

(Wilhelm Barner-Rasmussen and Ingmar Björkman); an examination of the roles of firm characteristics and environmental factors in the formation of inter-firm alliances in China's high technology new ventures sector (Haiyang Li and Kwaku Atuahene-Gima); and an effort to develop a framework for assessing tacit knowledge transfer and inter-firm learning in the Chinese context (Richard Li-Hua and Jian Peng).

The second part focuses on Chinese business relations and *guanxi*. Lisa A. Keister investigates how inter-firm relations were actually structured in business groups and their impact on firm performance in the context of the early stage of reform (1988–90) and later development (1994–99). Heidi Dahles provides case studies of social capital building processes of Singaporean ventures in China – the investigation is mainly based on a Singaporean perspective. Chapters nine to 12 examine contextual balance of social capital and *guanxi* in the context of hierarchical relations (Karen Wang), small private enterprises (Stephen T. T. Teo and Karen Wang), group-affiliated rural non-agricultural firms (Emanuela Todeva), and ethical concerns (Jos Gamble). Finally, John Child discusses the management of risks associated with IJVs in China. This set of balance-accounting suggests that some of the discussion of *guanxi* in the existing literature may be overstated. It seems that despite its importance in many circumstances, *guanxi* is not a universal attribute of building successful business networks in China and many other, more conventional, factors come into play as well.

There are some major limitations to this book. Firstly, empirical works are largely based on cross-sectional data with small sample sizes, which do not allow for causal interpretations among variables. Secondly, there is a relatively extensive use of self-reported measures of key variables. Thirdly, there are overlaps and repeats in literature review and hypothesis sections across chapters, due to these essays being largely independent of each other while dealing with highly connected topics. Despite these limitations, the book can serve as a valuable reference for both novice scholars and experts with an intimate understanding of the business network literature who are interested in the dynamics of China's integration with the global economy.

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China's Opening Society: The Non-State Sector and Governance

Edited by ZHENG YONGNIAN and JOSEPH FEWSMITH

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The book collects 13 essays on what the editors refer to as “China uncertainties”: whether China, in the context of an increasingly open and complicated society, can achieve its ambitions to “transform from a ‘developmental state’ to a public service provider, and allow for more institutionalised mechanisms for wider social groups to participate in both political and economic processes” (p. 5) and share the benefits of growth by building a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*). A unifying theme of the book considers the tension between the government's strategy to guide the development of the NGO sector as “helping hands,” harnessed to play a role on behalf of the state in performing regulatory functions, and the sector's role as autonomous and independent.

Section one of the book considers international experiences of civil society development and contains a chapter by Vanessa Pupavac that offers a critical insight into sustainable development discourses that, the author contends, are defined

against an earlier modernization model based on industrialization and economic growth. In this context it can be appreciated why Chinese elites are unwilling to accede to a moral advocacy of international NGOs that attempt to determine which discourses are represented in the international development arena. As such, as the editors note in the introduction, “the government selectively accepts international development ideas to fit their own agenda” (p. 5). Catherine Goetze’s chapter investigates the nature of the emerging associational sector in China and produces an integrative model, drawing on the sociology of Bourdieu to theorize the conception of civil society and establish an empirical research agenda for assessing China’s emerging civil society.

The second section of the book presents concrete analyses of various aspects of civil society development and governance in China. These include, among others, chapters on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the internet and deliberative institutions. Within the limited space of this review, only a few salient arguments can be raised.

One of the book’s important themes is the examination of political and institutional arrangements that limit the development of NGOs. According to Zengke He, negative institutional functions cause structural weaknesses and therefore NGOs are characterized by an inability to grow due to shortages of funds, low capacity, low efficiency and poor internal management. Yiyi Lu concurs and warns that such is the way that state–society relations are structured, “the effectiveness of NGOs as service providers or as advocates for the interests of their constituents cannot be assumed but must be empirically proved” (p. 102).

