

Chairman Mao's Children: Generation and the Politics of Memory in China

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Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021

xi + 274 pp. £ 85.00

ISBN 978-1-108-84425-3 doi:10.1017/S0305741021001119

Since Anita Chan's 1985 study on the political socialization of the "children of Mao," a new typological approach to the Maoist "new man" (*xinren*) has gradually formed. The generation of Chinese who grew up in the Mao era (especially those urban residents who received the "17-year education" from 1949 to 1966) has been divided into several subgroups according to various criteria. Sociological studies based on these classifications aim to outline the fate of different individuals in a macroscopic socio-historical context in a fairly clear and direct way through a comparative perspective. Bin Xu's latest book, *Chairman Mao's Children: Generation and the Politics of Memory in China*, continues this typological tradition (p. 234), in which, based on diversified field surveys (including semi-structured interviews, anthropological participant observation, etc.), the educated youth (*zhiqing*) are divided into four different types (faithful red, indifferent red, aspirants and withdrawers) according to their political family background (*chushen*) and political attitudes. By examining commemorative activities of various types and scales, not only does Xu analyse the memories of different subgroups of *zhiqing* regarding their personal experience during the "sent-down" programme and their historical evaluation of the programme itself (p. 43), but he also establishes connections between the (past and present) class (*jieji*) of *zhiqing* and their political habitus through quantitative mathematical models (pp. 246–254). The author's goal is clear: at the empirical level, to understand how the generation of *zhiqing* "comes to terms with their difficult personal and collective past" and to "explain the variation in their memories"; at the theoretical level, to "contribute to our understanding of generation and memory"; and, on the basis of the first two, to reflect on "ethical and political issues" such as social inequality, historical responsibility, etc. (p. 7).

After an Introduction that outlines the problematization, theoretical frameworks, research methods and methodological reflections of this research, the main body of this book revolves around different commemorative actions of *zhiqing*. In chapters one and two, the author examines the *zhiqing*'s autobiographical memory and explains the diversity of memories from different subgroups of *zhiqing* in terms of their "class" and the political habitus they developed during the Maoist era. In chapter three, Xu analyses the memory of *zhiqing* in the literary field, especially clarifying the social causes and political implications of the prevalence of the memory pattern "good people but the bad event" (pp. 126–140). In chapter four, he explores different sites of memory, including the *zhiqing*-themed exhibits in the 1990s and the *zhiqing* museums that emerged after 2000, and shows that, once again, it is the narrative pattern of "The good people but the bad event" that has triggered the large-scale controversy and public discussions on the historical evaluation of the generation of *zhiqing* (pp. 171–172). Chapters five and six focus on the collective commemorative actions of educated youth. In chapter five, the author presents the collective activities of multiple *zhiqing* groups and their different opinions/attitudes toward historical memory; in chapter six, he describes in detail his personal involvement in a collective travel activity and all the kinds of conflicts that arose within this *zhiqing* group during the 11-day journey. As a bystander, the author sharply points out the fate of "booming inside, fading outside" (pp. 223–228) that various *zhiqing* activities have had to

face from the very beginning. Finally, following the conclusion, the author adds in the appendix a more detailed account of the fieldwork process, the basis for building his mathematical model and quantifying the different parameters, as well as his formulation of several hypotheses and their testing by regression analysis.

For over 40 years, the study of educated youth has consistently been a rich and fruitful field in academic circles. The most important innovation of Xu's book is the way in which he cleverly integrates the commemorative actions on both individual and collective levels, and focuses his analysis closely on the central concept of "class." Moreover, he insightfully points out that within the narrow living space under the political and ideological constraints of the post-Mao era, the generational memory of *zhiqing* has to conform to such speech norms or action modes as "the good people but the bad event," "socialist nostalgia," "rightful resistance," etc. (pp. 176, 182, 232). This is extremely enlightening for understanding the spiritual predicament of the entire *zhiqing* generation. Based on rich field data and meticulous logical analysis, there are, however, a few methodological and theoretical aspects of Xu's research that deserve further discussion. For example, one of the self-evident aims of the typological approach is "exhaustion." Given the complex internal structure of the *zhiqing* generation (the author himself also stresses the importance of "going beyond the false impression of homogeneity" [p. 25]), to what extent are the cases of the educated youth based in Shanghai representative of the whole generation? In other words, can the same research paradigm be applied to other groups of *zhiqing*, such as those from Beijing? Furthermore, is the quantification of habitus the best way to inherit Bourdieu's social-philosophical legacy? Finally, based on the examination of the content, presentation, and differentiation of the memories of *zhiqing*, an analysis of the relevant (individual and collective) mentalities and emotions might have been a good addition. However, in any case, Xu's study is a fresh experiment and an undoubted contribution to the already relatively mature research field of educated youth, as it not only fills academic gaps but also meets the needs of the general public.

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Beijing from Below: Stories of Marginalized Lives in the Capital's Center

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Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020

266 pp. \$26.95

ISBN 978-1-4780-0815-6 doi:10.1017/S0305741021001272

While several studies have depicted and analysed the urban and social transformation of Beijing's historical districts in the last two decades, Harriet Evans's *Beijing from Below* stands out, as it gives the reader the feeling of being fully immersed in the lives of the residents of Dashalar, a neighbourhood known for its overcrowding and for the material deprivation of its inhabitants.

The book is based on life stories of six local households that share certain commonalities of experiences such as *both* a strong emotional attachment to Dashalar and a loss of reference points due to the successive urban transformations that have significantly altered their social and political status, and their living conditions. This tension