

to his decision to cut all her prefaces and commentaries from the *Biographies of Foreign Women*, a work that he could never have translated on his own? Did she take exception to her husband's comment, in the introduction to *Around the World in Eighty Days*, that she had long been a cultural chauvinist, who only under his tutelage came to recognize the value of "world histories and treatises" (p. 186)?

These questions are important not because a "real" Xue Shaohui waits submerged under the publications. We should assume nothing about interiority or a more authentic self obscured by the written record. They are important, rather, because Xue staked out such a clear position about the capabilities of women in all her published work, and it would be useful to know how she negotiated the changes happening all around her, including the ones she herself helped to set in motion, at the level of the body, the heart, and daily life.

The paradox of historical work, however, is that new silences become obvious even as the best work allows us to hear previously inaudible voices. In *Politics, Poetics, and Gender in Late Qing China*, Nanxiu Qian has given us an enormously rich portrayal of one woman thinking and writing in the company of family and friends. It is a measure of Xue's achievement, and of Qian's, that this account leaves us wanting more.

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Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937–1949. By Zhao Ma. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. xiv + 366. \$49.95/£36.95.

In this interesting study, Zhao Ma examines the "life experiences of lower-class women and, in particular, their struggles and tactics of survival" (p. 318) during a turbulent time of war and foreign occupation. The author adopts Michel de Certeau's contention that quotidian activities such as "talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc." reveal "everyday tactics" people deploy to "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" and "continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them" (p. 3). By focusing on Beijing's lower-class women's "everyday tactics," the author aims to

explore . . . questions such as how changes in politics and society affected the meaning and function of the city for women during the war. How did these

changes empower or endanger women's lives? How were women's survival tactics different from men's? How did lower-class women's experiences differ from those of the elite? How did everyday struggles in a war-torn city shape women's understanding of their personal identity, especially their gender and marital roles? And how did women respond to the state's propaganda, policing system, and mobilization efforts that attempted to reformulate public policies and influence domestic relationships? (p. 4)

Ma asserts that "answers to these questions illuminate an informal system of values and practices based on the intimate knowledge of urban economic and social space, neighborhood networks, customary practices, and conventional social and gender roles, all of which informed and justified women's everyday survival tactics" (p. 4).

The author uses an impressive array of primarily prewar sociological studies, government documents, and accounts of early twentieth-century Beijing by individual Chinese and Westerners to provide an intricately detailed contextual setting. He then moves into the war period, using details gleaned from (by my estimation) approximately forty criminal cases adjudicated by the Beiping District Court (*Beiping difang fayuan* 北平地方法院) to discuss a wide array of issues ranging from the many meanings of work and marriage in a crowded tenement community, to wifely desertion, bigamy, and smuggling. These criminal case files, now housed at the Beijing Municipal Archives (*Beijingshi dang'anguan* 北京市檔案館) under the category "Offenses against the Institutions of Marriage and Family" (*fanghai hunyin jiating zui* 妨害婚姻家庭罪), vividly detail episodes of bigamy, adultery, and abduction in which lower-class women were sometimes victims and at other times perpetrators. These files offer fleeting but rare glimpses into a world that all too often appears only as faceless and voiceless statistics in historical sources. The personal stories revealed in individual cases, plus a few excerpted transcripts of testimonies given during court proceedings, convey the immediacy of watching a film that displays emotions running the gamut from the passions and pathos of relationships gone awry because of financial or other difficulties to cold-eyed calculations of monetary or material gains that determine the course of action (plus a few scenes of people being caught *in flagrante delicto*).

By themselves, these files make interesting reading but lack historical and sociological mooring. Ma skilfully mines details from these cases to illustrate and elaborate his arguments. This investigation of an understudied segment of society during an understudied time period is divided into three parts: the activities and aspirations of Beijing's lower-class women in their domestic setting, their interactions with neighbours in their tenement community, and their ventures out into the wider expanse of Beijing and points beyond.

