

of 893 local officials suggests that localities also recognise the significance of efforts in bottom-up policy bargaining (Chapter Three).

However, bargaining power is unbalanced among different cities. Ma calculated the total number of times that each municipality was mentioned in the two recent waves of five-year plans (2011–2015 and 2016–2020). After considering certain properties for each city, such as GDP, population, revenue, and capital, Ma discovers that the municipality whose leader had a dual appointment in the provincial leadership (referred to as “the cardinal”) could acquire more bargaining power than other cities (“the clerics”) in procuring policy support from the province (Chapter Four). That means localities with greater bargaining power (including higher political status, more effort from local leaders, and some idiosyncratic opportunities) can obtain approvals more efficiently. To present effectiveness based on different bargaining power, Ma collected data on the duration of construction for 54 high-speed railways from 2004 to 2014. The data analysis showed that “cardinal” cities constructed their high-speed railways before other cities and at a faster pace. Furthermore, they were also able to build more stations within their jurisdictions (Chapter Five).

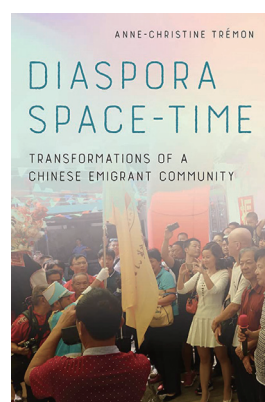
For unprivileged cities, inadequate bargaining power did not reduce their appetite for attracting high-speed railway investment. For instance, in Linshui County, Sichuan Province, civic protests over the absence of high-speed railways and stations compelled the provincial government to reconsider the railway location. Local officials acquiesced to the mass mobilisation and transformed public pressure into bargaining power (Chapter Six). First-hand information about protests against government mergers in eastern county C also present the same kind of strategic action on the part of local officials. Ma developed the concept of *consent instability* to signify their actions, which I believe to be highly insightful. If *consent instability* is accepted, it will reverse many established statements about Chinese conservative bureaucracy. To increase the credibility of *consent instability*, Ma issued a questionnaire to 368 officials from around the country. The results from the questionnaire also prove that China’s bureaucrats are more likely to approve a request when they are put under pressure by the public (Chapter Six).

From a traditional perspective, centralised planning in economic affairs (including infrastructure investment) is criticised for rigidity and despotism. In contrast, *local bargaining* provides another possibility, as bottom-up policy bargaining enables local preferences to be considered in national policymaking. This would explain why the authoritarian state, compared with tyranny, is more beneficial for the economy and society. Similarly, Ma has never concealed his theoretical ambition in this book, as he declares, “The majority of the book’s empirical evidence is situated in the context of China’s high-speed railway program, the argument and findings of the book could and should be extended to explain dynamics in other policy areas” (p. 34–5). Apart from describing an administrative phenomenon, *Localized Bargaining* presents an alternative lens to interpret the cohesion and resilience of the authoritarian political system in China and other similar states.

However, although this book challenges readers’ understanding of authoritarian politics, some aspects of Ma’s study are not discussed sufficiently. First, considering the process of bargaining, many readers, including me, expect the author to use a story to introduce the effect of institutional and idiosyncratic factors in bargaining. But one should not be too demanding in this respect, as probing

bureaucratic processes is not easy in any political context. Second, it would have been better if the author presented a competition for resources between two cities with similar bargaining power. To do this, he could have used data obtained from news reports, participant observations, or interviews. These examples would facilitate understanding the significance of *local bargaining* and make it more credible. Third, other factors that affect bargaining over the construction of high-speed railways, such as geographic location, should also have been considered in Ma’s study.

Despite these minor defects, Ma’s book offers an insightful demonstration of localised bargaining, and thus has theoretical significance and current relevance. It is essential reading for those who want to understand China’s high-speed railway program and authoritarian politics. I recommend this book to scholars of social science and anyone interested in the current Chinese government.



TRÉMON, Anne-Christine.
2022.

***Diaspora Space-time:
Transformations of
a Chinese Emigrant
Community.***

Ithaca: Cornell University
Press.

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Despite the unprecedented success of Shenzhen in China’s economic development, there has been a conspicuous lack of academic attention devoted to the city. While the prevailing narratives of the Shenzhen phenomenon primarily highlight the top-down policies and initiatives of the central government, grassroots-level sociocultural negotiations undertaken by local communities have also been instrumental in shaping the city’s trajectory. In particular, rural villages such as Pine Mansion have been largely overlooked and under-researched in the broader discourse on the city. To address this gap in the literature, Anne-Christine Trémou employs Pine Mansion – an entity she calls the “lineage village community” (p. 13) – as a case study to explore the complex interplay between diasporas and local residents, as well as the implications of outmigration in contemporary Chinese society. The stories of Pine Mansion provide a microcosm of Shenzhen’s urbanisation processes and China’s evolving position on the global stage over the past few decades.

The book derives its content from an abundance of ethnographic data and a meticulous examination of archival sources. It is organised

into eight chapters, each of which scrutinises a particular facet of the evolution of diasporic relations. The first chapter traces the historical trajectory of diasporas from Pine Mansion over the course of the past century. Drawing upon sources including the lineage genealogy and recent surveys, this chapter offers a comprehensive overview of migration from the village, placing it within a broader historical context. The author identifies two main migratory periods, which witnessed a degree of “lineage agency” (p. 34) and reflected the larger sociopolitical trends within the country. The designation of Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone in the 1980s ushered in a new era and gave rise to a new class of “hypermobile entrepreneurs” (p. 46), who adopt more flexible strategies of mobility for accumulating capital. The author shows that the links between overseas destinations and the village have weakened over time.

