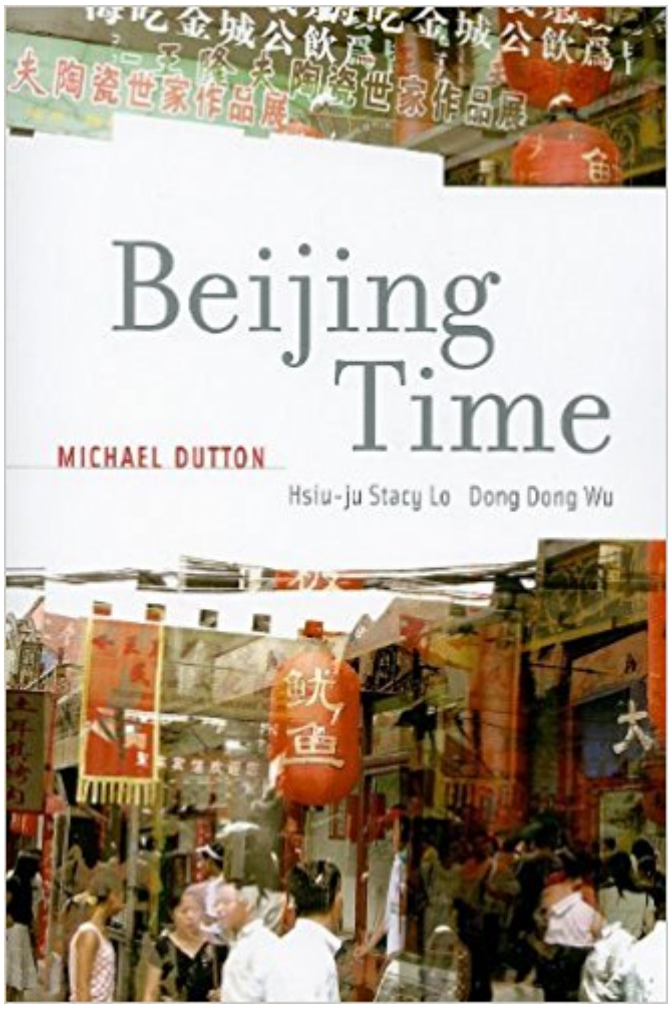
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Beijing Time



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Synopsis

Ã¢â ¬Å“Where is the market?Ã¢â ¬Â• inquires the tourist one dark, chilly morning. Ã¢â ¬Å“Follow the ghosts,Ã¢â ¬Â• responds the taxi driver, indicating a shadowy parade of overloaded tricycles. Ã¢â ¬Å“ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s not called the ghost market for nothing!Ã¢â ¬Â• And indeed, Beijing is nothing if not haunted. Among the soaring skyscrapers, choking exhaust fumes, nonstop traffic jams, and towering monuments, one discovers old BeijingÃ¢â ¬â ¢newly styled, perhaps, but no less present and powerful than in its ancient incarnation. Beijing Time conducts us into this mysterious world, at once familiar and yet alien to the outsider. The ancient Chinese understood the world as enchanted, its shapes revealing the mythological order of the universe. In the structure and detail of TianÃ¢â ¬â„¢anmen Square, the authors reveal the city as a whole. In Beijing no pyramids stand as proud remnants of the past; instead, the entire city symbolizes a vibrant civilization. From TianÃ¢â ¬â„¢anmen Square, we proceed to the neighborhoods for a glimpse of local colorÃ¢â ¬â ¢from the granny and the young police officer to the rag picker and the flower vendor. Wandering from the avant-garde art market to the clock towers, from the Monumental Axis to MaoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Mausoleum, the book allows us to peer into the lives of Beijingers, the rules and rituals that govern their reality, and the mythologies that furnish their dreams. Deeply immersed in the culture, everyday and otherworldly, this anthropological tour, from ancient cosmology to Communist kitsch, allows us to see as never before how the people of BeijingÃ¢â ¬â ¢and ChinaÃ¢â ¬â ¢work and live.

