

## REVIEWS

Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar *Chinese Educational Policy: Changes and Contradictions 1949-1979*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1980. pp. 202.

"To serve the people" or "to serve the revolution" or "to build socialism" are the replies one receives to questions like, "What are you studying to be?" or "What are you studying for?" whether the queries are posed in the first grade or in the university. Chinese educational policy is directed, not only at the eradication of illiteracy and the promotion of knowledge among the people, but also, and more centrally, at the creation of new men and women who think and act in a socialist way, who will find fulfillment and meaning in service to the community. It is the attempt to achieve this latter goal while simultaneously constructing a viable modern economy that gives the educational system of the People's Republic of China its distinctive character and dynamism.\*

In view of the current Chinese conclusion that the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was nothing less than "ten lost years," the concluding sentence in the quote (published in 1975) raises fundamental epistemological questions about the study of China. Jan-Ingvar Löfstedt says that a number of questions interested him: what is the nature of the socialist transformation China has achieved? What experience has she gained in nation building? What role has education played in the development process? Why had there been so many fluctuations in China's development strategy including educational policy? What was the cultural revolution really about? How should one view the Soviet influence on Chinese development? Although the author, as we shall presently see, explores these questions with care and competence, he does not help us to settle basic validity and reliability issues regarding the study of China.

But, did the author aim to resolve such fundamental epistemological problems? No. Then what is the point of this accusation? It is this: many of us who believed much of what we read about the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution — as it was called then — now approach post 1976 articles or books on China with a certain willing suspension of belief. Nevertheless, one must do one's best to be fair to the content of *Chinese Educational Policy*.

Löfstedt, according to information provided on the back cover, undertook graduate studies on Chinese education at Stockholm University, taught Swedish at the Peking Foreign Language Institute in the early 1960's and later taught Chinese language and pedagogy at several Swedish universities.

The author has obviously consulted or carefully considered all the major, relevant primary and secondary sources. Moreover, his knowledge of the Chinese language and his extensive travels within China both during and after the cultural revolution have helped to deepen his understanding of people and events in that complex country.

The author had formulated an ambitious goal for the study leading to this book:

- (1) To describe and analyze educational development in China since 1949 at the levels of a) theory and ideology, b) policy, and c) implementation, with educational policy as the most central level.
- (2) To define a general Marxist theory of education and use it as a point of reference for Chinese educational policy.
- (3) To examine Soviet educational policy in the early decades and its influence on China after 1949.
- (4) To evaluate Chinese educational policy and performance during [1949 to 1979] and thereby relate them to the socialist development strategy and its components of Marxist theory and Soviet experience.
- (5) To apply a modified dialectical method of description and analysis making change in educational policy the main object of study, and relating this change to contradictions and interrelations in a holistic ("all-embracing") perspective. (p. 21)

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\*Joseyney Slade Tien, "Everyone Getting Ahead; Nobody Left Behind: Education in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Educational Thought*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (December, 1975), p. 182. This essay was based on a three month visit to China. For my view, based on a three week visit in 1978, see "Massliners versus Capitalist Roaders in China's Education Ring: Round Four to Capitalist Roaders?" *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (February 1979), pp. 101-114.

Löfstedt has attempted to view Chinese education from a historical, comparative and multi-disciplinary perspective. Individuals interested in Marxist (including Soviet) education, socialist development and comparative education should, therefore, find this book interesting.

*Chinese Educational Policy* is a panoramic work. Every major problem or issue or resolution that affected that policy from 1949 to 1979 has been mentioned or briefly discussed. One might almost use it as an introductory reference manual on Chinese education. The author presents over 60 charts, tables and figures to summarize or highlight complex matters. Most of them do assist the reader to retain interest in the author's multi-focussed approach, although some of them — for example Table 12:1 "Model of Policy Conflicts" — merely list polar categories such as "urban" and "rural" or "Quality" and "Quantity." Since the author's dialectical framework, at root, is Marxist, his narrations and descriptions which take up most of the space in the book display sensible sympathy towards China.

The major conclusion of the book is that we can account for most of the major changes in Chinese education in the past three decades by relating them to the oscillations between moderate and radical left political tendencies in that country. (The moderates are "identified with the theory of productive forces (i.e., that the main contradiction in China today is between the advanced socialist system and the backward productive forces).") The radicals take the position that "the main contradiction is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.") This major conclusion is a defensible one. A second important conclusion is that controversies about the role of education among the leaders arise from "the different sets of value systems" — presumably based on their view of the nature of the main contradiction — than from any "actual evaluation of the performance of the educational system."