In Part One, "Precarious Livelihoods," Ma offers an etymology lesson regarding

the term *zhiye* 職業 (occupation) and then explains why lower-class women's working experiences, characterized by diversity in the types of tasks performed, and flexibility in the length of time devoted to these tasks, more often than not lay outside early twentieth-century Chinese elite, reformist discourse about women with employment who could earn social autonomy and economic independence. For example, in the case of thirty-five-year-old Chen Ma Shi, accused of adultery, the authorities listed her as "unemployed" (*wuye* 無業) even though she had worked in domestic service and later took in washing and mending to supplement her family's income (pp. 38–39). The Civil Code (*minlü* 民律), promulgated in 1931 and remaining in effect throughout the war years, upheld the model of a household sustained by mutual economic support provided by all household members. But the paucity of employment opportunities for lower-women class often obligated the husband to assume the role of principal provider for the household. A man unable to fulfil such an obligation, especially in light of worsening wartime economic conditions, could find himself in a terrible predicament, as shown in a 1943 court case. Li Zheng Shi, a woman charged by an irate husband with abducting his wife, offered the following defence at court: she decided to help her neighbour find another husband because the latter had complained of "lack of spousal support" (*buyang* 不養) from her husband's meagre earnings as a rickshaw driver (pp. 86–87). The verdict of this particular trial is not known. As Ma indicates, "charges of lack of support brought by wives against their husbands had become almost [a] cliché" in court proceedings in the immediate aftermath of the War of Resistance against Japan, and officials appeared to have no trouble accepting it as justification for wifely desertion (p. 98).

Part Two, "Among Neighbors," presents a detailed portrait of the physical makeup of the tenements. One study published in 1928 records an unforgettable set of dimensions for a partitioned room inhabited by not an individual but an entire family: 2.6–3.65 meters long, 2.13–2.89 meters wide, and 2.13–2.89 meters high (p. 144). This overcrowding certainly was not alleviated as Beijing's population increased during the war years. Living so close to one's neighbours had decided advantages and disadvantages. Comfort and aid from sympathetic neighbours and temptations to stray from an unhappy marriage were both within easy reach. The informal social networks (described by Ma as "spontaneous, self-centered, and self-serving" [p. 125]) formed among the tenement women, together with women's kinship networks that often extended far beyond the neighbourhood, offered what amounted to job advice and placement, matchmaking service, family counselling, and, when necessary, a support system for escape from domestic abuse and economic misery. The author stresses that women (and men) who helped other women to abandon husbands did not always act out of mere compassion or moral conviction: for many the anticipated material rewards for lending a helping hand proved to be an attractive incentive.

This section also provides useful insights into how the court attempted to determine whether couples in bigamy cases had indeed satisfied the requirement stipulated in the Civil Code that marriage was considered established after wedding formalities had been “celebrated by open ceremony and in the presence of two or more witnesses” (p. 202).

The following case cited by Ma contains many of the complexities probed in Part Two: Ying Wang Shi, a widow in her late thirties, found another husband with the help of her “adopted mother” in the fall of 1940. But a year later economic hardship propelled her to run away, with the help of friends and neighbours, and three days after her escape she married a twenty-one-year-old bowl mender without telling him about her complicated past. When her former husband found her only ten days into her new life, she was brought to trial on the charge of bigamy. The court questioned people who had attended the two-day wedding festivities, and they all concurred that “it was a legally binding marriage based on the wedding procession they witnessed and the wedding feast they attended.” Ying Wang Shi was sentenced to three months in prison, plus a three-year probation. Upon hearing the verdict, the hapless new husband was mostly interested in a refund of the large sum he had spent on the wedding (pp. 197–99).

Part Three, “On the Move,” highlights an important facet of these women’s survival strategies, namely, their savvy skills in moving about within Beijing and travelling on trains and buses to distant cities and towns. These skills reveal an impressive familiarity with geography and the transportation system; they also underscore the usefulness of the complex web of networks formed both within and beyond the tenement community. This phenomenon of “women on the move” represented not just the daring acts of a few intrepid or desperate runaway wives but in fact charted a broader trend that clearly indicates evolving—and expanding—roles assumed by women in public space, despite obvious wartime restrictions and the disapproval of conservatives anxious about such an increasing female visibility.

Among the primary sources used to document the war years (1937–1949), the court case files occupy a decidedly prominent place. One wishes that the author had explained at the outset how many wartime files under the category “Offenses against the Institutions of Marriage and Family” are held at the Beijing Municipal Archives and why he chose the ones cited in his study. Is it merely a fluke in archival processing that just about all the adultery, bigamy, and abduction charges mentioned in the book occurred during the second half of the War of Resistance? Or do they constitute a spike that emanated from noteworthy social, economic, or political events during that particular time period? Ma makes clear that the wifely desertion he describes is different from the “running away” experiences elite women celebrate in reformist and revolutionary discourse (p. 320). But a cursory discussion of wartime

elite women's court cases involving adultery, bigamy, and abduction probably would have been welcome, especially since in his introduction the author expresses an interest in comparative analysis.

