

quibble over the cartography of these regions, which have long fallen under a variety of names. Anthropologists of “Inner Asia,” such as myself, often stress the distinction between Central Asian oases and Inner Asian grasslands, while muting the differences between the Inner Asian grasslands and mountainous Chinese Zomia, to call attention to certain shared political and economic histories, ways of making a living, and features of religious life across this region. But Harrell’s map is drawn to throw the clearest light on ecological history, where China’s approach to its oases and grasslands, on the one hand, and its tightly compressed highlands and uplands, on the other, is revealing unto itself. These borderlands and hinterlands of China are ethnic minority heartlands with rich natural resources that, as is the case the world over, have long experienced some of the keenest environmental injustices because they have been some of the most keenly exploited. Yet Harrell shows that, since the 2010s, China has also increasingly shifted its ecological exploitation abroad, offloading the damage onto other often less wealthy countries.

Still, Harrell urges us to keep clear sight of the fact that while “environmental policy and action are inherently political, we must never use our political preferences to evaluate the state of the environment” (p. 435). He cautions that environmental degradation and the partial remediation of it seem to be the same under any form of governance, whether that be the CCP authoritarian regime or electoral democratic regimes. Certain environmental harms are more directly traceable to development, and they may take effect at an astonishing distance away from their sources. Given this, the question arises: can knowledge of modern China’s ecological history point us to new ways of envisioning and managing worldwide climate change?

The answer would seem to be yes. Harrell’s book offers the hope that comes with a robust knowledge of ecological history. He reminds us that many predictions of ecological doom have been “belied by recovery after all sorts of disturbances” (p. 438) – from the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union to the celebration of the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party – and that this “should make us humble in the face of the complexity of social-ecological systems” that surprise us by recovering even when this does not seem to be either apparent or possible (p. 439). His study of the radical reengineering of ecosystems in modern China will remain of lasting value precisely because those ecosystems are continuing to shape the world’s ecology, economics, politics, climate, and more in ways that will have lasting effects far into the future. Our own visions of ecological history have much to learn from this, and much hope to derive from it.

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A Spark in the Smokestacks: Environmental Organizing in Beijing Middle-Class Communities

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The main question addressed in *A Spark in the Smokestacks* concerns the rise of vibrant civic associations in China, an authoritarian setting. To this end, the book delves into environmental activism in Beijing’s new gated communities in response to the challenges posed by waste incineration

projects. Through detailed case studies and a blend of interviews, participant observation and ethnography, Jean Yen-chun Lin examines how first-time middle-class homeowners, faced with the threat of incineration projects, mobilized and staged collective action against the projects. Her book highlights the role of community conversations, both online and offline, in fostering participation and mobilizing against environmental grievances.

While only one of the three incinerator projects of interest was eventually abandoned, Lin showcases the development of civic skills such as petitioning, networking and leadership within these communities. She illustrates the use of “citizen science”-based tactics as a method of engagement with government agencies, emphasizing the role of professional connections and expertise in the process. Through case studies of communities resisting the three incineration projects, this book contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of grassroots activism and civic engagement in an authoritarian context.

Specifically, the first chapter sets the stage by reviewing China’s housing reforms, demographic trends and the rise of private homeownership, exploring how these changes relate to homeowners’ associational life and self-organization. Against this backdrop, chapter two zooms in on the three selected cases of new urban middle-class housing communities in Beijing: Community Meadow and Neighbouring Communities Willow and Pine; Community Rose; and Community Marigold. This chapter elaborates on the formation of associations and the development of collective identity of “homeowners” within these communities. The following two chapters then spotlight the role of community leaders or representatives in framing, making sense of external threats and grievances, and mobilizing and organizing for collective action by the homeowners in each of the discussed communities. The chapters compare similarities and differences among tactics and actions taken by each community. In particular, Lin points out that community leaders in the two failed protest cases (Communities Rose and Marigold) did not develop or even draw on existing community strengths, whereas Community Meadow and its neighbours could steadily expand the number of anti-incineration protest participants, allocating responsibilities, facilitating interactions and building relationships (p. 124).

