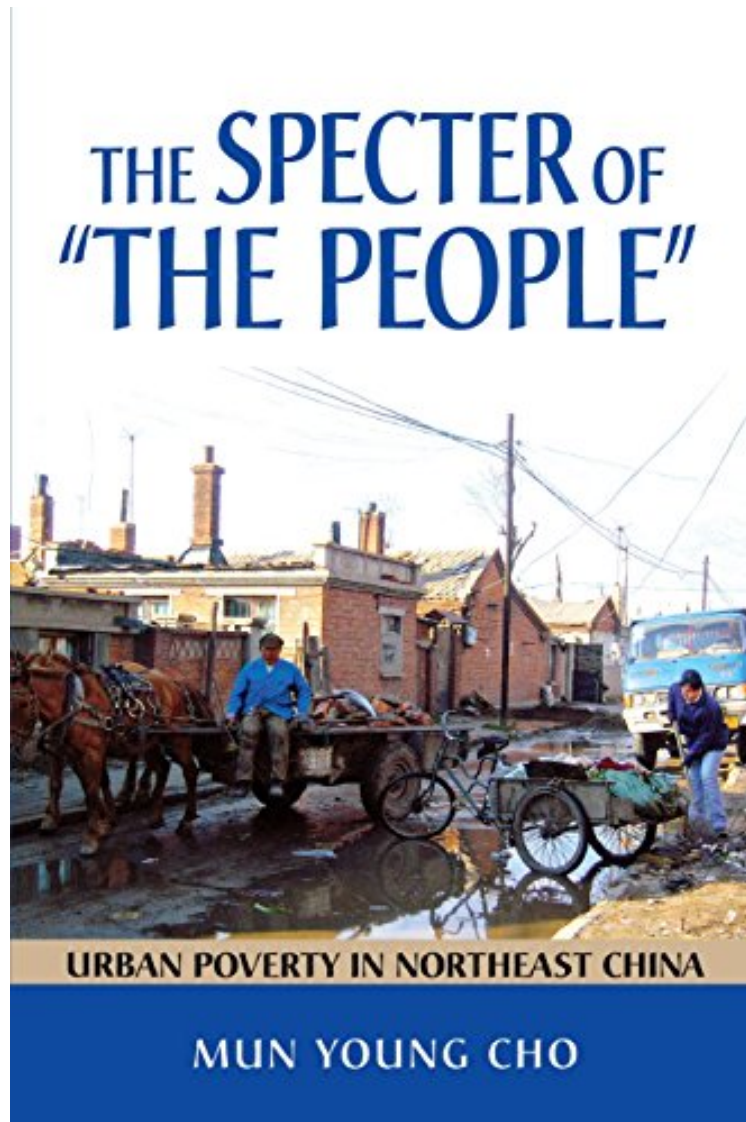


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The Specter of "the People": Urban Poverty in Northeast China

Mun Young Cho

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Mun Young Cho : The Specter of "the People": Urban Poverty in Northeast China before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Specter of "the People": Urban Poverty in Northeast China:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Informative By Zachary Trippe I really enjoyed this book. I now have a much better understanding of northeast China and its new urban poor.

Despite massive changes to its economic policies, China continues to define itself as socialist; since 1949 and into the present, the Maoist slogan "Serve the People" has been a central point of moral and political orientation. Yet several decades of market-based reforms have resulted in high urban unemployment, transforming the proletariat vanguard into a new urban poor. How do unemployed workers come to terms with their split status, economically marginalized but still rhetorically central to the way China claims to understand itself? How does a state dedicated to serving "the people" manage the poverty of its citizens? Mun Young Cho addresses these questions in a book based on more than two years of fieldwork in a decaying residential area of Harbin in the northeast province of Heilongjiang. Cho analyzes the different experiences of poverty among laid-off urban workers and recent rural-to-urban migrants, two groups that share a common economic duress in China's Rustbelt cities but who rarely unite as one class owed protection by the state. Impoverished workers, she shows, seek protection and recognition by making claims about "the people" and what they deserve. They redeploy the very language that the party-state had once used to venerate them, although their claim often contradicts government directives regarding how "the people" should be reborn as self-managing subjects. The slogan serve the people is no longer a promise of the party-state but rather a demand made by the unemployed and the poor.

"The specter of 'the people' is a welcome addition to the investigation of the ever-shifting status of the poor in China's quickly changing political economy [it] is an important contribution that adds new insights to an ongoing discussion about China's poor, and the state policies that at varying times help, hinder, or simply ignore them." Marc L. Moskowitz, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2014) "This well-researched and very readable book has a number of strong points. . . . [It] is a great contribution to the understanding of contemporary China from aspects of everyday urban poverty and governance that will suit both academics and students specializing in anthropology and/or China studies. It will also be useful to those who are interested in life at the grassroots level in urban China." Jialing Luo, *Asian Ethnology* (2015) "I read this sophisticated, engaging, heartfelt book with much absorption and pleasure. Mun Young Cho has done superb fieldwork and has come up with a fascinating framework. Choosing the site of an outcast locale in China's northeast was a marvelous approach, since here one can find a very strong sample of people who were considered the elite of the past; here, too, on the outskirts of the city, one can encounter both impoverished, discarded laborers and discriminated-against peasant migrants. The juxtaposition of the surging prosperity of the nation and the searing poverty of Cho's subjects is stunning." Dorothy J. Solinger, University of California, Irvine, author of *States Gains, Labors Losses: China, France and Mexico Choose Global Liaisons, 1980-2000* and *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China* (winner of the Joseph R. Levenson Prize) "The issue of downward mobility among the working class, and how this relates to interclass conflict and populism/nationalism is clearly on the policy agenda everywhere in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Mun Young Cho is particularly interested in the emotional dimensions of these interactions in relation to the distinctive and continuing resonance of understandings of 'the people' in the Maoist era and how these understandings have both continued to resonate and been transformed in the post-Mao reform era." Alan Smart, University of Calgary, author of *The Shek Kip Mei Myth* About the Author Mun Young Cho is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Yonsei University, Seoul.