

*City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide.* By Jeremy Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 254. £69.99 hardback, £18.99 paperback.

As President Xi Jinping promotes accelerated urbanization in China and many rural areas are drained, with the working-age population drawn to city-based jobs, this is a timely book. Jeremy Brown examines urban-rural relations under Mao Zedong from the 1950s through to the dawn of the era of reform. When the book begins its analysis, China was typically characterized as having eighty per cent of its people in the countryside. With the present official emphasis on shifting population to urban centres, a flip in this 1950s ratio can almost be imagined. This book offers us a way of assessing the troubled and interdependent nature of relations between cities, where most officials lived, and their rural hinterlands, under what the author calls the “Maoist development project” (p. 11).

The focus is on Tianjin, for most of the period since 1949 ranking as a province-level city. The city's close and shifting relationships with its hinterland through successive political campaigns animate the study. Chapters examine urban-rural interactions in the Great Leap Forward, the consequent years of famine, the Four Clean-ups (*Si qing yundong* 四清運動), and the Cultural Revolution era. Throughout these three decades, Brown makes clear how porous were the boundaries between city and countryside. This is not a new point, but he illustrates it vividly with a mix of broad policy and individual experiences. The central argument is the favouring of the city over the countryside throughout this period (and indeed since). This elevation of the city extended among all levels of society and officialdom, Brown argues. All citizens throughout these decades rated an urban household registration (*hukou* 戶口) as the most attractive. Beijing's leaders are currently again trying to identify ways to dismantle this still rigid rural-urban divide fixed by *hukou*. This study shows well many of the ways in which ordinary citizens, bureaucrats, and officials have wrestled with the consequences of this core arrangement in Chinese lives since the early 1950s.

The importance of the kind of *hukou* and the lure of urban residency are clear from the Great Leap period onwards. Peasants became workers when city factories needed to ramp up production. But workers did not necessarily get given urban registration. As famine followed the distortions of the Great Leap obsessions with inflating numbers for production and with mobilization, urban workers who had been living in Tianjin for years were reminded that their registration belonged in the countryside. Many resisted enforced banishment back to villages they barely knew. In the famine years, feeding the cities took precedence over commune members' interests. Particularly well presented is the unequal power of city and rural leaders (e.g. p.129), seen during the Four Clean-ups campaign that followed the famine

years and bridged rural experiences with the start of the Cultural Revolution. The importance of performing loyalty or identifying model enemies for ritual denunciation is acknowledged with some well-chosen examples. A chapter on two rural enterprises run by Tianjin city, one a steel works in the remote southwest of Hebei and the other a state farm on Tianjin's western edges, shows the importance in daily lives of the kind of *hukou* residents were allowed to hold. These two places gave urban registration to their personnel, despite their rural and in one case remote settings.

Rural-urban developments during the Cultural Revolution itself are covered only in part. The sending into rural exile of alleged class enemies and other unwanted urban dwellers is one emphasis. The other is the fortunes of the village of Xiaojinzhuang 小靳莊, which became a model village for Jiang Qing's efforts in the cultural sphere. The place was the subject of an earlier study by Brown.<sup>1</sup> Some of his observations seem to overlook the fact that many of the model village's cultural activities, such as group singing of model opera arias (pp. 207–8), were standard practice in a wide range of communes across the nation. In contrast, there is little in these pages about the educated youth (or sent-down youth) experience of the urban-rural divide in the 1970s. This unexpected omission is probably because the topic is worth a book in itself. The French scholar Michel Bonnin has covered some of these issues in his magisterial study, now available in English.<sup>2</sup>

Brown makes resourceful use of a range of sources. Archival materials from city, provincial, and organizational levels and institutional histories form the core of the sources. The author has taken advantage of the commercialization and commodification that have characterized Chinese life in recent decades, purchasing documents at second-hand markets in Tianjin and elsewhere. These include some treasure troves in the form of personnel and investigation files, which have allowed him to trace the stories of several exemplary individuals as they have navigated the urban-rural divide. In addition interviews with those who experienced the policy shifts and campaigns of these years provide more detail and colour to these pages. A careful reading suggests that a sizeable proportion of the interviewees appear to be Communist Party members. Being aware of the tendency of informants to recall past events through a lens of present-day policy should encourage caution in placing too much dependence on interviews for researchers with limited direct experience of life in China before the 1990s. Brown manages to test assertions in interviews against the documentary record.

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Brown, "Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The City in the Countryside, 1974–1976," in Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 153–84.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968–1980)*, trans. Krystyna Horko (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013).

