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Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900 by Benjamin A. Elman; Alexander Woodside

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including the philosopher Francis Anderson, and reforming bureaucrats, Peter Board and Frank Tate. She shows how, for example, the Australian educationists stressed the school's social function, whereas Dewey, for all his ambiguities, sought cultural transformation of a kind the Australians did not seek. They were professional educators and therefore conservative, and they used the new educational techniques to buttress traditional social values. Dunt argues convincingly that as professionals, "as *educational* but not *social* reformers" they tried to develop the child as "an autonomous moral agent" who would, however, come gently to an acceptance of a conservative view of moral responsibility (p. 61).

This outlook predisposed Australian educational administrators and academics, in the years immediately before the Second World War, to embrace what they regarded as a truly American invention: education as a science, an objective body of knowledge derived from and expressed through evaluative psychology, preferably numerically. Dunt shows that this shared view symbolized a tightening relationship between Australian and American educationists, particularly those at Stanford and Columbia. Ironically, it did not have Dewey's support. Ken Cunningham, who became the founding Director of the Australian Council for Education Research, which was deeply influenced by this view of education, remarked when reflecting on his time at Teachers' College in the 1920s: "John Dewey I met several times. . . . He was well on in years and semi-retired. . . . I never found his writings easy to follow. . . . In some ways I feel I have never quite buckled down to the task of mastering him" (p. 110).

If the task of mastering Dewey was too much for Cunningham, it was also too much for many (such as William Heard Kilpatrick) who had a closer geographical acquaintance with the master. The same cannot be said of Lesley Dunt. This brief and brilliant book will challenge historians in the United States and Australia.

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Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds. *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. xiv, 575. \$65.00.

The most coveted status in late imperial China (1600–1900) was that of government official, a status not ascribed but achieved—by mastering the arcane Confucian classics and passing an arduous sequence of civil service examinations. Historians have already discussed at length the Chinese emphasis on merit over birth as a criterion for holding office; the effects of the civil service examinations in socializing the bureaucratic elite into a common set of values; the concern, derived from Confucian thought, for

moral learning over practical knowledge; and the widespread respect for education, inspired by Confucianism but fostered by its association with political power.

These themes set the agenda for *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*, a collection of fourteen meticulously researched articles that refine, modify, and extend the discussion far beyond past findings on Chinese education. The editors, Alexander Woodside and Benjamin A. Elman, do much in their introduction to relate this volume to previous scholarship; even so, readers outside the China field should note that this book is not—indeed, was not intended to be—an introduction to the subject.

In his own article Elman, by analyzing examination essays in greater depth than any previous study in English, revisits a question that has often been asked: did the Chinese civil service examinations, which tested knowledge of ancient texts and were used by the emperor to select his officials, stultify intellectual change and sustain a politically sponsored orthodoxy? While accepting that the examination system tended to transmit past values to the present generation and to instill political loyalty, Elman shows that examination questions also incorporated new intellectual currents, especially the eighteenth-century interest in evidential (philological) studies.

Facing this same question of intellectual openness and flexibility, other contributors show how Chinese scholars reinterpreted their cultural tradition and influenced politics. Thus, R. Kent Guy examines an anthology of examination essays to explore the symbiotic relationship between the emperor and his officials. The emperor, who commissioned the anthology project in 1736, wished to celebrate “luminous and elegant” models of the past in order to set a standard for future examination takers (p. 160). The compiler of the anthology interpreted the project differently: by appending commentaries to the essays, he advocated his own intellectual agenda and tried to influence policy.

K. C. Liu explores education within the large, well-to-do household of the renowned mid-nineteenth-century scholar-official, Tseng Kuo-fan. Tseng’s personal diary and letters to his brothers and sons illuminate intrafamilial relationships and problems of household management. But even here the theme of examination success looms large. Tseng wanted his son Chi-tse to pass the examinations, but he also appreciated that the required eight-legged essays ill-suited the Confucian goal of moral self-cultivation, and he condoned his son’s view that learning should be pursued for its own sake. Tseng, though a stern guide, faced realities flexibly, and his case thus illustrates the wide latitude allowed by the Confucian tradition.

