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Book review of Vocational Education of Female Entrepreneurs in China. A Multitheoretical and Multidimensional Analysis of Successful Businesswomen's Everyday Lives

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*Vocational education of female entrepreneurs in China: A multitheoretical and multidimensional analysis of successful businesswomen's everyday lives.* Mary Ann Maslak. Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2015. 110 pp., (hardcover), 145\$, ISBN: 978-0-415-73742-5.

This book is about vocational education, but also about possibilities of non-/informal education; it is about China, but also about a specific ethnic minority group (the Dongxiang), which is, among other things, characterized by Islamic faith; it is about entrepreneurship, and more specifically about successful female business women; it is about these women's everyday lives; and, if that was not enough, the author calls her analysis also "multitheoretical." Any reader who might now be expecting a weighty tome will be surprised to notice that Mary Ann Maslak's book contains a running text of a little more than 80 pages. As might have been foreknown, this brevity compromises both scope and depth of an analysis that otherwise could have been insightful and multi-faceted.

The book's topic is wisely chosen: How can we think in educational terms about people who usually do not belong to the target group of vocational education (in this case, illiterate women residing in rather remote, impoverished regions)? And may successful cases among these groups be able to point us to new ways of experimenting with (vocational) education and training on the ground? Maslak sets out to explore these issues by investigating the examples of four comparatively successful business women in a small town in the southern part of Gansu province, Northwest China, whom she met first in 2005 and then re-visited almost ten years later. In her final chapters, Maslak argues that we

should pay closer attention to the diverse realities as represented by these women, and calls for an education and training model that integrates various types of formal, non-formal and informal education.

This could have yielded important insights into problems as well as the potential of vocational education and training. However, Maslak's book turns out to be flawed by a number of serious shortcomings. Due to limited space, I will confine myself to the following aspects: the policy setting; the women's everyday lives; theory and methods; and the author's conclusion.

China's ethnic minority *policies*, including policies concerned with religion, are immensely complex, as are the social realities of ethnic minorities. Much more needs to be said regarding ethnic minorities' access to and participation in basic education, particularly with regard to girls/women; existing vocational training programs, including grassroots initiatives (which are at least partially already practicing what Maslak is calling for towards the end of her book); but also policies surrounding the construction of a "new socialist countryside," and how this has impacted rural China. Concerning these women's *everyday lives*, the book does not provide deeper insights into these women's experiences, norms, values, their embedding in Islamic faith, etc. The author, despite calling her work ethnographic, remains by and large an outsider, providing rather descriptive accounts of these women's daily work schedules. In terms of *methods*, the reader would like to learn more about how data was collected and analyzed; little knowledge is gained from the author's general statements about the advantages of qualitative research. For example, how was the author's research "participatory" (p. 7)? In terms of *theory*, the one and a half pages on Chinese and Western feminism and the two pages on social capital theory could have been expanded much more in order to do justice to the complex phenomena under investigation. Some parts of Maslak's *conclusion*—such as her call for integrating various approaches—have been noted and developed in the past by other scholars. Other ideas—such as envisioning a local mandatory course in "Being a Woman in Today's Society" (p. 97), drawing on feminist theory—could be developed further: How is this to be reconciled with the given local (cultural, religious) circumstances?

Some claims are badly researched. It is for example misleading to use the EBSCO database to prove the point that non-formal education is an under-recognized phenomenon in China. If one checks Chinese databases, the picture looks quite different: The China Academic Journals database yields 373

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.

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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