



Setsuko Matsuzawa: *Activating China: Local Actors, Foreign Influence, and State Response*

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With the increasing power and influence of NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) sector in the international and transnational arenas, how international NGOs exercise their discourse and influence on various countries with specific context has been an urgent question to be addressed. Setsuko Matsuzawa is an associate professor of sociology at the College of Wooster, Ohio, USA. Her book probes the need for understanding the relational dynamics between foreign NGOs and local actors in the authoritarian regime of China.

The main aim of the book is to explore how foreign or International NGOs exercise their influence on China's local landscape and the effects of transnational social and environmental advocacy in China since 1989. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in China and archival work in the USA, the author challenges the assumption that global forces shape local discourse and practices and highlight Chinese activists, researchers, and government officials' entrepreneurial conceptualizations and realizations of global discourse. She goes on to argue that the global–local relationship is not as vertical and hegemonic as is commonly viewed. Instead, the three case studies of this book demonstrate horizontal relations, as well as mutual and reciprocal collaboration between the global and the local. Taking into account the Chinese party-state's rising concerns over the influence of foreign NGOs, the new theory of transnational activation reveals that international NGOs'

goals may change profoundly as a result of their engagements with local actors on the ground.

The book has seven chapters. Chapters one to three introduce the broader institutional and social environment of the case studies and provide a rich and well-researched description of NGO development in China. Chapter one explains China's attitude toward foreign influence and global discourse from a historical perspective. Chapter two examines how China's NGO sector has developed and how China's ideological and legal framework controls and responds to the growing sector. Chapter three introduces the case studies' location Yunnan, a less developed province of Southwest China, focusing on how Chinese national policies and global discourses created opportunities for transnational activation in Yunnan. Chapters four to six are three case studies. Chapter four explores China's first participatory development project initiated by the Ford Foundation. Chapter five delves into China's first successful case of transnational anti-dam activism led by International Rivers and Chinese domestic NGOs, while chapter six scrutinizes China's first national park project jointly launched by the Nature Conservancy and the Yunnan provincial government. The concluding chapter seven highlights the local actors as assertive players with entrepreneurial spirit and savviness instead of acting as passive adopters, active resisters, or otherwise powerless.

The three case studies offer a comprehensive understanding of the sociopolitical environment and the development of the NGO sector in China. Because of the author's background, the sociological approach and discourse analysis provide both a comprehensive picture of China's ongoing sociopolitical transformation as well as the practice, dynamics, and details of local activations. For example, the central–peripheral relationship between Chinese central government and Yunnan province is an

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essential component to understand the local actors' situation and their navigating and mobilizing strategies in relation to both Chinese central government and foreign NGOs. However, there are several interpretations regarding the social phenomenon in China that can be more accurate. For example, the relationship between GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization) and retired government officials is much more complicated than offering government officials opportunities for job and income (p. 28). In actuality, the relationship is reciprocal in that GONGOs rely on government officials' network, and government officials play the role to monitor GONGOs operation and management. Another example would be the causal relationship between the one-child policy and becoming a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which is questionable (p. 41). The causal relationship oversimplifies the contextual subtleness of one-child policy implementation in China. The author might be disappointed to see the result of whether the 2016 abolishment of the one-child policy encourages more people to become CPC members. Therefore, a more detailed description of the research methods and research rigor, such as the

researchers' reflexivity, procedures of documents review and interviewing, and her interaction with research participants, would be appreciated and helpful to avoid any further misinterpretation.

Overall, *Activating China* is empirically rich and thought-provoking research. It makes a significant contribution to understanding of the dynamic global–local relationships and China's concerns and attitudes toward global discourse and foreign influence. For international NGOs, this book is helpful to understand the unique sociopolitical context and transformation of China and navigates the relationship establishment with central government and local actors. This work is also of interest to scholars who aim to explore the fields of global civil society and social movement studies.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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