Kai-wing Chow relates social tensions within the elite to the changing content of the civil service examination. As evidential scholarship—

which required access to great book collections—won a place in the examinations, success became difficult for residents of library-poor regions. In reaction, one scholar created—and invented a legitimizing lineage for—a school of learning that returned to the simpler ways of ancient prose writers.

Historians have also heeded the tensions arising from the two goals of learning specified in Confucian theory: moral self-cultivation and service to the state. Career success, attained through examination competition and pragmatic political behavior, often conflicted with the values of the true, moral scholar. Like many great thinkers before him, Tai Chen, the subject of Cynthia Brokaw's essay, reasserted the primacy of moral goals, in his case by incorporating the fashionable philological techniques into a new synthesis.

Implicitly, many of the essays address the question: how pervasively did the state influence Chinese education? In her study of locally sponsored elementary schools in the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1911), Angela Ki Che Leung concludes that state intervention was absent, while community sponsorship of education expanded. However, she also notes that community leaders acted in ways that harmonized with state interests, with the result that, in contrast to the diverse *petites écoles* of eighteenth-century France, the curriculum content was remarkably uniform throughout China.

A different story is told by William Rowe in reference to elementary education in the eighteenth-century frontier province of Yunnan, inhabited by aboriginal tribes. There, some seven hundred community schools were established or renovated, not by members of the community (as in Leung's sample), but by an official, Ch'en Hung-mou. Driven by an expansionist spirit, Ch'en tried (ultimately in vain) “to transform the people and perfect local customs” (p. 419), in other words, to sinicize them and subjugate them to Chinese rule.

In her study of Manchu learning, Pamela Kyle Crossley examines how the Ch'ing state (ruled by Manchus, who had conquered China in 1644) shaped and used education—not to preserve Manchu ethnic identity (as others have maintained), but to control a proliferating Manchu nobility and, in the spirit of monument building, to augment symbols of the state.

Two contributors explore links between the late imperial trends and early twentieth-century educational reforms. Woodside shows that many Ch'ing scholar-officials sought the key to reform in an ancient ideal that the government should control and coordinate education on a nationwide basis. Influenced by this view, twentieth-century Chinese educators poorly understood the advantages of the intellectual and political autonomy enjoyed by Western universities. Barry Keenan, concentrating on Kiangsu province, explores the rapid expansion of academies during the

restoration period following the mid-nineteenth-century Taiping rebellion. This expansion, he suggests, then paved the way for the introduction of modern public schools.

The above-mentioned essays heavily rely on documents written by Confucian literati for a tiny elite whose members held, aspired to, or emulated official status. Indeed, the vast majority of historical sources for the study of late imperial China are of this sort, with the result that China is generally viewed from the top down, and it is difficult to fill in pictures of such other occupational groups as merchants, engineers, and Buddhist and Taoist priests, not to mention the vast sub-bureaucracy of non-degree-holding clerks who aided officials in the administration of China.

Alan Barr compensates for this lack by ingeniously using an eighteenth-century novel and other fiction to reveal a range of attitudes (some of which conflicted with commonly held ideals) about home tutors and village school teachers. Susan Mann overcomes the scarcity of documents about the education of women by defining education more broadly than the other authors to include non-bookish means of socialization (such as the display of symbols commemorating virtuous women, and training in domestic skills like needlework). Also moving beyond mainstream sources, Catherine Jami considers how knowledge was obtained about mathematics and astronomy, subjects not required for the civil service examinations; and Wejen Chang discusses the various ways (most notably, apprenticeship) in which legal knowledge was acquired.

In their afterword, the editors take up (among other themes and cross-cultural comparisons) the topic of religious education, neglected up to this point. The editors provide sound reasons for the slight; but, in light of the huge mid-nineteenth-century religious-inspired rebellions, one wonders if the neglect above all signifies the success of the Confucian hegemony in obscuring non-elite activities and thought. The editors mention in passing “nonliterate education” (p. 544), but only Mann considers how non-verbal symbols were used in education. More attention might have been paid to the spread of information through nonliterate means—such as the ubiquitous outdoor opera performances that were often sponsored by religious institutions. However, given the richness of the volume (far richer than can be intimated in the space here allowed), to ask for more is gluttony.

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