What emerges from this interesting range of sources is a persuasively argued picture of urban anxiety and rural frustration in a system that was constantly trying to adjust to changing demands from the centre, the local, and the grassroots. This is an impressive case study that makes a major contribution to modern Chinese studies. But, as we read about how some of the motley protagonists in these pages on occasion got on their bicycle and headed to the city or back to a village, questions arise. A hinterland that was relatively accessible to urban residents and vice versa seems a special case. Were the suburban areas of Tianjin, most of which for a lot of the period were under the administrative control of Tianjin municipal authorities, truly rural? Did Tianjin residents require the presence of refugees and beggars on the city's streets to begin to wonder what was going on in the countryside, as suggested on page 38? There are occasional hints of the diversity of so-called rural occupations (radio repair factory worker is one, on page 94). The effort to fit the Xiaojinzhuang case study that makes up the final chapter into this book's overall theme by arguing that Jiang Qing's identification of it as a model village represented an urban takeover of the countryside seems a little strained. Nonetheless Brown shows the strength of urban residents' sense of clarity and conviction about the distinction between their city and the peasants beyond, despite their relative proximity. These questions perhaps arise in light of the much wider geographical reach of rural-to-urban migration in the past twenty years in China. How representative of the totality of Chinese rural-urban relations in these three, pre-reform decades is the story of Tianjin and its hinterland? This is not to diminish Brown's achievement, but to wish that other studies might expand our knowledge of the varieties of rural experience and urban interaction across other parts of China.

Also unaddressed here is any substantial consideration of the idea of the countryside in Chinese Communist Party policies and attitudes as they developed in the Yan'an years and after. The arrogance of urban leaders and ordinary Tianjin city residents is made clear in these chapters: "Ubiquitous propaganda trumpeted rural advances, but only partially concealed the contemptuous view many urban elites held of Chinese villagers" (p. 203). A more sustained explaining is needed of how these attitudes sat with the regime's rhetoric about the superiority of peasant wisdom and the corruption lurking on city streets. Urban-based leaders' frequent abuse of the countryside's inhabitants, vividly noted here, seems at odds with usual notions of Maoist ideals. There are also some oddities or errors in the book. An interviewee saying that a visit to Xiaojinzhuang gave Tianjin youngsters like himself "the opportunity to see real farm fields" (p. 224) ignores the soft boundary of cities like Tianjin and Beijing in the 1970s that featured farm fields in the city. The idea that Zhou Yang 周揚, then one of Mao's main propagandists, could stay in a village in early 1964 and remain anonymous seems unconvincing (p. 113). The claim by an interviewee that in the 1960s he and his urban friends stole persimmons in July

to eat instead of waiting until they were ripe in August (p. 180) seems impossible. Persimmons in suburban Beijing in the mid-1970s had to be left until they were almost rotten, usually well into autumn, otherwise their astringency made them impossible to consume. Overall, however, this book deserves to be read and studied as an exemplary examination of local politics and responses. It is a pleasure to read, assisted by being first edited by the author's mother, a professional editor.

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***Chinese Architecture in an Age of Turmoil, 200–600.*** By Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014. Pp. xxix + 465. \$68.00/HKD530.00.

In the most recent addition to a series edited by Ronald G. Knapp and Xing Ruan, *Spatial Habitus: Making and Meaning in Asia's Architecture*, Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, eminent Western historian of Chinese architecture, has crafted an invaluable volume. She chose to undertake a considerable challenge by writing about China's architectural history from 200 to 600, four centuries between the fall of the Han empire and the rise of the Tang. Ironically, as Steinhardt points out, the new archaeological discoveries of the past sixty years provided the impetus to dramatically rewrite architectural history for early periods, particularly from the Xia through Han dynasties (c. 2070 B.C.E.–C.E. 200) (p. xxii). For post-sixth-century architectural history, recent discoveries have not significantly changed the existing comprehensive scholarly narrative on the fundamentals of the architectural development but rather continue to refine the discourse. By focusing on this age of turmoil, 200 to 600, her volume bridges this substantial gap, bringing greater clarity and texture to the diverse creativity of these four hundred years when dozens of cities, as well as many temples, and pagodas, were constructed, destroyed, and rebuilt.

At this time, China endured fleeting dynasties, internecine warfare, and nomadic invasions in the north, while also enjoying flourishing trade with the West and responding to the introduction of Buddhism. When north China fell to nomadic control, the Chinese ruling house fled south, establishing a capital at Jiankang 建康 (present-day Nanjing), which remained the seat of imperial power for a succession of six short, weak dynasties. Undoubtedly, the complexity of this period, variously characterized by Chinese and Western scholars as “Three-Kingdoms-Six Dynasties,” Three Kingdoms, two Jins, and with rubrics such as “the Northern and Southern