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中国式在家上学: R 学堂的教育人类学研究 [*Chinese style "home schooling": The study of educational anthropology on R-School*]. 任杰慧 [Ren, Jiehui]. 北京, 中国: 社会科学文献出版社 [Social Science Academic Press], 2017. 247 pp., (paperback), RMB69, ISBN: 978-7-5201-0538-5.

From the title of the book, you might be a little confused. While the research is about "homeschooling," the study seems to have been carried out at a private school called "R-school." In fact, this conflict absolutely reflects Chinese homeschooling today. A Chinese teacher at a model public high school for years, Ren felt uncomfortable with learning and teaching centered around *gaokao* (高考) test scores. In 2013, as a doctoral student in anthropology, she came across a group of parents who chose R-School over the public school education system for their children. This book is the first monograph on homeschooling in the Chinese mainland.

R-school was selected as a case study representing Chinese-style homeschooling. While in countries such as the US, homeschooling mainly takes place in family settings, this is not allowed in China. Therefore, the Chinese style of homeschooling means an escape from public education and establishing one's own educational locale, often without the official recognition of being a "school" (p. 112). This type of new educational locale has expanded quickly in the past decade in China, indicating diverse needs emerging in the country.

The author conducted field work and interviews at R-school for a total period of 9 months between April 2013 and September 2015 (p. 10). Both teachers and parents were surveyed. Seven chapters discuss the origins of R-school and the challenges it faces at present and in the future. First, who joins these new-style schools? R-school has 250 to 260 students in 15 classes, more than 60 teachers, and more than 20 logistical staff members (p. 11). The parents of R-school students are identified as middle-class Chinese. The main reasons given for them choosing R-school are "dissatisfaction with public schools" and "hope that children can have a happier childhood."

Second, how are these schools founded and run? In 2006, R-school used to be a parents' mutual-help group comprised of four kids (p. 11). Over the following seven years, the group developed into an organization with many more students. The features of the practice at R-school can be summarized in four points:

emphasizing traditional Chinese learning and culture, individualized small class size education, developing personality rather than academic training, and mobilizing parents' involvement.

Third, what are the social and cultural factors fostering this type of homeschooling in China? From Ren's point of view, social and cultural change in China has had a deep impact on it. The middle-class families would like their children to experience individual development and acquire a liberal spirit through education. Education is no longer taken as the tool to chase fortune, power and social status, but rather a way to achieve happiness.

Social and cultural changes in China do play an active role in forming Chinese style homeschooling. But the explanation can be developed further. Ren tries to address this issue by way of a historic view, referencing the imperial examination system in China. The strategy of analysis is on the right track, as Chinese homeschooling does combine Chinese educational traditions and contemporary patterns in a modern Chinese context. To some extent, imperial education can explain Chinese learning styles, such as memorizing and reciting texts, drilling and practicing, learning to the test, etc. On the side of contemporary patterns, liberty, freedom, and individualism are in higher demand. Both sides can be founded at R-school, but it is disappointing that Ren did not provide more powerful explanations as to the mechanism by which these two sides interact in the case in question. Why do parents giving up public schools need another type of school? Is it because the parents and children are used to authority in the form of school structure even though they claim to pursue freedom? What do liberty and individualism mean for educators and parents at R-school? Some key concepts are mentioned in the work, but several have not been discussed in-depth, including Chinese cultural tradition, liberty, and participation.

LIU Qian
Renmin University of China
E-mail: liu_qian@ruc.edu.cn