

state to reshape the narrative about the causes and consequences of the earthquake, perhaps this only highlights that apathy might be a normal human state easily reinforced by fears of state repression. Indeed, the question might not be why more volunteers did not ascribe political meaning, but rather why the few who did were able and willing to do so. Apathy might not be created as much as reinforced, questioning whether this outcome is solely attributable to an authoritarian state or interaction with universal problems of political apathy.

I also find the “solidarity of strangers” a more important change than Xu because it is a powerful unifying force, so as this trend continues and young strangers increasingly connect over online networks, ideas of political participation might continue to change. Currently the Party recognizes this and is trying to use volunteering to bolster loyalty, but it is unclear if they can do this effectively (see Anthony J. Spires “Chinese youth and alternative narratives of volunteering,” *China Information*, 2018). This might still be an important source of change even without changes in political institutions, especially as civil society organizations connect to young volunteers and online networks. In fact, civil society adaptation can now also be seen in how failure in previous disasters created the motivation to play a larger role after the earthquake, despite the fact that their capacity and institutional context had not changed (p. 52). Changing political institutions will, of course, impact civil society more than any other factor, but shifting conceptions of citizenship through volunteerism might also influence change over time.

This excellent book is further strengthened by the author’s decision to situate himself and his volunteer experience in the research, and I highly recommend it for those interested in understanding civil society and volunteering in China, political activism and the politics of disasters.

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Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China

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Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017

xv + 228 pp. £24.95

ISBN 978-0-262-53385-0 doi:10.1017/S0305741018000607

There is hardly a day without news about devastating levels of pollution in China. Yet, we still have limited knowledge of how people, not least in the rural areas, deal with pollution and if they respond to it at all when not taking part in some of the outright protests that reach the media. Anthropologist Anna Lora-Wainwright has spent a considerable amount of time doing fieldwork in some of the most polluted rural areas of China. Her recent book, *Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China*, provides much-needed insights precisely into how people deal very differently with pollution in China, and how and why toxicity, over time, may come to constitute a new normal, even become integrated into perceptions of what makes a good life.

The book sets out with a clearly written introduction in which the author introduces the analytical concept of “resigned activism” as a tool for capturing the many nuances and complexities of people’s ways of reacting to pollution. The introduction is followed by a thorough literature review that effectively situates the author’s study of rural China in the context of other scholarship on social

environmental movements and activism beyond China. This chapter is, in itself, useful for students working on environmentalism as a form of social movement.

The following chapters take the reader into the Chinese countryside. The first section mainly draws on the Chinese sociologist Chen Ajiang and colleagues' work on "cancer villages," showing that even though it is rarely possible to demonstrate a direct correlation between cancer and pollution, the very communication of the term "cancer village" has effectively drawn attention towards pollution and health in these rural areas. The chapter provides a local Chinese context for the following three fieldwork-based chapters that are also the most compelling in the book. They cover data collected from three different rural sites that for decades have been seriously affected by industry, mining and recycling activities (plastics, electronics, etc.).

Read together, these chapters offer an in-depth analysis of environmental agency that is highly sensitive to the complexities of people's ways of dealing with pollution and, not least, to residents' own ways of making sense of pollution and figuring out how best to deal with it. Where the field site of Baocun looked like "hell on earth" to the author when she first arrived (p. 60), it was nevertheless a place where people lived their lives (though the most privileged had long since chosen an exit strategy by moving elsewhere). Residents and immigrant workers in Baocun reacted with different forms of resignation to pollution they were aware of but unable to fight without compromising other important aspects of their lives related to community, family, economy or individual status. Consequently, pollution was gradually "normalized," although that, of course, did not make the problem any smaller from a medical or environmental point of view.

Based on her solid fieldwork and creative analysis, Lora-Wainwright convincingly demonstrates how communities which are affected by severe pollution often go through many different forms of reactions, including protest, acceptance and denial, and that these forms of agency may be present at the same time. Knowledge of pollution matters, but environmental awareness in itself does not lead to action or protests. Indeed, it is at times heart-breaking to read about people's sense of powerlessness in the face of horrendous levels of, for instance, heavy metal pollution known to have profound health consequences (chapter four). Key factors for understanding responses to pollution, the analysis shows, are local relationships and, not least, time. People's ways of coping with pollution tend to change over time, a point that is indeed too often overlooked in literature focusing on specific incidents of environmental protests and their effects. Even groups of people who actively protest against pollution may over time give up or give in, change their strategies and start to make peace with, or even accept, pollution. Pollution becomes rooted in the community; uncertainty and resignation sets in; and less visible forms of activism emerge. Instead of actively and collectively protesting, people may quietly try to take precautions against pollution such as quitting their jobs, moving children away, closing the windows at night, wearing masks or buying drinking water. Environmental action may, to a larger extent, become an individual endeavour.

The book is a pleasure to read, and it is an important one. Lora-Wainwright should also be commended for offering her honest reflections on the sometimes frustrating process of research and the demanding ethical dilemmas involved (pp 113–123 and the appendix). She states in the conclusion that one of her aims in writing this book was to restore attention to agency as it emerges in unlikely places and subtle forms. With this book, she has managed to do so. It deserves to be widely read and discussed by students and researchers, and within China.

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