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.

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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

total enrolment of 2.78 million students, accounting for 12.7% of the number of institutions and 11.6% of the enrolment in the Chinese higher education system. From the date of its birth, however, it is full of controversy. On the one hand it is viewed as an institutional innovation to enhance opportunities for higher education access; on the other hand, many people criticized it as inequitable because generally the tuition fees are twice as high as in public universities. Just as Zhejiang University City College, every independent college's name is affiliated to the public university involved, but it has an independent social identity; the educational and management resources originally relied on the public university involved, but like purely private universities, the operating expenditure is primarily from tuition and fees that are charged according to a market mechanism. Therefore the independent college is a typical public-private hybrid. Although central government has managed to define the independent college as a private (or *minban*) university in policy terms, it has developed into two basic types in reality. The first is a public institution which is created by a single public university or by public universities and other public institutions cooperatively, and mainly is governed by public universities. The second is a private institution which is co-organized by public universities and private enterprises, and is mainly dominated by the enterprise. How did it arise, and why does it encounter the dilemma of institutionalization in terms of organizational form?

This book, adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation, adopts a case study method to investigate three independent colleges, trying to inquire into the two questions above. From the perspective of rational choice institutionalism, the author argues that the creation of independent colleges was derived from the strategic calculation of maximum benefits performed by relevant actors including the central government, local governments, public universities and private enterprises. Then using an institutional logics conception, the author attempts to explain the implementation failure of the central policies. All of the major actors involved have their own peculiar logics of action. To prevent the undesirable impacts of marketization on social stability, the authoritative central government formulated policies to regulate the running of independent colleges. In the meanwhile, it tolerated some deviation in policy implementation because it could not develop policies appropriate to local practices and it was trapped in a network of interpersonal relation. In order to promote local education and economic development, local governments took various measures to sidetrack

and compromise the original intentions of central government policies. Likewise, independent colleges and their creators deliberately circumvented policy requirements which impeded their success. It was eventually the interplay among these multiple logics that contributed to the variability in the types of independent colleges and the ways in which policy implementation was carried out.

It is hard to understand the actual mechanisms that underlie the creation and institutionalization of independent colleges, however, because the author probably misused the adopted theories or conceptions in this book. Firstly, rational choice theory in response to the behavioral perspectives emphasizes the impact of structure on actors as well as strategic action, but the author prioritized the calculation of interests to such a degree that he underestimated the restrictive role of institutions. This led to some questions being unresolved. For instance, why is the independent college an institutional form of public-private hybrid rather than a pure public or private form? Secondly, the author confused institutional logics with logics of action. Institutional logics should be at a societal analytic level and logics of action at an individual analytic level. The confusion of the two levels may have resulted in the ignoring of the separate effects of factors from different levels and the obscuring of the mechanism of interplay between them. As for the analysis of independent colleges in the book, the effect of relevant institutional logics, including societal, state, market and educational are not clear, and the reader cannot ascertain how they enable and constrain individual strategies of action involved at the same time.

Nevertheless, this book represents a commendable tendency in educational research in China, whereby researchers are consciously applying concepts and theories of social science to analyze educational questions. Meanwhile, the reader should be aware to the possibility of theories being misused, as happened to some extent in this book.

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