

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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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

is finely detailed through the seven chapters that make up the book. Key themes linked to the precarity and scarcity of their lives are critically exposed and analysed in the broader context of Chinese society, using interludes between each chapter to explore anthropological questions. By selecting the different but complementary family stories of a street vendor, a garbage collector, a public lavatory cleaner, an illiterate housewife, a pedicab driver, a prostitute and a photographer-restaurateur, the author focuses her research on “underclass” citizens who “never appeared as people who count” (p. 224). The perspective of narrating the life stories of disadvantaged and marginalized citizens based on excerpts from interviews conducted by Evans is crucial for our understanding of history. First, it allows us to distance ourselves from the official narrative of the capital city’s metamorphosis based on local archives and produced by elites and experts. Second, by unveiling tensions and frictions between the subaltern people and the others, it also sheds light on the structural power geometry, which unravels the complexity of such a multiple and multi-layered history.

As an anthropologist, I really appreciated Evans’s approach of combining ethnographic methods (first seeking a personal contact in the area, building a relationship based on trust, immersion, participative observation, interviews) and oral history in order to gather data alongside official local archives. The reflection linking anthropology and history methodologies is not new, but it finds a relevant illustration in *Beijing from below*. This results in an insightful exploration of how Dashalar inhabitants developed modalities of agency in a bid to survive and take part in society as individuals or social subjects in the recent decades, which have been characterized by radical spatial, economic and social change. By focusing on people born between the 1930s and 1990s, the author narrates life stories of women and men linked by their attachments to Dashalar in many ways and for different reasons, including the evolution of their relationship with the author between 2004 – when she was first introduced to the area by a local friend photographer – and 2017.

The first chapter sets the scene for the research by presenting the physical, spatial, social and cultural dimensions of the neighbourhood. It highlights the three main phases of Dashalar’s transformation: the creation of a new centre for business and tourism in the 1980s, the regeneration city plan transforming the old and dilapidated housing in the 2000s, and the Dashalar project in the 2010s. The next six chapters explore significant issues of Chinese society through key family representatives and aim to show how these representatives use the past to explain the difficult conditions they face and to claim ethical recognition as social subjects. Dominant themes addressed in the book relate to the politics of belonging and the boundaries of identity (us/them, civilized/uncivilized, high-/low-quality citizen), the virtuous family rights and duty for oneself and in the eyes of others, the construction of gender at multiple scales (family, kinship, neighbourhood, community, society), the construction of the dispossessed and marginalized category by crossing several dimensions (place of origin, social class, land property, education, employment, migration trajectory) and the modes of action developed according to people’s norms and values for a desired or real social mobility. Evans describes these subalterns’ struggle to claim their dignity in a hostile and violent (built and social) environment. Their agency is a search for recognition as human beings that implies respect, consideration and justice. The life stories Evans tells thus provide a better understanding of the different kinds of recognition sought by Dashalar’s residents based on their social position as well as their cultural and economic capital.

Evans’s efforts to articulate the subaltern memories with the spectacular transformation of Beijing’s urban and social fabric is more than necessary at a sensitive time

marked by a still-in-progress government strategy of demolition and relocation (*chai-quan*), with or without monetary compensation. By narrating ordinary lifestyles or everyday actions undertaken by subaltern underclass citizens to pursue their lives amidst precarity and scarcity in a neighbourhood subjected to gentrification, she sheds light on the phenomenon of the urban poor disappearing from official history. In doing so, she pinpoints issues of “heritage-ization” that create tensions between nostalgia for a past (“taste of the old Beijing”) that has been preserved and kept alive by the presence of local residents, and social engineering mechanisms working alongside urban transformation, tourism and a state programme of cleansing. Therefore, the book will be of great value to anyone interested in Chinese urbanization, memory studies, public history, civilizing processes, use of cultural heritage, politics of identities and agency of the urban poor.

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Divorce in China: Institutional Constraints and Gendered Outcomes

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Xin He has given us a splendid analysis of the processes of judicial divorce in China, and in so doing provides an insightful analysis of the operations of the civil chambers of the people’s courts in mainland China’s authoritarian political-legal system. As in other parts of the world, around 70 per cent of petitioners are women, and imperfections in the contested divorce system result in sustained gender injustice. Divorce lawsuits, annually leading to more than 1.5 million divorces, make up almost one-fifth of all civil cases. Divorce, especially contested divorce, is seen officially as a major social problem, and one linked to the grave issue of domestic violence. Problems in the division of the matrimonial estate, and custody of children, can give rise to serious difficulties. Judges may be skilled and professional in their approach, but they are faced with case load pressures and policy imperatives of social harmony, and they have little time for moral reflection, detailed investigation and individualized justice. Outside the large urban areas, parties are invariably legally unrepresented. The persuasive and pervasive role of mediation, applied with pressure especially in more fiercely contested matrimonial disputes, also contributes to the system of gendered injustice that has come to prevail. It might be added here that these troubled circumstances also help to explain why it is that most Chinese couples who seek divorce today choose consensual divorce secured through administrative processes, rather than seek matrimonial justice in the courts.

The basic cause of this seemingly self-perpetuating system is, as Xin He cogently argues, to be found in the institutional constraints within which judges have to determine outcomes. In particular, gender injustice in court processes reflect such institutional factors as bureaucratic incentives within the court system and socio-political policy concerns for stability and harmony. These pressures encourage judges to manage divorce cases expeditiously, and people’s judges therefore have come to manage contested matrimonial cases primary in a spirit of efficiency and with