Chapter five explores the “citizen science” approach, in which citizens engage in scientific data collection and interpretation (p. 163). This approach was commonly taken by middle-class homeowners in order to more effectively impose pressure on the government to block targeted incineration projects. After illustrating tactics and actions of activism in these communities, chapter six discusses the consequences of the community organizing. Lin stresses the positive impact of homeowners’ collective action on the fostering of middle-class identities and a sense of civic responsibility, as well as on the building of enduring community organizations that extend to issues beyond incineration. This is true even for failed cases. One consequence of the homeowners’ organizing efforts was their newfound role in environmental education and their participation in workshops and talks in environmental NGOs.

Despite the careful comparison of the three cases, some questions remain. First, why did community leaders in those communities take different tactics as they did? In particular, why did community leaders in some communities opt for individual actions over a common framing? Could this be a strategic choice to avoid government repression? For instance, in a high-profile successful anti-incineration campaign in Guangzhou, activists also encouraged individual actions and framed their collective petition as leaderless, individual actions to preempt government repression. This strategy bears parallel with a strategy termed as “disguised collective action” by China expert Diana Fu, in which organizers coach workers in turning group grievances into limited or individual protests (which have a network behind them). In this sense, that Community Rose representatives encouraged individual actions might be a strategic choice rather than the reason for explaining the failure of their protests.

Likewise, comparing community differences in mobilizing and organizing, *A Spark in the Smokestacks* emphasizes the fact that community leaders in Rose and Marigold failed to take

advantage of existing community strengths. Then, a subsequent question is: why did they fail to do so? In addition to individual or community choice, do structural factors and external reasons (such as political capital, homeownership type and government reaction) matter? How would homeowners in these different communities explain their tactics and differences across communities? The representatives from these communities held meetings together and shared experiences with each other. What would they have to say about differences in organization tactics? In brief, *why* did different communities resort to the tactics they chose?

Furthermore, a main argument of the book is that collective action of homeowners helps build durable community organizations that extend to issues beyond incineration, even for communities of failed cases. This might be true for *some* homeowners in those communities. Yet is it possible that the failure of anti-incineration activism might have disempowered *other* homeowners and undermine civic engagement? Finally, the evidence presented to show enduring environmental activism is from events that occurred *on the heels of* the collective action. Since over ten years have passed and China has transitioned from the Hu-Wen era to the Xi era, how enduring are those organizations and activism today?

Overall, with its rich data, this book is a welcome addition to the burgeoning field of civil society, environmental activism and contentious politics.

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Weibo Feminism: Expression, Activism, and Social Media in China

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Weibo Feminism examines the rise of radical feminism on China's most popular and heavily censored microblog platform, Weibo. The spectrum of radical feminism encompasses various aspects, from prioritizing female interests and rights to creating women's words and expressions, distancing oneself from proposals of reforming within the current system to improve gender equality, protesting the male-dominated LGBTQ+ movement paradigm and neoliberalism, and rejecting nation-state-family institutions. The grassroots feminism approach captured in the book critiques elitist feminism, even though many Weibo feminists are highly educated (e.g. PhD students with transnational experiences). The book describes how the emergence of radical feminism in China incorporates distinct Chinese characteristics, while echoing feminist movements in present-day South Korea and showing parallels with global radical feminism in the 1970s.

Weibo Feminism covers a broad range of issues, including the subjugation in representing women in history and in contemporary China, reproductive questions such as single women's preference for having offspring and the problem of surrogacy, women's property rights, the naming politics of children, the anti-marriage movement, the betrayal by male counterparts who sacrifice feminist agendas for other activist goals, women's desires and imaginaries, and new feminist strategies of online contestation. The book is organized with five main chapters on themes and/or theoretical threads: digital feminism responding to the COVID-19 and its control; feminists contesting