

STREETLIFE CHINA

In this extraordinary collection, Michael Dutton offers both a lively reader and a unified theoretical argument about contemporary Chinese streetlife. The pieces—drawn from newspapers, government documents, academic writing and interviews—build a vivid picture of everyday life in China. Dutton's editorial hand and incisive commentary on these pieces form a rigorous discussion around current theory. Streetlife is shown to be a creative, dynamic, dissenting, deviant and often compliant aspect of the economic, political and cultural face of China. Key themes are the emergence of a market-driven consumer culture, and how this intersects with social outsiders; state strategies and the street's response. Underlying this narrative is the theme of human rights. There is no better introduction to contemporary China, and few more entertaining, vivid and stimulating accounts of shifts in cultural life and politics.

MICHAEL DUTTON teaches in the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne, and is also the Co-Director of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies in Melbourne. He has held three visiting research fellowships in China. He is co-editor of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* and author of *Policing and Punishment in China*, published by Cambridge in 1992.

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PREFACE

For me, this book is like a treasure box of possibilities. Possibilities both for Chinese society and for those of us in the business of making sense of it. While the diversity of this collection gives rise to its own heterogeneous possibilities all the pieces, in one way or another, build toward a picture of China in transition. In a funny and private way, this work also marks a very personal transition.

Any book with a readable title page is, to some extent, autobiographical, says Paul de Man, and this one is no exception. As I moved ground from researching a fairly empirical work on the Chinese police and toward a more cultural studies orientation, this collection took shape. This came about in part because of my growing interest in the work of Walter Benjamin, who spent many of his later years ‘loitering’, flâneur-like, in a study of the early commodity form in the West. This work not only helped frame many of the issues covered in this book but it also heavily influenced the form it would end up taking. It was Benjamin who wanted to ‘write’ using snip-bits of work stolen from the pens of others. Through these stolen lines he wanted to create his own mosaic of shock-like impressions about early capitalism. This idea enchanted me, but it proved hard to imagine how such a work could be organised and still be written in an accessible manner. Hard, that is, until I re-read Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin’s *New Ghosts, Old Dreams*. Barmé and Jaivin arranged their collection of Chinese dissident writings in such a way as to produce a text that could be read as though it were a sustained piece rather than a collection of writings. *Streetlife China* became an attempt to build on Benjamin’s radical insights by drawing on the architecture of Barmé and Jaivin. It was this desire to ‘write’ using other people’s—Chinese people’s—words that formed the contours along which the material now before you was collected, translated and arranged.

As this collection took shape friends, colleagues and students not only helped me carry the workload but pointed me in new directions. To those people I am eternally grateful. Foremost among them was Professor Xu Zhangrun. He not only collected and translated large parts of this volume but spent considerable time explaining to me the significance and depth of Chinese cultural difference. Kaz Ross tutored in the course in which much of this material came to life and she brought new and fresh ideas to the collection, pointing to possibilities I either didn’t or couldn’t see. The same was true of ‘Waku Tongzhi’, who read the manuscript in an earlier draft and offered some very useful suggestions. Then, there are my many friends and colleagues at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies. People

like Phillip Darby, John Cash, Rob McQueen and Don Miller have had an ongoing and profound influence upon my thinking as have the co-editors of the journal *Postcolonial Studies*, Dipesh Chakarabarty, Leela Gandhi and Sanjay Seth. I should also mention my students, the postgraduates in particular, who have never really fitted into a politics department and therefore came to study with me. They brought a diversity of scholarly interests with them and that has left its mark on this volume. At a much more concrete level, there was an army of translators involved with what in China would no doubt be thought of as a 'campaign to produce a book'. David Bray, Sylvia Chan, Li Shaorong, Li Tianfu, Xu Zhangrun, Sun Xiaoli and Tom Clarke all contributed. The authors, artists, designers and photographers whose work has been used in this volume should also be thanked, as should Jiang Tingyao who helped me track all these people down. The Australian Research Council gave me money for research on Chinese policing and social control and, through this, I was able to produce a book that, if it tells us one thing, it is that China is quickly becoming a country so diverse that it is impossible to police.