The following chapters revolve around three key issues: economy, practice, and narrative. First, Chapters Two and Three delve into the landscape of economy through the lens of overseas donations and shareholding companies. Financial flows in the forms of remittances and donations can be interpreted as “scalar strategies” (p. 51) of the actors, who deploy and valorise the values of both overseas destinations and the village of origin. Prior to China’s economic reforms, such overseas contributions served as a way of maintaining ties with one’s native village and provided donors with a sense of legitimacy regarding their eventual return. The accumulation of capital facilitates not only upward social mobility for subsequent generations, but also the establishment of “local financial autonomy” (p. 70) in contemporary times. The village has maintained continuity in its territorial structure and economy, characterised by the principles of collective ownership and redistribution. Such a land-based collective economy has undergone a transformation from the previous agricultural collectives to contemporary cooperative shareholding companies. These shareholding companies have a hybrid nature in that they operate on the principles of both the market economy and the traditional collectivist mechanism that emphasises morality and equalisation. In this sense, the lineage reemerges as a “corporate entity” (p. 73) in which community members participate in what the author refers to as the “moral economy of surplus” (p. 94).

Second, Chapters Four, Six, and Seven respectively examine three types of collective practices regarding the negotiation between local inhabitants and the diaspora. Chapter Four illuminates how the people mobilised to defend two of their valued sites amid the process of neoliberal urbanisation. As a response to the city’s funeral reform during the 1990s, the lineage erected a mausoleum around the founding ancestor’s tomb and temple to safeguard the tomb from the state’s policy of economic development. The mausoleum serves as a “territorial anchorage” point (p. 101) to recentre and relocalise the lineage in the village community. In a similar vein, the establishment of the primary school, which is named after the founding ancestor, indicates the lineage’s effort to break the pattern of segmentation and embrace the principle of public good. Both of these village landmarks can be considered heterotopias and heterochronias – “alternative places and temporalities” that are distinct from the rapid pace and policies of urbanisation (p. 98). Nevertheless, the author points out that the mobilisation strategies employed in their defence are still closely tied to the logic of urbanisation, thereby generating homotopic and homochronic places in the context of social reproduction.

Chapters Six and Seven focus on the return of ancestral worship rituals and emigrants from overseas destinations to the village of origin. The reconstruction and relocalisation of ancestral worship rituals generate a “spatiotemporal fusion” (p. 159). The rituals serve to unite people from disparate localities and temporalities while simultaneously underscoring the diaspora’s classification as a group that is both geographically and temporally distant. Local adjustments of speech and action can be observed throughout the course of the ritual, such as the downplaying of social hierarchies within the lineage and the elimination of prostration. The reinvention of local traditions, in addition to the symbolic placement of overseas relatives in a remote past, is indicative of local villagers’ strategies of legitimation in response to state policies and the evolving nature of diasporic relationships. Not only have the rituals returned, but the emigrants themselves as well. The Tahitian Chinese group’s journey to their native homeland and their quest for roots can be viewed as a process of “refamiliarisation” (p. 168) and “wayfinding” (p. 179), which seeks to establish a spiritual reconnection between the diaspora and their ancestors.

Third, Chapters Five and Eight investigate the evolving narratives related to diasporic relationships. Chapter Five charts the evolution of the narratives pertaining to the geomantic attributes (*fengshui* 風水) of the village. The changing discourse on geomancy captures the intricate financial interplay between overseas kin and local inhabitants, as well as the sociopolitical structures governing mobility and immobility, which the author calls “sociodicies” (p. 122). In principle, lineage members are expected to occupy a similar social stratum, and yet the geomancy discourse proves to be a powerful means of explicating the existing inequities. The rapid economic transformation of the region in recent decades has led to a gradual erosion of the disparities in living standards between the village and overseas destinations, thus rendering the situations morally assessable. Once again, the diasporic community is viewed as a “separate class” (p. 133), occupying a different space-time continuum. Chapter Eight explores the dilemma of situating Overseas Chinese within official discourse, which results in “a sense of both global belonging and estrangement” (p. 189) for the diaspora. On one hand, the state emphasises a sense of global brotherhood in an ethnic context and recognises a moral responsibility to assist distant relatives; on the other hand, the legal status of the diaspora as foreign citizens, coupled with their lack of close kinship, curtails their actual interactions at the local level.

Overall, this book presents a compelling case study of Overseas Chinese and contributes to the field of diaspora studies in two significant ways. Firstly, by directing attention towards the “localities of departure and origin” (p. 8), an area generally overlooked in migration research, the book provides a nuanced understanding of the complex diasporic relationships and the multifaceted role of lineage in the local context. Second, the book adopts a processual approach to anthropology, placing a strong emphasis on the issue of scale throughout the process. The author distinguishes two dimensions of scale, scope and valence, and proposes a “ternary core/periphery/semiperiphery framework” (p. 51) that highlights changing relations rather than a rigid dichotomy between a Global South and a Global North. Against the backdrop of Shenzhen, a symbol of China’s success in globalisation and urbanisation and the prevailing “triumphalist discourse” (p. 85) that comes with it, the stories of Pine Mansion take on even greater significance as a reminder of the past that tends to be forgotten by the nation.