

Book Reviews

From Village to City: Social Transformation in a Chinese County Seat

ANDREW B. KIPNIS

Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2016

xii + 263 pp. \$29.95; £24.00

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This is a terrific book; one that should be on the shelves of every scholar interested in China's rapid social transformation. Andrew Kipnis draws on a quarter century of ethnographic research in Zouping, an industrializing medium-sized county seat, to shed light on a much larger set of questions about the links between industrialization, urbanization, and the complex of features associated with "modernity." The focus on Zouping alone makes for essential reading, as most work on these questions of (variously) industrialization, migration, working patterns, technological change and the transition to "modernit[ies]" has tended to consider the either the larger scale industrialization of the Pearl River delta or the megalopolises of Beijing or Shanghai, while Zouping is resolutely middling in its geographical scale and location. In addition, since Zouping county was a model county in the 1930s and the subject of a team of social science researchers that culminated in Andrew Walder's edited volume *Zouping in Transition* (Harvard University Press, 1998), Zouping is a site that offers a solid base of extant scholarly work.

Kipnis uses his richly detailed data from Zouping to argue for what he calls "recombinant urbanization," suggesting that while aspects of Zouping's urbanization and industrialization display many of the features correlated with "modernization" such as smaller nuclear families, free choice of marriage partners, high density apartment living, higher uptake of education, and use of advanced technology, processes of urban transformation continue to be deeply inflected by pre-industrial and even late imperial norms.

The book is divided into two parts of unequal length. The first, longer section concentrates on general processes of urban transformation, with chapters devoted to such topics as the built environment/ urban planning (chapter two), the extraordinary growth of Zouping's two major employers, the Weiqiao and Xiwang groups (chapter three), changes in patterns of consumption that focus on such factors as the ready availability of high-tech consumer goods like mobile phones and computers, leisure services for migrants, and services such as evening cram schools for families with school age children (chapter four), and consumption patterns in public space such as eating in a huge variety of local restaurants, singing in karaoke bars, hiking, and participation in public spectacles such as wildly popular "red" singing contests that reify the legitimization of the Chinese Communist Party (chapter five).

The second, shorter section zooms in at the level of the individual, with narratives that illustrate the ways in which larger processes of urban change have opened up spaces, created different opportunities, and on the whole made life better for most while creating dissatisfaction for a few. Chapter six concentrates on ten life stories of semi-local migrants, some of whom work for the two main employers in town, and others of whom are entrepreneurs; chapter seven on the households of four long distance migrants; chapter eight on eight individual "villagers in the city," whose villages have been absorbed by the expansion of the Zouping urban area and

accorded a range of special benefits and protections; chapter nine on three exemplars of the white collar middle class; and a final substantive chapter on the ways in which new patterns have had an impact on young adults in factory work, services, technical schools, and training as kindergarten teachers. The conclusion revisits the notion of recombinant urbanization while sketching out some of the possible futures for Zouping.

Such a short review cannot begin to do justice to the complexity and detailed nuance in this monograph. There is something here for everyone interested in contemporary urban China: urban planning and the geography of public space; changes in patterns of family formation from virilocal to “viricentral” where the male’s parents are much more present in the lives of a young family; the part-time migration for husbands who stay in town to work a nearly full complement of factory shifts, but then return to rural Zouping to help parents with farming; the range of options for young adults, and how people work and spend their leisure (from roller skating to vacations in Qingdao). But Kipnis demonstrates time and again that processes of urbanization and industrialization, and the choice set that they offer, are not a uniform march to something that we would recognize as “modernity.” They rather continue to evolve as cross-cutting patterns that manage to be both “modern” and “something else” at the same time.

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To Govern China: Evolving Practices of Power

Edited by VIVIENNE SHUE and PATRICIA M. THORNTON

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The term “authoritarian resilience” is a curious one, tending to reflect the assumptions and preoccupations of outside observers rather than telling us much about life within the regimes themselves. To their own citizens, authoritarian regimes seem less “resilient” than “inevitable” and “all-encompassing”; that is, until the black swan moment after which they are neither. The discipline’s overwhelming focus on seeking to anticipate and predict change (or lack thereof) has meant warehousing interesting and important ideas on how these countries are actually governed.

This ambitious and intellectually subversive volume deftly engages with precisely these ideas. Frustrated with how the study of politics apes generic notions of “science,” the editors frame the volume in terms of debates from the evolutionary sciences, paleo-anthropology and physical geography *as metaphor*. They insightfully and unpretentiously hone in on Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” as their basic, volume-wide *unit* of analysis, allowing the contributors to engage it from the perspectives of specific *levels* of analysis, ranging from the state to the individual.

Elizabeth Perry shows how Chinese authorities draw from shared national tendencies, craft public sentiment and mobilize symbolic resources to create a regime of “cultural governance.” She notes “a surprisingly adaptive and responsive policy approach” (p. 42) despite the state’s tendency toward miscalculation (the Confucius statue in Tiananmen Square), its obsession to avoid relinquishing control of the message (the Weng’an riot), and its adeptness at crafting an attractive medium with the actual message farther down in the mix (the Guangdong China Mobile case).