
Elisabeth L. Engebretsen and William F. Schroeder’s collected volume consists of twelve chapters focusing on different current discourses and projects connected to the Mainland Chinese queer community, including research, (political) activism, the cultural and the social. The contributors, all well-known figures (academic scholars, organizers/activists, filmmakers, media producers) in their local communities and many of them also abroad, deal with questions of social activism and integration, everyday resilience, belonging and definitional status, all corresponding to the concepts of queer/tongzhi.

The book’s intersectional and mixed-genre approach is reminiscent of Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang’s collected volume *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China* (Yang 1999), in which she also combines diverse viewpoints to show how gender and sexuality are discussed and negotiated in Chinese contexts, locally and also in a regional and global context. Besides shifting the focus to “queer subjects” instead of “women,” Engebretsen and Schroeder also align their book more with current trends discussing social change from the perspective of “media cultures,” replacing Habermas’ formerly more popular concept of “public sphere.” In their introduction, the editors raise questions of what queer subject positions and politics look like in contemporary China, how perspectives on gender and sexual diversity “informed by global flows of queer theory” fit into a Chinese context, and what a Chinese perspective could contribute to debates on global queerness, along with transnational sexuality and gender studies. In the contentious debate on whether queer theory can be applied within the Chinese context, they agree with Petrus Liu’s position that rather than a categorical rejection of “queer,” it makes more sense to constantly revise and expand “what is queer” in local or regional contexts.

The volume includes two chapters about film screenings and webcasts, and how these have contributed to queer community-building, reaching out to LGBT and non-LGBT audiences all over China. Stijn Declerck and Xiaogang Wei describe how their webcast *Queer Comrades* has become an online queer media institution since its beginnings in 2007. Meanwhile, the filmmaker and activist Fan Popo introduces the “China Queer Film Festival

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Tour,” describing its development between 2008 and 2012, during which it visited over two dozen cities.

Three chapters deal with the use of different media for queering the Chinese cultural discourse, including digital video (Bao Hongwei), Chinese web literature (Ling Yang and Yanrui Xu) and Chinese pop music (Qian Wang). For example, Bao Hongwei analyzes the documentary *Queer China, ‘Comrade’ China* by Cui Zi’en, looking at Cui’s concept of “Digital Video Activism” (yingxiang xingdong) as local tongzhi activism and a challenge to the “global queering thesis”. According to Bao, Cui calls the technique which he used in many of his films “zero rhetoric” (ling xiuci), as resistance against films overloaded with political rhetoric.

Another two chapters discuss the positionality of researchers and its impact on ethnographic work. One of the editors, William F. Schroeder, reflects on his research experience as a gay US-based researcher in China and his difficulty in dealing with different perceptions of LGBT activism and cultural interpretation. Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, an ethnic Chinese lesbian-identified female scholar based in Hong Kong, describes how she feels like a “native outsider” during her research in the lesbian community in Shanghai.

Ethnographic studies of queer grassroots activism in different cities in China are the focus of three chapters, written by Engebretsen, Wei and Fu. Engebretsen looks at Beijing, Changsha and Shanghai, taking the example of “Pride” events for examining local activist practices and discourses, aiming at challenging queer hegemonic narratives while referring to Peter Jackson’s critical analysis of “global queering”. Wei Wei documents the mobilization of local tongzhi around HIV/Aids activism and the development of a non-profit gay community organization in Chengdu, including questions about funding, leadership and networking. A spatial perspective is taken by Xiaoxing Fu to examine different historical phases of the situation of Chinese gay men in Shenyang, a topic previously unexamined in published research.

In her chapter “On The Surface: ‘T’ and Transgender Identity in Chinese Lesbian Culture,” Ana Huang applies an innovative approach to the concept of “surface” (mianzi),

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2 A review of her book *Shanghai Lalas: Female “Tongzhi” Communities and Politics in Urban China* can be found at http://www.wagnet.ox.ac.uk/wagrev/journals/articles/00904.pdf.

3 In many “Western” places such as Europe and the USA, annual “pride parades” function to remind the public of the New York “Stonewall Riots” of 1969, and also to protest against anti-LGBT discrimination and celebrate queer lifestyles. Since demonstrations on public streets and squares are forbidden in China, creative alternatives are organized annually to bring together the LGBT community, e.g. holding a “summer event” near a university campus.
showing that it can be a positive option for social interaction in the *lala* community, instead of seeing “face” as being limited to an oppressive function in a heteronormative context. An interview with the filmmaker, queer writer, scholar and activist Cui Zi’en, conducted by the filmmaker and activist Fan Popo, who is Cui’s former student, rounds out the book.

For anyone academically and/or politically interested in local activism, discourses and strategies inside the queer/*tongzhi* community in Mainland China, this book gives a great overview of the political and social obstacles and impressive hard-earned achievements of its highly active members. It provides a level of insight that could only be given by authors deeply involved in local community affairs while also reflecting on transnational queer issues at the same time. For readers already somewhat familiar with the Mainland Chinese queer community and related scholarly studies, which often focus on Beijing or Shanghai, this book offers insights about new locations in the contributions by Wei, Fu and Engebretsen, as well as other new ideas and details. For me personally, the latter was offered by Hongwei Bao’s chapter on Cui’s film work and by Ana Huang on the meaning of “mianzi” in a lesbian/queer context. An important common thread throughout the whole volume is the protagonists’ negotiation between strategies of “queering” their social/cultural environment and of “normalizing” the public media perception of LGBT issues in China.

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4 The term “lala” is often used to denote lesbians, bisexual women and women-loving female-to-male transgender persons in China.