

*The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968–1980).*

By MICHEL BONNIN; translated from French by KRYSZYNA HORKO. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013. xxix, 515 pp. \$55.00 (cloth).

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This overdue English-language translation of Michel Bonnin's book about sent-down youth (published in French in 2004 and in Chinese in 2009) is an important contribution to the growing field of PRC history. Drawing on oral history interviews conducted in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, newspaper articles, literature, gazetteers, and collections of policy documents, Bonnin argues that the rustication of urban youth during the Cultural Revolution was a "massive waste of talent" (p. 426) that contributed to a broad decline in social morality in China.

Bonnin writes in a new preface that he was surprised at how difficult it was to publish an English translation. This is in part because the book is much longer than a standard English-language academic monograph. It also has an unorthodox structure. Bonnin opens with a fifty-page section about "motivations" for the sent-down youth movement, divided into three chapters about ideological, political, and socioeconomic motivations. Bonnin holds that sending urban youth to the countryside was driven more by Mao's political need to disband the Red Guards and his ideological goal of transforming young people through rural labor than it was about solving employment pressures.

The book's second part consists of four chapters detailing policy changes. This material is largely familiar until Bonnin arrives at a fascinating discussion of the late 1970s and early 1980s, an understudied period when protests pushed authorities to abandon rustication and find ways to deal with lingering problems related to jobs, housing, marriage, and seniority.

Part three, "Firsthand Experience," and part four, "Social Resistance," constitute the heart of the book and represent Bonnin's main contribution. Bonnin surpasses previous studies of sent-down youth by detailing the difficulties and discrimination they faced in villages and state farms. Bonnin shows that many sent-down youth were worse off than their rural hosts because they earned fewer work points, lacked survival skills, and were defenseless against mistreatment by local cadres, including the widespread rape of female youth. Yet as Bonnin demonstrates, long-term passive resistance and occasional open protests created an "alternative *zhiquing* culture." He writes that this was the "first time in the history of the PRC that a relatively large social group produced a radically different culture from the dominant norm" (p. 355).

As excellent and authoritative as Bonnin's book is, it should not be the last word on the history of sent-down youth. This is mainly because Bonnin's research, conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, did not overlap with the revolution in access to archival documents that followed. If Bonnin had continued to collect sources through the 2000s, when he could have found policy documents and reports in provincial, municipal, and county archives, plus diaries, letters, and petitions in urban flea markets, how different would the final product have looked? For an answer we can look to Elya J. Zhang's work on Li Qinglin, a Fujianese teacher whose letter to Chairman Mao about his son's troubles in the countryside catapulted him to fame in 1973.<sup>3</sup> The provincial and county archives that Zhang consulted provide a more complete and richer picture than Bonnin's account of the same episode, but they also confirm Bonnin's mostly negative

<sup>3</sup>Elya J. Zhang, "To Be Somebody: Li Qinglin, Run-of-the-Mill Cultural Revolution Showstopper," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, 211–39 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

assessment of the movement as a whole. Because reports in archives are mostly intended to deal with problems rather than to propagandize to the masses, they contain even more evidence of trauma, mistreatment, resistance, and violence.

Had Bonnin conducted the bulk of his oral history interviews at a later date, however, the negativity of his conclusions might have been softened. His interviews from the late 1970s and mid-1980s provide a snapshot of the immediate aftermath of the sent-down youth movement, when participants' memories of loss and trauma were most raw. Their statements reflect this rawness and negativity. After the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 and the economic changes of the 1990s, oral testimonies about the Mao era have tended to contain more nostalgia, more detached analysis, and more gratitude for having experienced bitterness.

None of these comments are meant to detract from the value of *The Lost Generation*, which should be required reading for anyone interested in the Mao years. Chinese University Press should be commended for making it available in English. I am embarrassed to admit that I do not read French and did not rush to read the Chinese edition in 2009. Reading it now for the first time, I found myself nodding in agreement at many points that resonated with my own findings. If I had read Bonnin's book before writing my own, I would have cited him properly and acknowledged the originality of his ideas. In an attempt to make up for it in some small measure here, I close with one of Bonnin's most sparkling analytical gems. He wrote it first: "If anything, the concept of urban superiority over the countryside was reinforced during the xiaxiang period because improved mutual knowledge made each side more aware of the real differences between them. Neither xiaxiang nor any other policy at the time actually curtailed the advantages of urban life" (p. 419).

JEREMY BROWN  
 Simon Fraser University  
[jeremy\\_brown@sfu.ca](mailto:jeremy_brown@sfu.ca)

*Spectacle and the City: Chinese Urbanities in Art and Popular Culture*. Edited by JEROEN DE KLOET and LENA SCHEEN. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. 261 pp. \$62.00 (paper).  
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Written from interdisciplinary perspectives across global urban, cultural, and area studies, the thirteen essays collected in *Spectacle and the City: Chinese Urbanities in Art and Popular Culture* present a dynamic texture of wide-ranging critical analyses of the representation of the Chinese city. Inspired by French Situationist Guy Debord's writings on the society of the spectacle, many contributors to this edited volume revisit the dialectical relations between imagination and reality, construction and deconstruction, and longing and belonging, in the context of Chinese modernity and global capitalism. Together, these interdisciplinary essays address the urgently felt need in the field of Chinese urban studies to interpret the art and literature produced in the context of the recent radical urbanization in Greater China.

The volume seeks to "seriously engage with the rapid circulation of imaginations of the Chinese city" (p. 13). Citing Debord, editors Jeroen de Kloet and Lena Scheen highlight the fluidity denoted by the notion of "city-as-spectacle." They believe that