At Cambridge University Press, a range of people are to be thanked. The anonymous reviews gave me heart and advice. Professor Bill Kirby, the editor of this Cambridge series, did likewise. Authors are usually quite egotistical about their work and I was no exception. In hindsight, however, I bow to the wisdom of those who had the temerity to criticise! On the production side of things this text has proven to be nothing short of a battlefield and it is Jane Farago and Rosemary Perkins who are on the frontline, negotiating the various financial and production problems. Ron Hampton, the designer, took my rough sketches and ideas and brought them to life while Foong Ling Kong transformed my purple prose into readable English and, along the way, picked up quite a number of errors of translation. Most of all, I should like to thank Phillipa McGuinness and her assistant Sharon Mullins. Throughout the entire process of submission, review and finally acceptance, they kept the faith. It is fair to say that without their advocacy, this book would never have seen the light of day. Lastly, and on a very personal note, I could not have done this had it not been for Deborah and Tavan. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

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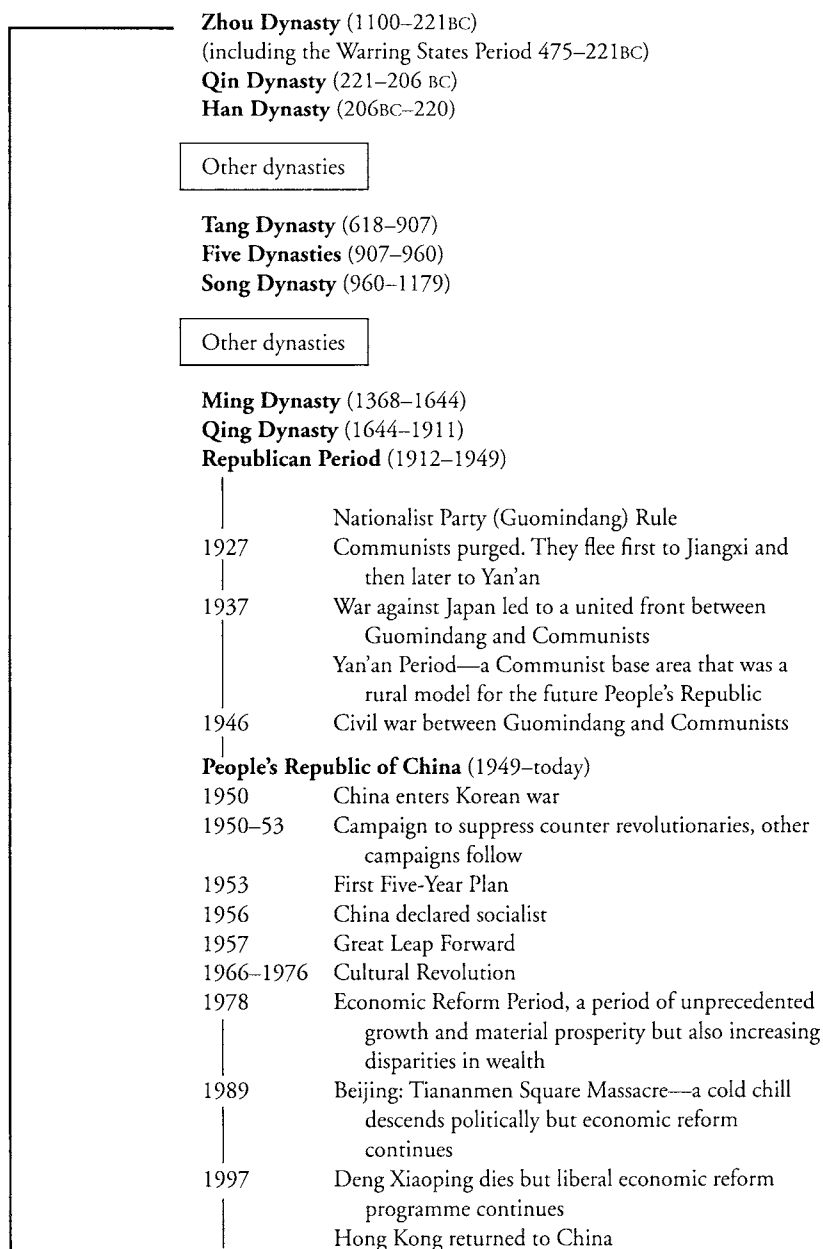
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Timeline on Chinese History



A Note on Method

... the book is an obsolete mediation between two different card-filing systems. For everything essential is found in the note boxes of the researcher who writes it, and the reader who studies it assimilates it into his own file.

—Walter Benjamin (1928)

A Note on Content

To the ordinary man.

To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands of streets ... The floodlights have moved away from the actors who possess proper names and social blazons, turning first toward the chorus of secondary characters, then settling on the mass of the audience ... a multitude of qualified heroes who lose names and faces as they become the ciphered river of the streets, a mobile language of computations and rationalities that belong to no one.

—Michel de Certeau (1984)

An Introduction

This introduction is like a snapshot accompanying a tourist's tale. Like all snapshots, it needs explanation. The tales that accompany this snapshot lead from the life stories of ordinary people through to the rules, rituals and rationalities that govern their daily existence. This is a story that begins in a backstreet and never really leaves it. This book is a note box, a file, a dossier, a collection of stories of the streets, ordered in a way that excited and made sense to me. I hope these stories will do the same for you.

—Michael Dutton