According to Ma, Beijing's lower-class women, that is, those in the categories of "just coping" (*jiangjiu duri* 將就度日) and "extreme poverty" (*qiong de yaoming* 窮的要命), made up the majority of the female population in the city during the late 1920s (pp. 32–33). Assuming this remained more or less the same during the war years (though in all likelihood it rose), one is inclined to ask whether forty court case files that contain but "fragments of several women's lives" (p. 31) can adequately represent "the statistical majority" (p. 32)? Fully anticipating this question, Ma answers in the affirmative: according to him, these "criminal case files are more like what Gail Hershatter calls a 'good-enough story,' a story that 'surprises and engenders thought, unspooling in different directions depending on which thread the listener picks up'" (p. 31). Perhaps as his "good-enough" stories unspooled in different directions, a few more threads could have been picked up in order to provide a more nuanced contextual setting with more time-sensitive markers to chart the twelve long years that cover two very different wars.

Ma's narrative contains extraordinarily detailed descriptions of various aspects of life in prewar Beijing, but in discussing wartime Beijing it often settles on general references to exploitative and incompetent political authorities, rampant inflation, and the increased suffering of the people. The most conspicuous leitmotif of this study is the rampant inflation that brought so much hardship to the people. The author frequently uses statistics to underscore the distressing economic deterioration in wartime Beijing. According Arthur Young, the city's wholesale price index rocketed from the 1939 baseline of 1 to 1,535 in 1945 (p. 97). In fact, by the third year of the eight-year Japanese occupation, Beijing had slipped into a subsistence crisis, and this crisis worsened after the start of the Pacific War as institutional plundering by Japanese troops, bad weather, hoarding, and disruption of shipping networks within and beyond China all contributed to severe shortage of daily necessities in the city.¹ To move from economic statistics and general observations to the granular details of

¹ John D. Post's definition of subsistence crisis: a term that "refers primarily to the demographic and economic consequences of doubled or tripled cereal prices and, while the effects are due more to the high cost than to the absolute shortage of food, the conditions may range from dearth and scarcity to actual famine, with deaths from starvation," in Post, *The Last Great Subsistence Crisis in the Western World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. xiii. Evidence comes from the general price index and retail prices of about two dozen daily necessities compiled monthly by the Social Affairs Bureau (*Shehuiju* 社會局) of the Beijing Municipal Government (*Beijingshi zhengfu* 北京市政府) and published in the city's daily newspapers such as *Shibao* 實報 and *Peking Chronicle*.

how individuals and their families cope in such a situation is an unenviable task for a researcher. Ma skilfully extracts such information from the court cases. However, because the focus of the trials was on the messy entanglements of marital relationships instead of obviously economic crimes, such as burglary and robbery, some details that are irrelevant to the charges in the adultery, bigamy, and abduction cases do offer rather important insights into survival tactics not examined in depth in this study. These are some of the “threads” that are not picked up.

On a few occasions, Ma makes passing reference to individuals working for the Japanese, including one woman working as a servant in a Japanese household (pp. 123, 224, and 251). Continuing opprobrium of the Japanese occupation hampers research efforts and general discussion about the multifaceted Japanese presence during the war years. But the fact remains that on the eve of the War of Resistance, Beijing’s Japanese population hovered around two thousand five hundred, and by 1944 it ballooned to over ninety thousand.² This population, consisting mostly of civilians with nuclear families, was more well-to-do than the city’s Chinese population as a whole.³ Their presence served as a constant reminder of China’s trauma and humiliation but also meant employment opportunities. That a forty-eight page Japanese-language handbook offering tips to this sojourner community about life in the city contains four pages of advice on how to interact with Chinese male and female servants suggests that the few individuals mentioned in passing by Ma were part of a larger group.⁴ Another thread that could have benefited from more intensive pursuit is the informal economy to which the author alludes from time to time. He gives a memorable account of Beijing women putting on ten pairs of pants and then boarding a Chengde-bound train to exchange the pants for grain (p. 272). Like the

² *Senzenki Chūgoku zairyū Nihonjin tōkei* 戰前期中国在留日本人統計 (Statistics on Japanese residents in China during the prewar period) (reprint, Tokyo: Fuji shuppan 不二出版, 2004), vols. 7 and 8. A May 1940 survey shows that leading employers of Japanese residents in Beijing were companies and banks, followed by government. The figures for company and bank employees (men and women) were 6,184 men and 718 women, with 3,055 sons and 2,995 daughters; for government employees, 1,362 men and 91 women, plus 604 sons and 901 daughters. Source: *Keishin nichinichi shinbun* 京津日日新聞, 16 June 1940, p. 5.

³ Because of their preference for a Japanese-style diet, this population was allotted some food subsidies shipped from Japan and other Japanese-controlled regions outside China. For the building of a Japanese-designed New Town, west of the walled city of Beijing, during the War of Resistance, see Aaron Stephen Moore, *Constructing East Asia: Technology, Ideology, and Empire in Japan’s Wartime Era, 1931–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 121–35.

