them. Spontaneous strikes in China still provide more space for aggrieved Chinese workers to take action.

All in all, this edited volume is the first attempt to provide us a comparative perspective for understanding China's and the world's labour, contributing to labour internationalism in the long run. More studies should follow this path.

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Fragile Elite: The Dilemmas of China's Top University Students
SUSANNE BREGNBÆK
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016
x + 172 pp. $24.95
ISBN 978-08047-9778-8 doi:10.1017/S0305741016001235

In this short and highly readable ethnography, Susanne Bregnbæk depicts the existential dilemmas faced by students at Tsinghua and Peking Universities. Based on fieldwork between 2005 and 2007, she focuses on problems that stem from the "Oedipal project," that is, those of separating from one's parents, and, because the state acts as a parental authority, gaining independence from government officials and dogma in schools. Problems related to the Oedipal project take the shape of a dilemma, a double bind, or "aporias" – that is contradictions that are unresolvable, which offer no satisfactory forward path. In general, one cannot satisfy one's parents' aspirations without becoming an independent person, but gaining independence from one's parents requires disregarding their wishes on specific issues. Moreover, the human life-cycle guarantees that the independence of one's children foreshadows one's own demise. Consequently, students who feel guilty about the sacrifices made for them by their parents sometimes resist opportunities to "grow up" and gain independence from their parents. While Oedipal dilemmas of some sort are universal, the specific dilemmas Bregnbæk describes are shaped by both China's highly competitive educational culture and the gender, class and even particular circumstance of a given student. For example, top university students from poor rural backgrounds realize that success requires "improving their quality" and thus distancing themselves from the village life-worlds of their parents. While the parents of such students want their children to succeed, they often do not understand the degree of emotional and social separation this success will require.

Gaining admittance to one of China's top universities demands disciplined study. In some cases this discipline is enforced by parents, particularly mothers, while in other cases it is internalized by the students directly from teachers and other state functionaries. Bregnbæk describes how the latter students often make the Freudian slip of calling their parents "the government" (or vice versa). The former sometimes have difficulty internalizing the discipline required to study while they are gaining independence from their parents.

In its actions as a "parent" to China's students in state schools, the Chinese Communist Party faces its own Oedipal dilemmas. On the one hand, it desires students who are ever loyal and obedient to state authority. On the other hand, it fears that China's students are not innovative enough and wants to push them to become entrepreneurs and inventors who can boost the nation's economy. Its desires to simultaneously foster innovation *and* obedience lead to the multitude of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016001235 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contradictory educational policies and practices emerging under the name of "education for quality" (*suzhi jiaoyu*).

Bregnbæk also devotes space to the extreme dilemmas that lead some students to suicide. When the attainment of the credentials necessary to become a well-off citizen in a highly competitive society are described as necessary sacrifices that lead only to positions where one must continue to sacrifice and then raise one's own children to also sacrifice, then feelings of hopelessness can emerge. Hopelessness is just another word for aporia – lacking a path, a position from which there is no path forward. But while the condition of hopelessness is untenable, at least for some, Bregnbæk also seems to denigrate hope. Hopes are based on fantasies, such as the fantasy that going to university in the United States will lead to self-actualization. Bregnbæk brackets such hopes with Bourdieu's concept of "*illusio*, which encompasses all those 'well-founded illusions' in which people place their hopes, or discover a sense of purpose or a promise of well-being" (p. 144). This critique points to the ultimate double-bind. If hope by definition is an illusion, then what choice is there but hopelessness?

Arguably, it is the ambitious (elite) of any country who are most likely to nurture the illusion that their efforts can make a difference, at least to their own social position, and that improving their social position can somehow lead to higher levels of life satisfaction. Harbouring such hopes, they would be seemingly vulnerable to the forces that would dash them. Can hard work be sustained by anything but an illusion? Are China's top university students the only elites who are "fragile" or do all elites face similar dilemmas?

Throughout, this engaging ethnography brims with life stories of the elite members of China's "1980s" (*baling hou*) generation. Focused on youth and their existential dilemmas, it is likely to appeal to undergraduate readers from a wide variety of disciplines. While it offers entrance into the literatures on education, child rearing and youth in China, it unapologetically focuses only on the dilemmas of the successful, so other works must be assigned alongside it to give a fuller picture of Chinese youth. Though generous in her discussion of the works of other scholars, including my own, Bregnbæk misses that of her fellow Scandinavian, Børge Bakken. Where Bregnbæk makes an insightful analysis of the ambiguity of the Chinese word *guan* (simultaneously implying care, love and discipline), for example, Bakken dissects the character for education (*jiao*) to show how corporal punishment was present in the very ideograph for this concept. But this is a minor oversight. Anyone interested in what it is like to be an elite university student in contemporary China cannot afford to miss this book.

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The Pursuit of the Chinese Dream in America: Chinese Undergraduate Students at American Universities
DENNIS T. YANG
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016
xi + 161 pp. $80.00; £52.95
ISBN 978-1-4985-2168-0 doi:10.1017/S0305741016001247

There has been a long history of Chinese students going to the United States for higher education, dating back to the mid-19th century when Yung Wing attended Yale University. After 1949 and the Communist takeover of China though, the US

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016001235 Published online by Cambridge University Press