

discourse practices and understandings of the state as a ubiquitous presence against which any social activity must be measured. On the other hand, NGOs thrive within the grey areas of state-sanctioned activism. Some of the examples presented in the book clearly illustrate how the Chinese state, by outsourcing workers' protection to the NGOs, implicitly legitimises their existence.

Pan's application of anthropological theory, one major example of which is Herzfeld's (2016) notion of cultural intimacy, is consistent and well explained, accessible to readers who have not mastered the subject. However, one important point that could be further developed is the institutional domain of NGO-state relations. As an anthropologist, Pan focuses on how non-state actors perceive and negotiate the idea of the state among themselves, rather than on how they engage with it. Increased methodological dialogue with other disciplines could provide further explanation of the macro-dynamics of contention on institutional ground. After all, labour movements act on political institutions. A multi-disciplinary approach may also contribute to investigating how NGO-state relations change by mission: for instance, there may be a difference between how labour and environmental NGOs deal and are dealt with. Normally, time and space constraints prevent authors from weighing all these different angles and hypotheses, but this additional level of comparative analysis could further complement the study of NGO activity in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

At the time of writing, China's workforce is witnessing profound change. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the transformation of capital-labour relations by stimulating the rise of e-commerce and online industry. Chinese migrant workers are now filling the ranks of a new type of working-class, facing precarious labour conditions and derisory legal protection. Such circumstances are quickly translating into new demands and protests over poor working conditions, with one recent example involving strikes by couriers and food delivery workers.¹ Similarly, Hong Kong has seen a remarkable rise in unionisation,² spurred by both the pandemic and the 2019 protests. As these trends promise future developments in Chinese labour advocacy, Pan's book may be an excellent starting point for educating oneself on the micro-dynamics of NGO activity.

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THIREAU, Isabelle. 2020.

Des lieux en commun. Une ethnographie des rassemblements publics en Chine (Places in Common: An Ethnography of Public Gatherings in China). Paris: Éditions EHESS.

FLORENCE GRAEZER BIDEAU

Reviewing research whose subjects echo one's own work is a fascinating and stimulating exercise. *Des lieux en commun* resonates in fact with two ethnographic studies I carried out in Beijing, one in the mid-1990s on the collective dance of *yangge* (秧歌), and the other more recently on the controversial renovation of the district of Gulou. Isabelle Thireau's volume deals with Tianjin. Based on an immersive fieldwork, the author presents two distinct experiences of public gatherings. The first is the daily meetings in Shengli Square, a space used for group physical exercise as much as for socialising among its members; the second is for activities relating to the protection of the cultural heritage of historic Tianjin. What the experiences have in common is the mutual presence of several social actors, who come together in a more or less structured way, and a sharing of know-how related to their engagement in urban space and civil society.

The focal point of her study concerns the modalities of "doing things together" and the capacity of action of those taking part in these gatherings. The author emphasises with great finesse the close connections between knowledge and action, and the importance for citizens of making visible a public history of the urban and social changes of which they are at once witnesses and actors. The comparisons made between these two situations are ingeniously documented via several significant entry points for the communities concerned. They reveal not only the differences between these two forms of public gathering, which both fall along a continuum of participatory initiatives, but also the respective issues at stake and the fragile legitimacy of their actions in a relatively uncertain sociopolitical context.

Divided into two parts, each of which contains extracts from interviews as well as ethnographic descriptions, the work relates in meticulous detail the common experiences of an apprenticeship in and a familiarisation with public action carried out by those participating in the gatherings.

The first part delves into the daily "keep healthy" meetings on Shengli Square in the district of Heping between 2011 and 2017. The author insists at the outset on the social and geographical heterogeneity of its members in order to better highlight the forms taken by the different types of engagement between familiarity and strangeness within the "spontaneous" group. The specific modalities of interaction and communication (how people position themselves, greet each other, move around, take leave, go off together, etc.) designed for "doing things together" are all instances of a common know-how made up of practices and shared norms that progressively form into a pattern of behaviour. People do their exercise and

talk to each other at a comfortable distance. They engage in discussion about ordinary subjects (the environment, the family, food, etc.) and share their ideas within the group. They identify material traces of places undergoing transformation and they take part in a collective commemorating effort of the kind that occurs in the popular radio programme "Speaking about the Tianjin Garrison." These different experiences thus contribute to the establishment of a "we" through the setting of a collective narrative that sometimes diverges from the official history. The three chapters that comprise this first part provide an account of the way in which "common understandings are created and know-how shared" (p. 182) within a group that is loose in terms of its structure and resilient by dint of its regularity, but above all dynamic through the configurations of mutual presence that unfold there and that are on public display. Without any control over concrete reality, the people taking part in these daily gatherings have to adapt to urban transformations such as the one happening on Shengli Square itself, which pose a threat to the legitimacy of this institutionalised "doing things together."