⁴ Andō Kōsei 安藤更生, *Pekin annaiki* 北京案内記 (Guide to Peking) (Beijing: Shinmin inshokan 新民印書館, 1942), pp. 323–70.

subject of Chinese servants in Japanese households, this is also a difficult topic to examine because of its informal, if not illegitimate, nature. But probing activities in what was essentially an “economy of things” (to use Brett Sheehan’s term referring to a preference of “goods, virtually any goods, in lieu of money” as a hedge against rampant inflation) would perhaps uncover enough data to yield some understanding of quantitative and qualitative changes over the entire span of twelve years covered in this study.⁵

Ma maintains that survival tactics “opened endless possibilities for lower-class women . . . to subtly deflect, subvert, and ‘escape without leaving’ the powerful masculine forces of the surveillance state during and beyond wartime Beijing” (p. 5). But he also points to two powerful means used by the authorities, that is, the *hukou* 戶口 (household registration) and *juzhuzheng* 居住證 (residence card), one more effectively enforced and the other newly introduced during the War of Resistance, that indisputably made the lower-class women—and everyone else—in Beijing increasingly legible to the state. These administrative trackers were not just a technique used by the authorities to maintain social order in a volatile time. They were more than a mere nuisance that thwarted Zhang Zhang Shi from wifely desertion (because she could not produce her residence card at the train station during police inspection) or a piece of evidence that made Wang Shuhua realize that her husband was a bigamist (while doing laundry she found her husband’s residence card in a pocket and saw that the home address listed on the card was an unfamiliar one) (pp. 156 and 185–86). These identification systems signalled an important transformation of the relationship between individuals and the political authorities. If a resident lost or misplaced his residence card, he was supposed to report it in the “lost and voided identification card” section reserved for such a purpose in one of the city’s daily newspapers. Interestingly, after the city-wide grain subsidy program went into effect in 1943, officials no longer seemed to complain about the sluggish compliance to such a regulation. Because the residence card was one of the documents required of residents to obtain and redeem the subsidy coupons, the list of the “lost and voided” grew from a score or so on a given day to at least a hundred.⁶ Admittedly, the grain subsidy programme itself was an abysmal failure because the authorities were not able to obtain even the small amounts of coarse grains promised for monthly delivery during the last years of the War of Resistance. But that residents bothered to endure the convoluted administrative process of obtaining the subsidy coupons and the lengthy time spent standing in line at designated grain shops indicate

⁵ Brett Sheehan, *Industrial Eden: A Chinese Capitalist Vision* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 6.

⁶ See *Shibao* and *Chenbao* 晨報.

that, in exchange for a modicum of food relief, however paltry in quantity and quality, Beijing residents acquiesced to becoming more legible—and thus more manageable—to the authorities. In that sense, opportunities to “deflect, subvert, and ‘escape without leaving,’” diminished as war eventually gave way to a new political and social order with its own opportunities to deviate.

The points raised above are minor quibbles. Zhao Ma is to be commended for showing us how resourceful and resilient lower-class women managed to live through—and survive—years of war and occupation with an impressive array of survival tactics. This work definitely “surprises and engenders thought,” and ought to stimulate others to explore an understudied segment of society in other parts of China during the war years.

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Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700.

By Joseph R. Dennis. Harvard East Asian Monographs 379. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. xv + 390. \$49.95/£36.95.

This book is a study of the Chinese genre called *difangzhi* 地方志 (local gazetteers) defined by Dennis as cumulative records of a territorial unit published in book format, “generally by a local government, and arranged by topics such as topography, institutions, population, taxes, biographies, and literature” (p. 1). While their prefaces often claim that the genre originated back in the Zhou dynasty, gazetteers became a distinct genre only by the Song and Yuan periods, becoming especially popular by the Ming. From each of the first two periods *c.* 30 gazetteers are extant, while more than 1,000 exist for the Ming, with a further 7,000 available from the end of the Ming until 1949. Dennis proposes to be our guide in understanding the historical changes in the significance, format, and underlying agendas of gazetteers, and indeed, he provides us in this welcome work with a very useful critical overall picture of the genre.

This is the more important, since many historians of China use gazetteers regularly for local information (such as stone inscriptions, unpublished local writings, and genealogies), without asking how such information was produced. Dennis shows this is dangerous: gazetteers were sites where the “central state” interacted with local élites, and, hence, they were fields for battles over social status and property interests, forums to shape public opinion and advocate policy, and much more (p. 3; by “centre”