

and the outcomes of their decisions. In short, the peasant ability to work this system, or to flounder in it, was influenced by both state structures and policies and economic forces that cut across the Chinese urban and rural landscapes.

In many ways, *Contesting Citizenship* is about the political will of the Chinese government after three decades of socialist experimentation and the current project of capitalist restructuring. Readers learn that the hukou system has been an institutional structure that has allowed for the ease of the urban population, for discursive modes of naming and classifying populations, and for everyday practices of surveillance. Readers also learn something about the cultural politics of inequality in socialist and contemporary China. Solinger reveals how peasant sojourners have had to contend with modes of discrimination and prejudice left over from the socialist era, as well as with all of the new forms of exploitation that have come with capitalism. Her main theoretical contribution is that migration issues are all about the politics of citizenship. How one belongs to the nation depends on how one is classified, but also on how one can work the system to one's benefit. Readers learn that citizenship in China, as with so many other places, is about how marginalized groups are working to empower themselves against powerful regimes and indifferent market forces. Solinger tells this tale with clarity and compassion. *Contesting Citizenship* should be read by anyone interested in questions of labor, international trade, and the place of state socialism in the new global economy.

**Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life.** Ruth Finnegan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xii + 212 pp., appendixes, notes, references, photographs.

MICHAEL A. FAHY  
University of Michigan

Recent years have seen "an explosion of interest in the concept of narrative" (p. 4) within the social and human sciences, as Ruth Finnegan notes in *Tales of the City*. Finnegan should provoke reflection on why the recent interest in narrative, which has engaged a number of anthropologists, has had scarcely any impact on the subfield of urban anthropology where narrative (and more specifically the

"life narrative") has figured largely as a feature of methodology. *Tales of the City* is admirable for its deft intercalation of rich ethnographic material with analytical insights drawn from a number of disciplines, but Finnegan's innovative achievement lies in providing a model for the theoretical foregrounding of narrative in anthropological approaches to urban life.

Finnegan posits that narrative plays a crucial role in the organization of knowledge and lived experience. She effectively argues that personal stories not only reflect the reality of urban existence but in "building creatively on the set of accepted narrative resources" (p. 158) the tales of actor-narrators also actively formulate the city's social and cultural constitution. Finnegan analyzes multiple urban stories from a range of narrative registers while focusing on the new city of Milton Keynes, planned in the 1960s and located in southern-central England. She selects from the stories of city planners and academics, for example, as well as from the personal stories of individual lives. In analyzing either abstract or personal stories, her emphasis here is on how stories draw on wider cultural themes and narrative conventions. As Finnegan notes, within any cultural system of reference there are recognized generic conventions about content and delivery, with effective expression and communication built on "shared expectations about structure, style, protagonists, mode of distribution and content" (p. 11). Here, the use of narrative resonates strongly with how anthropologists have used the term culture: the efficacy of narrative capitalizes on the invisibility of its artifices to those employing them, thereby concealing the conventions that enable such narratives to work below the threshold of consciousness.

Among the accounts of 35 individuals living in one of the Milton Keynes housing estates in *Tales of the City*, six are comparatively extensive. Finnegan does not want to reduce their complexity to a single "message" or "definitive list of themes" (p. 56). She argues that the stories are not limited to the unique persons or events portrayed in narration, but carry wider symbolic value for both teller and hearer. The stories draw upon a range of available narrative resources recognized by participants, and Finnegan rather cogently elucidates certain stock conventions and narrative devices that recurrently animate many, if not uniformly all of the particular stories. Finnegan provides

# Tales Of The City A Study Of Narrative And Urban Life

**RJ Shavelson**



## **Tales Of The City A Study Of Narrative And Urban Life:**

## Reviewing **Tales Of The City A Study Of Narrative And Urban Life**: Unlocking the Spellbinding Force of Linguistics

In a fast-paced world fueled by information and interconnectivity, the spellbinding force of linguistics has acquired newfound prominence. Its capacity to evoke emotions, stimulate contemplation, and stimulate metamorphosis is truly astonishing. Within the pages of "**Tales Of The City A Study Of Narrative And Urban Life**," an enthralling opus penned by a very acclaimed wordsmith, readers attempt an immersive expedition to unravel the intricate significance of language and its indelible imprint on our lives. Throughout this assessment, we shall delve into the book's central motifs, appraise its distinctive narrative style, and gauge its overarching influence on the minds of its readers.

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## **Tales Of The City A Study Of Narrative And Urban Life Introduction**

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