

seriously, the book does not consistently follow through with the questions raised in the stimulating and all too brief introduction. However, it successfully points the study of migration along the path it ought have been following for some time now: that is, this book challenges anthropology to study migration as though we had no preconceptions about the fixed relationships between culture and space, to examine people in the act of migration as forces of culture in their own right rather than betwixt and between examples of marginalia, to study the interdependence of mobility and place in the construction of culture. I hope that this book achieves the recognition it deserves and helps to shape discussions of migration, culture, and space in the future.

Sasha Newell

Hanser, Amy: *Service Encounters. Class, Gender, and the Market for Social Distinction in Urban China.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. 235 pp. ISBN 978-0-8047-5837-6. Price: \$ 21.95

Over the past twenty years or so, China has experienced rapid economic development and a dramatic transformation of the urban landscape from the austere Maoist era. The reform policies of the post-socialist decades have brought about the gradual dismantling of the planned economy and its substitution by market mechanisms. This shift from a state socialist system to one that is increasingly market-oriented has produced greater wealth as well as greater inequality. Inequalities existed in Mao's China as well, but they have become much more obvious, especially the rural-urban divide. It is above all in urban China that the economic and social transformations are reshaping social relations. That is to say, the social changes are encouraging social stratification and stratified consumption patterns.

Against the background of the larger systems of inequality, Amy Hanser perceives the emergence of what she calls a new "structure of entitlement" and the social distinctions upon which it is built. These developments and the concomitant "search for distinction" are particularly evident in urban China's expanding service sector. Or as the author argues in her sound and detailed ethnographic account, service settings are key spaces "for the reproduction of structures of inequality through the recognition of class entitlements" (10). In other words, they are places where customers seek distinction and where that distinction is recognized by the service personnel. "The core argument of this book is that relations among these disparate groups are understood and enacted through a framework of cultural distinctions that interpret – and legitimate – inequality as difference" (3). Hanser explores China's emerging structure of entitlement in retail settings where people from different social groupings encounter one another.

The study under review focuses on three distinct types of retail outlets in the northeastern city of Harbin. One such establishment is a modern high-end private department store – referred to as Sunshine Department Store in the book – that offers luxury goods to the city's

newly rich. The second setting is a large state-owned department store, dubbed by Hanser "Harbin No. X." It was one of the city's premier retail establishments prior to the introduction of market reforms and is still a major shopping destination for working-class shoppers. Finally, what the author calls "The Underground," is a crowded, low-end clothing bazaar where *getihu* (small, independent hawkers and merchants) sell inexpensive goods to people from a range of social backgrounds. Thus, as the author observes, "Chinese urbanites are divided both by what they can buy and also by how they buy" (51). It is particularly noteworthy that Hanser worked as a salesclerk in all three retail settings while undertaking her field research between March 2001 and September 2002.

It was at the highly regimented Sunshine Department Store that retail workers were made especially aware of the entitlement to luxury service. The store was representative of the highly attentive, deferential service that is characteristic of the elite consumer spaces in urban China. Moreover, as Hanser points out, this kind of "distinction work" involved class-coded femininity. Here an obedient army of young women in attractive uniforms served the newly rich and upwardly mobile class. "Store disciplinary routines aimed to control workers' bodies through a norm of youthful femininity that was expressed in rules and regulations focused on appearance, posture, physical deportment, and demeanor" (98). According to the author, the Sunshine managers were successfully using a seductive image of youthful femininity to encourage their workers. After all, the comfortable, clean work environment and smart uniforms set these elite salesclerks – while they were able to enjoy the "rice bowl of youth" (97) – apart from women in less luxurious service occupations, not to mention ordinary urban factory workers.

In stark contrast, the state-owned "Harbin No. X Department Store" did not yet contribute in significant ways to the creation of a differentiated structure of entitlements and the production of a culture of inequality among urban consumers at the time of Hanser's research. As a relic of the socialist past and on account of its continued links to the local state, the store retained many important institutional orientations rooted in China's prereform, planned economy era. Consequently, its management did not organize service work to produce social distinctions. As Hanser has convincingly demonstrated, the continuing socialist work culture critical of inequality between workers and managers provided room for worker autonomy as well as reciprocity in worker-customer interactions on the sales floor. "Most strikingly, workers maintained a sales floor culture that frequently invoked socialist values and included an explicit, almost Marxist, critique of inequality in the workplace and of managerial authority over workers" (63). The general economic and enterprise reforms notwithstanding, the store with its appeal to a common working-class past remained an open, essentially democratic space. However, it should be noted that, despite the store's populist and proletarian feel, the

egalitarian nature of the store and the give-and-take of the salesclerk-customer relation did not normally extend to rural people (“peasants”) who were considered “not normal” by urbanites.