Despite the erudition of the author, the informed reader is compelled to conclude, for two important reasons, that the book is a partial disappointment. (1) The author fails to achieve his fifth — in my view, the most important — aim although he does satisfactorily accomplish the other four objectives. (See above for the list of five aims). Given the vastness of his scope, this failure was, perhaps, inevitable. Indeed, the author would have been more successful in achieving this goal if he had explored in depth a more specific theme such as the Chinese experience in relating theory to practice through linking education to production. (2) He regrettably further ensures the possibility of failure with unfortunate ambiguities. For example, the concept of contradiction is central to the author's perspective. Yet, this is how he discusses it:

As for the term "contradiction", it has also been used in a rather common-sense and non-Marxist sense denoting (1) conflicting views or interests within or among groups of people, (2) mutually exclusive aspects or properties within or among properties and phenomena, and (3) tension or conflict between or among properties and phenomena which are not mutually exclusive (both . . . and . . . , instead of either . . . or . . . ) (p. 178)

How does Löfstedt's work compare with other recent publications? R.F. Price's revision of his 1975 book, *Education in Modern China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) also discusses most of the topics in *Chinese Educational Policy*. Without writing a review of Price's book, we may note a few important similarities and differences. Both books describe and attempt to account for the changes after Mao Ze Dong's death. Price and Löfstedt relate events in the educational systems to the economic, political and cultural contexts. The focus of both authors is on the past three decades. Yet the differences are striking. Löfstedt attempts to achieve much more than Price does. He relates China's experiences much more thoroughly to the educational aspirations and experience of Socialist countries, most notably the U.S.S.R. Price, on the other hand, sees modern China's attempt to reform its educational system mostly against the background of events, attitudes and traditions prior to 1949. Löfstedt tries, but generally fails, to put educational developments in China within a broadly Marxist theoretical tradition. Price, however, is much more interested in describing and explaining Chinese educational developments without benefit of "grand theory." Price's book contains much more description about students, the curriculum, schools and teachers than Löfstedt's. Mao also appears as a far more central character in Price's *Education in Modern China*. Finally, *Chinese Educational Policy* should be considered a graduate level book whereas undergraduates can benefit by reading *Education in Modern China*.

An unusual feature of *Chinese Educational Policy* is its organization. Chapter 5, The First Five-Year Plan, 1953-57 for example, is subdivided into 5.0 The First Year, 5.0.1 The Trade Unions, 5.0.2 New

Tasks etc. This extremely formal organization makes *Chinese Educational Policy* a dry and difficult book to read. The rather frequent infelicitous phrases and some spelling errors add to this difficulty.

Sana'i's Persian poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant" ends thus:

Each had but known one part, no man all;  
Hence into deadly error each did fall.  
No way to know the All man's heart can find:  
Can knowledge e'er accompany the blind?

Jan-Ingvar Löfstedt has tried very hard to know all the parts of Chinese educational policy. But his and our attempts to understand China are, perhaps, somewhat like the attempts of blind people to describe an elephant by examining only those parts of the animal near them.

Mathew Zachariah  
The University of Calgary

Thomas, R. Murray (ed.) *Politics and Education: Cases From Eleven Nations*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983. 295 pp. \$17.95 (U.S.)

On a worldwide scale the 20th century nation-state, in all its various manifestations, has tried to control its respective populations. Whether the purpose of control is ideological purity, technological superiority, cultural uniformity or national unity, the school figures as a central institution in the molding process. Each country has declared its ideological base, set forth its policies and constructed its educational system to reflect those values that it cherishes. As the governments change, so the educational system undergoes some modification; whether the change is gradual or abrupt depends upon the nature of the circumstances. But no state however disposed to mold its population has been able to use its educational system to enforce total compliance to its own will. This is not for want of trying — and some regimes have shown themselves totally unrealistic — but rather, that educational systems are seemingly incapable of being totally organized for the purposes designated. Mass education has still not created mass mind but nations continue to exert great pressure through educational systems to effect conformity to their particular brand of nationalism.

In reading *Politics and Education: Cases From Eleven Nations* one becomes acutely aware how contemporary politics and education have become thoroughly entwined. Each case exemplifies the degree to which control of education — from the regulation of a single institution within a society to the complete identification of the educational with the political and social system — is seen necessary to carry forward the ideals of that particular society. No society is exempt; on a continuum one could allocate a place for every nation in the world using the criteria of a political domination over educational systems. There exists no wall of separation between the State and Education: everywhere State control is defended as being for the benefit of the people. Every child has a right to be educated but the State determines the exercise of that right. Education is the prerogative of the State.

*Politics and Education* is a compilation of eleven case studies prepared for the Comparative and International Education Society's (U.S.A.) western regional conference in 1981. As a compilation of such cases, the book produced is far better than most having been planned seemingly well in advance allowing for the kind of integration which few conferences are able to produce. Each case study has a referent in the introduction, and the conclusion is an analysis based only on the cases discussed. The editor, R. Murray Thomas, has clearly delineated the scope of the book and carefully set out the parameters within which the observations should be interpreted. In the concluding chapter, Laurence Iannaccone presents a "re-analysis" of cases and develops a typology to interpret the results. The book contains a useful map, reference at the end of each chapter, and an index; a short biography on each author is found in the preface. [Note: I am a firm believer in waste management but the Pergamon Press seems to be carrying things a mite far. The book quite literally disintegrated in my hands. I claim no special destructive powers, intentional or otherwise, so that the reader is well advised to scan the book as quickly as possible before bio-degradation sets in.] The main body of the book is divided into three sections each with its own country and case illustration. Thus, the first section is entitled *Strategies For Using Education To Achieve Political Ends* (West Germany, Zaire, Nicaragua, The United States of America); the second is *Patterns of Majority — Minority Group Relations* (The People's Republic of China, Malasia, Jamaica); the third is *Multiple Group Influences On Educational Decisions* (Israel, England and Wales, Canada, Cameroon). Quite plainly the scope is broad, ranging