordinary private schools, and private universities. Based on a sample of about 40 private schools and universities and a comparison with their counterparts in the public education sector, the author sketches the spectra of characteristics of these three types of private education. She argues that, to different extents, these selected private schools or universities differ not only among themselves but also from their public counterparts in many important aspects, such as students' means of access (based on money, connections, or academic merit), students' family backgrounds, orientations of curriculum and teaching approaches, autonomy in curriculum and management, and relation to the state and/or market. She further argues that such differences provide a space for private education to develop into a genuine alternative to public education in the provision of compulsory or postcompulsory education and in the experiment of a democratic ideal of education and educational administration.

In chapters 10–12, the author critically evaluates both practical and theoretical issues confronting the newly emerged private education sector in China. She focuses mainly on the nature, functions, regulation, and survival of private education institutions and their relations to the public education sector and the government. In particular, the author argues that public education in China is “inherently unequal” (p. 175) and under the government's tight control. Against this background she further argues that the private education sector could enhance social equality, provide students with the choice to receive alternative forms of education or a sec-

ond chance to improve their social mobility, and promote democratic management in schools through greater autonomy and parent empowerment.

This book contributes to the international literature on the relations between private education and social change in China in three significant aspects. First, unlike many other writers on private education in China, the author provides rich, firsthand empirical findings on private schools and universities to substantiate her discussion on complicated issues such as social equality, diversity and plurality of education, and efficiency of public schools in contemporary Chinese education.

Second, although there is no significant theoretical groundbreaking in regard to private education and social transformation, the author skillfully uses the case of China to challenge the traditional dualistic view about the antithetical roles of public education as an enhancer of social equality and private education as a promoter of social inequality. Her comparison between private and public education institutions in China is both complex and dialectical in that her findings demonstrate that private education reproduces both social equality and social inequality, particularly in terms of opportunity and quality of education, similar to that perpetuated by the public education system.

Third, the book is one of very few works that analyzes the impact of class transformation on Chinese education. In particular, the author argues for the existence of a newly defined "middle class" (and "latent middle class") with socioeconomic characteristics different from its counterpart in Western countries. This special group of people in China has a greater ability to provide education for their children resulting in higher expectations and demands that cannot be met by the public education sector. The mismatch between the expectations of parents and the current state of public education in China will continue to provide a strong ground for the existence of private education and continued development of the socialist market economy.

Although the book focuses on private education in China, the author also draws on educational developments in other societies so as to provide a comparative background for understanding the issues facing private education in China. However, some remarks on other education systems may have been oversimplified. For example, the author presents a misconception about the banding system in Hong Kong. It is factually incorrect to say that, in Hong Kong, "public secondary schools are divided into five bands" (p. 172). As a matter of fact, the academic performance of primary school graduates, rather than secondary schools themselves, are classified into five bands for the purpose of allocating students in secondary schools. Of the secondary school students in a particular public school, 70 percent could belong to the category of band 1, 25 percent to band 2, and 5 percent to band 3. The percentages of secondary school students of different bands can vary with schools and time. The author also magnifies the variation of the quality of teachers and school conditions among public secondary schools in Hong Kong. Despite these factual lapses, the overall writing of the book is serious and careful, and its contribution to the understanding of contemporary Chinese private education is significant.

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