

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Trow, Martin A. (2010). *Twentieth-Century Higher Education: Elite to Mass to Universal*. Edited by Martin Burrage. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Pages: 627. Price: 80.00 USD (hardcover).

Reviewed by Hans G. Schuetze, professor emeritus, Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, University of British Columbia.

This book contains 17 essays in chapter format, written by Martin Trow between 1974 and 2006, originally published in a variety of journals and books. The chapters are introduced by scholars and former students who collaborated in one way or another with Trow over the span of his long and productive life as a social scientist and public intellectual. Among them are internationally renowned scholars such as Oliver Fulton, Roger Geiger, Nathan Glazer, Chelly Halsey, Guy Neave, and Ulrich Teichler. Michael Burrage, a British sociologist, contributes an informative and not entirely uncritical introduction to the volume. The essays necessarily neglect some themes with which Trow dealt but are, on the whole, a representative selection. Chapter 1 addresses the topic of upper secondary education (high schools), the feeding system for higher education, and its transformation from an elite to a mass system, a theme central in his later work on post-secondary education. All the other chapters concern various manifestations and perspectives of this transition in a three-tiered system of higher education.

Trow, who was initially trained (and briefly worked) as a mechanical engineer, held a doctoral degree in sociology from Columbia University in New York City, joining the sociology department at the University of California at Berkeley in 1957. In 1969, he moved to the Graduate School of Public Policy at Berkeley, where he held a professorship until his death in 2007. From 1976 to 1988, he also directed the Center for Studies of Higher Education. Under his leadership, it became a vibrant centre of scholarly debate on higher education. Scholars from Berkeley and elsewhere in California and the United States participated in this debate, and many others from abroad were drawn to it and contributed to it as well.

The book's subtitle, *Elite to Mass to Universal*, captures the thesis that made Trow famous both inside and outside the field of higher education. The first version was published in a 1974 article where he argued that the elite-to-mass-to-universal transformation was occurring in all countries, not just advanced industrialized ones. It was substantially changing the higher education system—not just the numbers of students, faculty and higher education institutions but also the composition of the student body, the diversification of the higher education system, institutional governance, curriculum, quality standards, and the internal lives of the institutions. At least in the Western world and until recently, this thesis is arguably the best known explanatory framework and most quoted piece of higher education literature. It is therefore appropriate that Burrage opens his introductory chapter as follows:

There are few social scientists who single-handedly identify a social trend early in their careers; spend the best part of their working lives observing, analyzing, explaining, and debating its course and consequences; and then, at the end, find the trend not merely continuing, but still a life issue in public policy debates and still inviting further research. Martin Trow was able to do just that. (p. 1)

Although Trow was keenly interested in developments in other (developed) countries, he was always comparing them with the American and particularly the Californian models. He argued that the relatively smooth transition from elite to mass and later to universal higher education in the United States was due to a number of factors that he found absent, or less developed, in other countries, especially the weak role of the state in determining universities' mandates and structures and the strong role of private interests and finance, which brought them into close contact with various communities—local, political, cultural, and economic.

Compared with England and Sweden, he saw the United States as being at an advantage because of the decentralization and relative independence from central state influence. In contrast, he saw structural disadvantages in (Western) European universities and defended that view against critical arguments by many European colleagues, among them some of the volume's commentators. They point out that there was more than just a little bias in his analysis, especially since the state plays a large role in higher education in his adopted state of California, both in the differentiation of the system (the California model) and in the financing of the public part of the system. Trow also downplayed the role of the massive federal funding for research that benefits the large research universities in the United States. Nonetheless, his analytical perspective of the three stages of development and his arguments about their impact on access, the functions of higher education, institutional governance, academic standards, and other characteristics are still cogent today, even if his description and analysis of the U.S. system is sometimes closer to Max Weber's ideal typing than to reality. The last chapter, written a year before his death and 32 years after his first article on the transitions between the

three stages of higher education development, provides an excellent overview and review of Trow's thinking and argumentation.

Although he occasionally mentioned the Canadian higher education system, Trow took no particular interest in it except to point out that it is a federal system, like the American one, but otherwise more like an extension of the European rather than the U.S. model because it is publicly regulated and financed. This reviewer, who had the chance to participate in some of the 1980s in the Berkeley Centre's weekly brown-bag seminars, was therefore not surprised when Trow, invited twice to British Columbia in the 1990s by UBC's Centre for Policy Studies in Education (now Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training), argued that the system that had been in place until the end of the 1980s in British Columbia (and the rest of Canada), namely a two-tiered system of degree-granting universities and non-degree community colleges, was insufficient to meet the growing demand for degree studies and for increased access and greater choice among programs. The example and experience of California's three-tiered system was of great interest in Victoria and Vancouver (where the two seminars were held) since British Columbia, in order to resolve one of the province's most urgent educational problems, access to post-secondary education, had just set up (in 1989) a third, middle layer of higher education institutions by creating four (and later five) university colleges, a type of institution hitherto unknown in Canada (excepting a single one in Cape Breton). It is worth noting that, in the meantime, this middle layer of higher education institutions has been abolished in British Columbia—a development on which one would wish to have Martin Trow's comment.

Even many years after some of these essays were first published, they are still profound and cogent, reflecting both the sharp analytical sociologist's view and his logical engineer's thinking. While today many of his arguments are well known, the essays provide as well some lesser known insights about the future of higher education and its pivotal role in shaping the future learning society. For example, Trow discussed early on the role of the Internet and the concept of lifelong learning and what they mean for the last development stage, universal higher education.

Trow, in spite of his somewhat biased US perspective, was an outstanding scholar of higher education and a sharp observer of new trends and developments. Like some other well-known American higher education experts such as Burton Clark, Clark Kerr, Philip Altbach, and Roger Geiger, he was an influential analyst of modern (Western and specifically American) higher education. This collection of essays brings together, makes more easily accessible, and critically comments on some of his most influential writings. That the U.S. higher education system, and especially the institutions at its top, served as his benchmarks and a model that most other countries, including China, try to emulate makes his analyses not just important to Western readers but a worldwide audience. The volume is highly recommended to scholars and leaders and administrators of higher education and it should be mandatory reading for all students of higher education. ♣