A critical emphasis in Gary D. Rawnsley’s chapter on the media, internet and governance, echoed elsewhere in the book, is the manifest self-censorship in the public sphere. According to Lu, this phenomenon may result from the legacy of the totalitarian system or, as Zengke He suggests, from a continuation of a mindset that perceives NGOs as a potential anti-government force. Rawnsley observes the self-regulation of journalists’ and citizens’ use of the internet and correctly notes the deliberately ambiguous framing of regulations that leaves arbitrary what is permissible and what is prohibited, which has the affect of actively discouraging full reporting and the use of the internet for political purposes.

Jean-Philippe Béja’s chapter on the changing aspects of civil society provides a valuable corrective to the literature that equates civil society to a democratizing movement. According to Béja, rather than a civil society in a “combative sense,” as could be discerned in the process of transformation in Eastern Europe, China may witness “a direct transition from totalitarianism to a form of (post)-modern governance without a democratization stage” (p. 84).

The chapter by Joseph Fewsmith examines the development of business associations in Wenzhou, which he says represents an “outlier” case, in that it is a city almost unique in its social development, and accordingly indicates the limits to the likely development of civil society in other locales in China. In a cautionary note the author correctly observes that the development of regularized quasi-institutionalized arrangements between trade associations and the local government may actually delay the emergence of a more robust civil society as such informal relationships limit competition.

The third section discusses the involvement of international NGOs in public participation initiatives in rural China. Youxing Lang suggests that certain strategies are adopted so that international NGOs gain acceptance, such as avoiding sensitive issues, framing assessments in apolitical language and stressing technical aspects of electoral reform. Nevertheless, both Lang and Qingshan Tan note the positive contribution of this process.

Zheng Yongnian and Joseph Fewsmith have assembled an impressive collection which makes an important contribution to Chinese studies and to broader political science debates on the multiple sources and dimensions of non-state sector development, local governance and deliberative democratic initiatives. Many chapters will provide invaluable sources to scholars researching these issues and the volume will undoubtedly prove to be an important supplement to the expanding literature on NGOs in contemporary China.

MICHAEL S. LENIHAN

China's Embedded Activism: Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement

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Of late, NGOs and civil society have been a prolific area of inquiry in China studies. Central to this field is the debate on the effectiveness of civil society in bringing changes to society and the polity. Optimists see significant roles for civil society groups and activists in expanding social space and societal autonomy, enhancing local agency, changing policies, and improving social and human developments. Pessimists, however, believe that NGOs are heavily constrained by the state (many of them are state-organized anyway). In light of the state dependency and lack of agency of China's NGOs, some argue that even the application of the "civil society" concept to Chinese studies may be problematic.

China's Embedded Activism is a timely addition to this rapidly growing literature. It looks at probably the most prominent civil society sector in China, that of environmental NGOs and activism. The book's central argument is that the NGO sector in China in its relation to the state constitutes a form of "embedded activism." This rendering argues that the relationship between civil society groups and the state is neither the full penetration or control of the former by the latter, nor a direct confrontational dichotomy between the two. Instead, China's semi-authoritarian context is both restrictive and enabling for the development of NGOs. While the state sets up a formal regime to control, monitor and regulate the NGOs, the intra-state dynamics, the ability of the NGOs to promote state-sanctioned or state-desired functions, and the complex ties and networks between NGOs and state personnel and agencies, result in a symbiosis between the two.

"Embedded activism" means the boundaries between the civil society and the state are blurred, and by consciously keeping a non-state-challenging profile, carefully depoliticizing their activism, and skilfully mobilizing support from within various government levels and agencies, the media, and the general public, NGOs in China can successfully advocate and enable changes that lead to better policies and improvement in human and social welfare. It might be true that environmental activism in China does not constitute a social movement like that developed in pre-1989 Eastern Europe, which directly contributed to the democratization of those communist regimes. Nor does it have the power necessary for a Central Asia-style "colour revolution" in China. Nevertheless, the book argues, the promise of China lies in the incremental changes this embedded (one might also say "creeping") environmental movement is producing.

After the introduction, a theoretical chapter by the two co-editors sets up the "embedded activism" framework, which is then elaborated in the following chapters.