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Customer Reviews

Deeply informed by urban theory and exhibiting an assured feel for the city, Beijing Time paints a vivid picture of Beijing's tumultuous transformations. At once anthropological and historical, and with its sights set on both the official and nonofficial city, on both urban form and urban experience, this book offers a wonderfully textured guide to contemporary Beijing, written with wit and panache. There is simply no other study quite like this. (Gyan Prakash, Princeton University)Beijing Time is an exhaustive, modern portrayal of a city and its people, written with flair from the belly of the Beijing dragon. As China scrubs away the history of the Cultural Revolution and repaints the city in capitalist strokes, old Beijing is being replaced by a more tourism-oriented versionÃ¢â ¬Â¦ This is a vividly textured account of a city in transition. (Laurence Mackin Irish Times 2008-06-14)Beijing Time is a wide-ranging travelogue that succeeds in capturing the contradictions of what the authors call a 'monstropolis.' They eschew simplification in favor of Beijing's dazzling intricacyÃ¢â ¬Â¦ We are shown a city with astonishing human capital, a city where, barely a decade after Tiananmen, the people and the government appear to have reached some tentative concord between dissent and coercion. (Tod Hoffman Montreal Gazette 2008-08-02)This engrossing book merges travel writing, sociology and streetwise reportage. From Mao's tomb to designer malls, karaoke bars to 'Pandaman,' who parodies Olympic hype, these intellectual sleuths search for clues to the hidden city beneath the headline stories. Their Beijing hums with ghosts of the past, as well as with every kind of futuristic dream. (Justin Wintle The Independent 2008-08-08)Beijing Time is an intriguing puzzle portrait of pieces of China, from an explication of how Communist construction disrupted the traditional flow of qi through the city to scenes from ragpickers' slums, karaoke bars, 'ghost markets' where collectors search for authentic Maoist ephemera, former factories converted to avant-garde artists' spaces, and a good deal more in only 238 well-illustrated pages. Through it all, China emerges as something quite different from the totalitarian nightmare of some people's fears, something more like the European monarchies of the 19th century where arts, culture and independent thinking flourished alongside the activities of secret policeÃ¢â ¬â ¢not a free society in the American sense, necessarily, but one where plenty of people seem to be free just the same, and maybe more free, for the risks they might run, than Americans would give them credit for. (Samuel Wilson Think 3 Institute [think3institute.blogspot.com] 2008-06-17)The book starts with Beijing places, beginning of course at the centre of the Chinese universe, Tiananmen Square, and starts to unpack their meanings for people today. It is interspersed with long encounters with interesting, ordinary Beijingers: a policewoman, rubbish sifters, a seedy businessman working contacts in a karaoke joint. (Rowan Callick The Australian 2008-08-06)A fascinating cultural mapping of modern Beijing. Here are ring roads that resemble 'successive reworkings of the old city

wall'; here is the district for 'saw-gash CDs' (imperfect discs dumped by western record labels on the Chinese market), where the young bob for Sex Pistols albumsÃ¢â ¬Â¦ The book is a useful street-level corrective to received ideas. In particular, its interviews with citizensÃ¢â ¬â ¢an ex-policeman, scavengers in plastic-bag mountains, luminaries of the art scene, cafe owners who dream of being film directors, members of a kind of granny Neighborhood Watch schemeÃ¢â ¬â ¢are wonderfully humane. (Steven Poole The Guardian 2008-09-06)

Michael Dutton is author of Streetlife China and the prize-winning Policing Chinese Politics; he is also Professor of Politics at Goldsmiths University of London.Hsiu-ju Stacy Lo is an independent scholar.Dong Dong Wu is an independent scholar.

The two earlier reviews I read are essentially correct. A careful academic work this is not. It's more like a graduate level Lonely Planet guide. And that is what I wanted from this book, so I give it high enough marks. The authors actually did take LP to task at one point, at which point I thought to myself regarding this book's weaknesses, "Physician, heal thyself." And like good LP guides, it is generally superbly written, fresh, and interesting.I just returned from Beijing, and visited many of the same sites as this book. It cast new light on them, in some occasionally overheated rhetoric. That said, I wish I had the book in Beijing as there are a few more places I would have visited. I thought the strength of the book was in its first half. This contained a description of Beijing's architecture and grand urban plan--its Cartesian nature with the y-axis the old imperial city, and the newer x-axis being the Communist contribution, with the Tiananmen Gate/The Great Helmsman at the origin. The authors are at their peak here, connecting architecture and politics. Its second half weakened (for me anyway) into bar-hopping, shopping excursion descriptions, and a too-long description of the second hand CD scene. It was too much like one of the more vapid "Style/Escapes" sections of the modern NYTimes. Nevertheless, the authors brought some new insights to me and held my interest through a rapid four hour read over two days.

Well, apparently this is what passes for scholarship at the Harvard Press:"As religion moves between the sacred and the profane, garbage moves between city and country. Reincarnation is guaranteed, because trash never dies. Bajiacun becomes its version of limbo." Fashion "is the embodiment of modernity. Ever deceptive in its telling of time, fashion teases and seduces death, but survives itself by reviving the corpse of garbage. Like fashion, trash is eternal. Garbage of fashion, and fashion of garbage, are phenomena of modernity, the signs of progress, and the

objects of entertainment. ...And both are doomed, rotating in the permanence that is the eternal return."This isn't writing, and with due apologies to Mr. Capote, it isn't even typing. I'm sure that the ten academics who will pretend to understand this idiocy will laud it for fear of being thought too dense to decode it. Oh, lah.

I recently lived and worked in Beijing for a period of three years. I would have very much appreciated the opportunity to have read this book prior to my arrival. It would have enabled me to better understand what I was seeing & experiencing all around me. Highly recommended for diplomats, business reps and ex-pats heading in that direction for both short and long term stays.

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