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enjoyed greater privileges in relation to education. Their aspirations to become “white-collar beauties”, however, could generate new gendered practices in the workplace and hence new forms of gender segregation in the labor market. The study concludes by noting that women workers have borne the brunt of China’s economic restructuring and that their histories reveal a lifetime of gender inequality.

While many other studies have already documented how China’s revolutionary socialism left an unusually deep imprint on the life course of this particular generation, and accounts of how women workers fare in economic restructuring are not new, this study represents a systematic effort to bring these two strands together by adding a gender dimension to the understanding of the life course dynamics of these women workers. Originating from Liu’s doctoral dissertation, the study is rich in ethnographic descriptions of the women’s experiences and their perceptions of their past and present. As a book, however, it could have been better grounded theoretically, and engaged more widely with the existing literature. Nevertheless, this book should be of interest to anyone concerned with the situation of women workers in contemporary China, and how their present could be related to their past.

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This volume is only the second to focus on field experiences in the People’s Republic of China and provides a timely update to Thurston and Pasternak’s The Social Sciences and Fieldwork in China: Views from the Field (1983). Published detailed information on conducting China fieldwork is sporadic, often hidden within articles and monographs reporting empirical research results. Meanwhile, the general literature on research methodology has lacked pieces dedicated to the specific challenges faced by researchers working in the PRC, where traditional difficulties are intensified by a particular set of political and social constraints. This volume fills a gap by addressing a range of issues well rehearsed in the general methodological literature (for example, political sensitivity; language barriers; field positionality; “insider” perspectives), but doing so directly through the Chinese lens. We thus learn how fifteen academics from different disciplines made “compromises between methodological rules and reality” (p. 3) in seeking to enhance our understanding of China.

One key reason for the lack of published accounts—and the lack of interaction between the specific China literature and the general methodological literature—has been fear that the eclectic and intuitive methods necessarily
employed in China may meet with disapproval by researchers working in less restrictive, more amenable research settings. The consequence is generation upon generation of uninformed and isolated researchers having to re-invent the wheel when confronted with China’s frustrating series of obstacles. This is not to say that the general methodological literature is of limited help to China fieldworkers (and here I differ from the volume’s editors who would claim it is), since happy individuals may come across works that, despite being located in a different context, nonetheless find resonance within one’s own experience. For me, during my initial field trip to Xinjiang, Northwest China, that work was *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Since the early 1990s, fieldwork opportunities in China have become more diverse, and the degree and quality of field access varies widely according to the region (compare Shenzhen and Tibet in this volume), set of people, or topic being investigated. Furthermore, as Dorothy J. Solinger points out, a policy or phenomenon too sensitive to study at the time may fruitfully be explored after the event (p. 154). Within this diversity, the editors highlight three general themes that persist: the over-riding presence of the Party-state; access limitations; and the role of collaboration with Chinese contacts. While few institutions, it seems, are enthusiastic about receiving foreign scholars (perceived to bring more troubles than benefits), most researchers nonetheless conduct fieldwork through an official affiliation of some kind, often secured for the sole purpose of fixing a research visa; as this volume overwhelmingly shows, they also rely heavily on contacts. *Guanxi* (connections) remain a core prerequisite for research success in China.

In many chapters, a tendency to combine officially approved and unofficial fieldwork emerges. Mette Halskov Hansen, working on the experiences of Han immigrants to Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Gansu), begins by suggesting that an official research permission opens doors for a non-Chinese researcher, enabling, among other things, the collection of locally produced documents. Yet, as shown here, the officially endorsed interview can result in the desperate image of a lay respondent meekly offering the “correct” responses to a high-status Chinese counterpart; while a scholar’s residence in the building of the local Committee for Family Planning may generate large-scale mistrust among locals. As Halskov Hansen later concludes, fieldwork in China remains partly a matter of “flying by the seat of one’s pants” (p. 94): one needs flexibility regarding official and unofficial methods, and ideally should stay in one location long-term, or at least return there frequently.

Emily T. Yeh provides a welcome rare insight into the field climate in politically sensitive Tibet. Upon arrival, Yeh was immediately informed by her sponsor that statistics, policy documents and interviews with state officials were “completely out of the question” (p. 101)—thus official doors were firmly closed. Hoping to study the political ecology of greenhouse vegetable farming in one village, Yeh instead learned how political constraints may lead to new insights. Herself coming under the influence of the “politics of fear” necessary to maintain state legitimacy in Tibet, Yeh operated under a similar system of “self-
surveillance” to her respondents, and was therefore better able to interpret their behavior. Furthermore, she was incorporated into “local repertoires of resistance” (p. 101), whereby gleeful respondents assisted her in negotiating access constraints. The overriding ethos eventually informing Yeh’s research was “what people don’t know can’t hurt them”, suggesting a different kind of ethics: one that protects respondents by allowing them to talk “without burdening them with the responsibility of [potentially dangerous] knowledge” (p. 108).

Stig Thøgersen’s chapter addresses language issues attending interviews, exploring not so much the obvious challenges of regional dialects and minority tongues but rather that of sociolect. This he splits broadly into “Ganbunese” (the language of the state), and “Baixingese” (the diverse varieties of language used by commoners). Arguing that “what is said is inseparable from how it is said” (p. 114), he encourages researchers to pay attention to the social categories, metaphors and cultural resources drawn on to describe problems and grievances.

Focusing on how nuances gained in interview may help us to interpret subterfuge and euphemism in printed sources, Solinger describes specific methods of gaining access and connecting with subjects. Many of her tips are well known among China hands but will prove invaluable to new recruits, such as describing one’s research in harmless, benign terms when negotiating official permission (she frames it in terms of “learning about China’s positive experiences”, p. 158); drawing upon “any relationship one might have with any person willing to be of help” (p. 157) when seeking potential subjects and the related need to retain old contacts; writing down information contained in a nervous respondent’s notebook rather than having him repeat the information verbally.

Exploring field positionality and reflexivity, Bu Wei shows how even a native Chinese researcher can face the insider/outsider dichotomy in China. Her first startling discovery is that, contrary to her presumption that trafficked women in Sichuan need rescuing, one respondent considered herself actually better off in her new situation, and did not want to return to her old life. The mismatch in social background gains prominence as the chapter progresses: while the (urban) researchers imagined that potentially vulnerable women could receive anti-trafficking messages via television, the comparatively uneducated (rural) women could ill relate to documentary and news programmers, while most had only irregular access to TV media. Of greater practical use to them was sharing experience and information between peers, for example physical descriptions of trafficker “types”.

Also included is an invaluable 24-page bibliographic resource of the scattered methodological discussions on China research published since 1990. In sum, this volume makes an important contribution to our patchy knowledge regarding the eclecticisms of fieldwork in China.

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