In many ways, this kind of bias extended to the rather more chaotic *geti* markets of The Underground. “Here ... the people working in the market – both the merchants and the young women who were their hired help – were widely perceived as unscrupulous and disruptive people” (121). Outsiders considered them uncouth, uncultured and undeserving of respect. In *getihu* markets selling cheap merchandise of uncertain quality, origin, and value, low-income consumers “must haggle over consumer goods that are of poor quality and may be dangerously substandard” (51). In this environment, “sharp-tongued” salespeople were not accustomed to treat shoppers with deference. On the contrary, as Hanser observes, the sellers of The Underground “turned negative perceptions of market people on their head, instead characterizing *customers* as dangerous, untrustworthy, and even ‘dirty’” (149).

The economic and social transformations precipitated by China’s relentless drive toward a capitalist-style market economy have produced greater stratification and inequalities. These developments have proved particularly difficult for China’s state sector workers, especially in China’s northeastern “rust belt.” “The loss of what was expected to be lifetime employment within the secure and defined boundaries of a work unit can produce personal, family, and community crises as well as a profound sense of social loss ... The overall result has been a loss of symbolic capital for China’s urban working class and the social spaces with which they are associated” (157). Relying among other things on Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* and “the trajectory effect,” Hanser has competently applied cultural concepts of inequality to China’s increasingly stratified retail sector and the phenomenon of post-socialist distinction work. Thus, she has convincingly demonstrated how the downward trajectory observed in the state-owned Harbin No. X Department Store mirrored the broader decline of China’s urban working class.

Some of the consequences of the inexorable pace of change were dramatically revealed when Hanser returned to Harbin in March 2005. The author found that the female salesclerks were, perhaps not surprisingly, all new at the luxury Sunshine Department Store. There had been a significant turnover of personnel in the *geti* market as well. But changes were also afoot at Harbin No. X. Not only were its workers more strictly controlled, the city was also in the process of selling its stake to a state-controlled business conglomerate. Indeed, the store was beginning to shed its socialist past – and will most likely shed its aging female sales force as well. Such discarded middle-aged women workers face an uncertain future in low-wage occupations. Although the “gendered” implications of distinction work are alluded to in earlier chapters and it has been made clear that the salesclerks at the three sites were mostly women, the wider gender issues have not been explicitly

discussed in the book under review. While the author has observed these women at close quarters at the sales desk, it would have been helpful to learn something about their daily lives away from the workplace.

Whereas inequality, class entitlements, and distinction work have long been accepted in the capitalist West, Amy Hanser’s skilful analysis of the more recent emergence of a culture of differentiated privileges and a new structure of entitlements in a post-socialist society offers valuable insights into the general social transformation and inequality in modern China. What makes this book especially valuable is the fact that it explores these important issues in three radically different, highly visible yet little studied retail environments, including the interaction of salesclerks and shoppers. This detailed, easy-to-read monograph is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the dramatic changes shaping twenty-first-century China. R. G. Tiedemann

Hausner, Sondra L.: *Wandering with Sadhus. Ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 247 pp. ISBN 978-0-253-21949-7. Price: \$ 9.95

This book, which was awarded the Joseph W. Elder Prize in Indian Social Sciences, and which embodies overall ten years of research, is the result of “deep hanging-out,” to borrow Clifford Geertz’s phrase, primarily with three Śaiva sadhus (one male of the Nirāñjanī Akhārā and two females of the Jūnā Akhārā, all members of the Daśanāmī Sampradāya), and secondarily with a host of other holy men between 1997 and 2001 in the Nepali capital, Kathmandu, and the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and after November 2000, Uttaranchal. Its origins could be traced to the childhood experiences of the author, when her father was posted as a United Nations official in Kathmandu. Her mother, a yoga teacher, would take her two daughters along the better to learn yoga from an ash-clad *yogī* whose name, Crazy Bliss, sounds almost American-Indian in the English translation of his name – Pāgalānanda. That seems to have provided what Hindus call the *saṃskāra*, which later fructifies in this study of renunciants.

The textual version of renunciation in Hinduism defines it as a break from normal social life and a commitment to a life of the soul (rather than of the body). The anthropological exploration of this claim results in the further realization that although the renouncer cuts himself or herself off from normal society, he or she does not necessarily lead merely a solitary existence but becomes part of another community, and that “instead of being based in one particular place, the community of renunciants inhabits a circuit of sites, a series of pilgrimage places linked through myth and geography. Renunciants do not ask each other, ‘Where are you from?’ but rather, ‘Which place have you come from now?’” (10 f.). And just as “pilgrimage circuits constitute communal conceptions of space for *sādhus*, festival cycles constitute communal conceptions of time” (11) especially festivals such as the Kumbh Melās, which