matches in 2015; the Chinese equivalent of Google Scholar, Baidu Xueshu, reports more than 3,000 entries. A side note on formal specifics: Language editing has been disappointingly sloppy, including many of the Chinese pinyin transcriptions. In two otherwise highly similar sections (p. 3, 48), two different population figures are provided for the Dongxiang, differing substantially (539,000 vs. 621,500).

To sum up, the book's topic is certainly worth further exploration: There is much to learn about the intersections of gender, ethnicity, rural identities, education, and working lives within the Chinese society, and both researchers and practitioners in vocational education have long ignored these contextual factors when investigating, designing, and evaluating programs in vocational education and training.

Barbara SCHULTE

Lund University

E-mail: Barbara.Schulte@soc.lu.se

DOI 10.3868/s110-004-015-0036-9

无声的革命：北京大学、苏州大学学生社会来源研究 1949–2002 [*A silent revolution: Social origins of Peking University and Suzhou University students, 1949–2002*]. 梁晨, 张浩, 李中清 [Chen Liang, Hao Zhang, & Zhongqing Li]. 北京, 中国: 生活·读书·新知三联书店 [Beijing, China: SDX Joint Publishing Company], 2013. 314 pp., (paperback), 49¥, ISBN: 978-7-108-04700-7.

Given the intensified public attention given to issues of educational equity in China, in particular opportunities for accessing the very few elite universities, the book *A Silent Revolution: Social Origins of Peking University and Suzhou University Students, 1949–2002* authored by Liang, Zhang, and Li intrigues and stimulates debate. Even though the authors give the term “revolution” the modest and de-politicalized definition of “great changes” (p. 24), this is deemed necessary in a country where revolution has often been coupled with massive

violence, which led to the overthrow of the established pattern whereby social wealth and political power were distributed. The studies in this book offer a controversial conclusion: Students in elite Chinese education have non-elite social origins.

Drawing on information from 150,000 student registration cards issued between 1949–2002, of which 86,000 were from Suzhou University while around 64,000 were from Peking University (with some missing from 1988 and 1956–1971), the authors examine the social origins of students by geographic region, parental career, gender and ethnicity, in order to identify changing patterns. The longitudinal nature of the investigation featured in the book is particularly striking, for it gives insight into how access to China's top universities has changed in differing time periods. Compared with before 1949, the social origins of students at elite universities of China became remarkably diversified after the Communist Party came to power. Between 1949 and 2002, parental careers had only limited influence on access to elite universities, and an increasing number of students from remote rural regions and from worker and peasant families were recruited into elite universities. The number of female and minority students was also boosted during this period (see Chapters 2–4). Such diversification, as the authors of the book further argue, has promoted the movement of people at the bottom end of society in a trajectory of upward mobility, which is a function usually achieved by massive revolution (p. 239).

An important reason why this book deserves a careful reading by scholars, policy-makers and the wider public, is that the authors made a great effort to integrate historical knowledge about the various stages of Chinese higher education into their analysis, including the establishment stage (1949–1955), the great leap period (1956–1966), the cultural revolution (often named “deconstruction” in documents; 1966–1976) and the period of reform and opening-up (1977–). This enables readers to form an overall understanding of how Chinese elite higher education achieved a more equalizing social system over the past five decades. This might be a fresh finding, but the reinterpretation is quite controversial. In most literature on Chinese higher education the above stages had been interpreted as a zigzag between two parallel policy goals, namely attaining equality and efficiency. If there did exist a fundamental change that could be called a “revolution” in the field of higher education in China, it certainly was not happening in a *silent* manner. In fact, the intricate progress of

Chinese higher education over this historical period has been made up of tense struggles and has not been without pain and lessons. Above all, as the approach in recent decades shows, it remains in question whether the *equalizing system* is sustainable or not.

This book could have been a more solid academic work if the authors had strengthened their theoretical framework. While dense pages are devoted to description, only small parts of the book are taken up with theories and theoretical reasoning. Although the authors analyze the main factors that played a role in restructuring Chinese higher education during the period 1949–2002, namely the expansion of secondary education, the establishment of key schools and the implementation of the national standard college-entrance examination, none of these elements are analyzed in a sound macro-level framework, and the relations between and among the factors remain unknown. Regretfully, this reduces to some degree the explanatory power of the book.

Nevertheless, this is a book written with great sincerity. As a piece of research adopting a quantitative methodological approach to history, this book is exceptional, inviting readers with a strong interest in history and education to explore further the substantial data presented in the book.

Yan LUO

Tsinghua University

E-mail: luoyl1@tsinghua.edu.cn

DOI 10.3868/s110-004-015-0037-6

诞生与危机：独立学院制度运行的案例研究 [*Creation and crisis: A case study of the institutional process of independent colleges*]. 彭华安 [Huaan Peng]. 上海, 中国: 上海三联书店 [Shanghai, China: Shanghai Joint Publishing Company], 2013. x + 261 pp., (paperback), 28¥, ISBN: 978-7-5426-4065-9.

The independent college is a new organizational form within the Chinese higher education system born in the late 20th century and has become an important part of the system. By 2012, independent colleges amounted to 303 institutions with a