The second part of the work deals specifically with the urban development of Tianjin and the role of its residents. The fieldwork study begun in 2011 documents interviews, archives, and participation in various meetings. Its aim is to reconstitute the origin of a team of volunteers whose objective was to protect the cultural heritage of a Chinese city recognised in 1986 as being "famous for its history and culture." The fieldwork interviews conducted in Tianjin and the systematic explorations of endangered places (Guyijie, Wudadao, Belfran, etc.) are presented in three chapters that point out the various modes of engagement developed by those involved (a forum, publishing newsletters, writing reports, sending letters, paying visits, winning prizes, etc.) to prevent the rushed destruction of certain cultural assets. In order to ensure the enforcement of the local and national legislative framework for heritage protection, this collective firstly engaged with the many administrative levels, regulations, and heritage labels in a series of initiatives to save buildings. Imbued with a feeling of responsibility for the protection of the city, the team then mobilised various written, oral, and visual sources and championed the cause of oral history and residents' memories of the past to legitimise their stance and activities. The upshot was an increasingly sophisticated capacity to position themselves in the sometimes-conflictual system between the local administration and the heritage experts. These initiatives resulted in the recognition of the "Tianjin model," according to which "the government rules, the experts advise, and the public participates" (p. 240). Their ability to mobilise is not only shown on multiple fronts but is, above all, something that is shared across the group. Indeed, their actions fall within a regulatory framework that encourages civil participation. The volunteers carefully choose what is to be made public in their exchanges with the representatives of the Party and the state in order to produce an authorised public discourse aimed at limiting the destructions. By playing with the local administration's codes, they embarrass it and impel it to act. Isabelle Thireau's research presents the issues at stake and the limits of public discussion. Her analysis of the different categories of citizen gatherings ultimately examines the fragility of their existence as well as the mechanisms of their representativeness in the current political and administrative context.

This ethnography provides an original and very specific account of a topical phenomenon in which unrestrained urbanisation meets social movements in China. It reflects the inevitable tensions between urban transformations and participatory processes and in doing so reveals the strategies and tactics put in place by politicians who are blinded by the

development of their city, and residents who are attached to the spirit of the place in which they live.

■ Translated by Peter Brown.

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CAPDEVILLE-ZENG, Catherine, and Delphine ORTIS (eds.). 2018.
Les institutions de l'amour: cour, amour, mariage. Enquêtes anthropologiques en Asie et dans l'océan Indien. (Institutions of Love: Court, Love, Marriage. Anthropological Surveys in Asia and in the Indian Ocean).
 Paris: Presses de l'Inalco.

PASCALE-MARIE MILAN

Marriage is one of the social institutions that is still playing an important role in many Asian countries. At least, that is what is shown in the work co-edited by Catherine Capdeville-Zeng and Delphine Ortis, which brings together ten case studies around the topics of "choice of partner," "individual expressions of feelings," and "marriage rituals." Love is an area that is "not easy to talk about," often running into the sociological hurdle of telling (p. 11), but this work succeeds in its aim of providing a comparative study of the contemporary configurations of the institutions of love in China, Korea, Japan, India, and Madagascar. At the outset, Catherine Capdeville-Zeng and Delphine Ortis emphasise that the very notion of love cannot simply be projected onto different local conceptions. It is about a set of culturally situated ideas justifying a preference for the expression "feelings of love" or an interest in studies on the institutions of love (*ibid.*). As one of the motivations of social relations to which individuals commit themselves, this subject offers the advantage of being a vehicle for exploring a society in action and exploring its values, hierarchical relationships, and social relations of sex. The work thus looks at the reconfigurations of intimacy without reducing them to the vagaries of Western-style romantic love, and by providing analyses that consider the weight of tradition, the family, and the state.

The opening four chapters exploring the "choice of partner" bring out very clearly the important role played by the family and the state. The cases presented therefore show that individual expressions fall within the