China Perspectives

2016/1 | 2016

Photo Essay: Deng Xiaoping's Failed Reform in
1975-1976

Monique Selim, *Hommes et femmes dans la production de la société civile à Canton (Chine)* (The Role of Men and Women in Creating Civil Society in Guangzhou, China),

Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013, 304 pp.

Nicole Khouri

Translator: David Buchanan

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/6936>

DOI: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.6936

ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 March 2016

Number of pages: 67-68

ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Nicole Khouri, « Monique Selim, *Hommes et femmes dans la production de la société civile à Canton (Chine)* (The Role of Men and Women in Creating Civil Society in Guangzhou, China), », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2016/1 | 2016, Online since 01 March 2016, connection on 23 September 2020.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/6936> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.6936>

Monique Selim,
Hommes et femmes dans la
production de la société civile à
Canton (Chine) (The Role of Men
and Women in Creating Civil
Society in Guangzhou, China),
 Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013, 304 pp.

NICOLE KHOURI

When discussing the emergence of civil society in Guangzhou, one must first take into account the particularities of Guangdong Province, an area of intensive migration and exchange between southern China and the rest of the world, a place receptive to new ideas, and a laboratory for the economic reform (*gaige kaifang*) that began in 1978, followed by the social reform encouraged in 2008. The fieldwork covered in this book occurred between 2005 and 2012, and is all carried by the same approach and anthropological analysis.

Divided into three parts, the book examines the groups, social categories, and collective movements that are part of the changing relationship between the Party-state and civil society in Guangzhou. The first section, which covers the ground between "recognition of the subject and collective organisation," brings together – to use the terms provided by the author – exemplary geriatrics and "madmen," rehabilitated autistics, and the rise of psychological care, a new commodity on offer from the many psychologists who have set up business in Guangzhou. Model volunteers, environmental protection, the quest for nature, and urban mobilisations form a second section that moves between "protest and integration." Finally, the symbolic power of gender, educated women in the workforce, designated journalists, and mothers in search of a different life form a third section, exploring the territory between "sexual norms and demands."

In the first section, Monique Selim shows that for the older generation (geriatrics who visit the centre, or parents of exemplary "madmen"), the current investment in their new "living collectives" is proof of a breaking away, but also of a certain continuity with the still vivid remnants of the Maoist heritage that defined their youth, modelled on sacrifice and heroism. Functioning as a "happy family," where everyone shares tasks, puts his own skills to good use, and fulfils his organisational and managerial responsibilities, these communes cast a new light on the genealogical and biographical experiences that would previously have remained unspoken. The parents of recovering "madmen," who come to the day centre after a long and tumultuous course of treatment, say they see the space as an oasis of solidarity, provided that they can all put aside their personal traumas, caused by all the ideological upheavals they have been through, and which have driven their loved ones mad.

Finally, in her analysis of rehabilitated autistics, the author – who does not dwell for long on the definition of "autistic" – places emphasis on the Party-state's normative domination of people's private lives, with regard to the 1979 law that imposed the single-child rule on a system of patrilineal succession. The cases where this rule was broken are thus especially serious, particularly for women (resulting in loss of employment, high fines, induced

abortions, shame, and sanctions). The hope of having a male child lies behind a great many strategies used to hide pregnancy and conceal the birth. The shame and guilt on the part of the parents, and especially for mothers who have given birth to an autistic child, are doubly pronounced.

In the second part, Monique Selim looks at the many types of "ecophile" who retrieve information from the Internet (on biodiversity, climate change, ecology, health, and nutrition), construct their own personal or collective life stories, flourish amid the supposed bounties of nature, or attempt to eat in a healthy way, sourcing food from suppliers and farmers that provide healthy, fresh produce; a phenomenon that, incidentally, has prompted the Yao and Dong ethnic groups to convert their land to organic agriculture. The young people who rallied to protest the demolition of an old neighbourhood in the west of Guangzhou provide an opportunity to tell the stories of the area's last residents, fragments of a history that is in danger of being swept away.

Finally, the book's third section shows that gender studies are being promoted by female scholars of diverse statuses. Being introduced to this field of study has allowed them to think differently about their political and social standing, characterised by discrimination (be it within the family, in education, in the job market, or in professional life). The message – whether encountered during a scholarship at an American university or on an internship in Hong Kong – is unequivocal: you must be yourself, and become personally or collectively involved in campaigning against the aforementioned injustices, as well as fighting to establish this field of study in the world of academia. With a view to combining Marxism with feminism, some women have taken up activism within the Women's Federation, in order to influence and take part in the decision-making process. As the author attests, the effect of these studies has been astonishing, "creating a huge breach in political and social life: the right to pleasure that is subjective, without designated purpose, and that exists outside the strictures of reproductive, economic, and political expediency" (p. 198).

Female graduates of major Guangdong universities, as well as female journalists and editors, describe first-hand the ways in which they construct their married, family, and professional lives. The existence of a "double bind" imposed by the two markets (matrimonial and professional) leaves little room for manoeuvre for younger women born after 1980. Many of them would rather sacrifice their career than remain "on the shelf," excluded from the marriage market. The older women, who are "protected" from the rules of these two markets, speak of a time when equality allowed them to break away from the social conservatism that so powerfully constricts their younger counterparts. Female journalists are faced with the same professional problems as their male colleagues, such as red envelopes and various forms of harassment if they research or write about "sensitive" topics. Cor-doning them off into supposedly "female" journalism, by assigning them subjects related to everyday life (organic farming, schools, transport, public toilet schemes for women, centres for the disabled) has been revealed as pure illusion, since these topics are laden with political implications.

In an entirely different sector, the mothers of the Steiner school offer a vision of what a "fully feminine" institution can be, in the context of an alternative school and a lifestyle that works in harmony with nature and personal development. They make a career for their children, forge a partnership with them, reorganise family arrangements by keeping separate living spaces (funded by the husbands, who live at their workplaces), and begin to dream of growing old together in this community of women. The author lays the groundwork for research on the forms of anxiety and proscription

among women in contemporary Chinese society. No longer raised on the pronouncements of the symbolic father figure as they were during the Mao era, they must seek fulfilment through their sons and against their own instincts.

The book's conclusion examines the specificity of relationships between the Party-state and the market, and between the latter and the ethical question expressed in the "grassroots" demands of citizens. This analysis situates the Chinese experience within a broader framework and poses questions about the structural integrity of the two conflicting sides that comprise our new historicity: a globalised financial economy on one side, and the demands and rights of the human subject on the other, signalling the tensions, practices, and nature of the conflicts, where, paradoxically, the subject of rights is both market commodity and ethical subject.

The groups, social categories, and collective movements presented in this publication make frequent reference to an ethic of conviction and responsibility. These citizens and volunteers are the salt of the earth, building the civil society of the future. Monique Selim's anthropological approach has the unique benefit of showing us, at close quarters, their ability to observe and analyse, allowing them to express what they feel the threats are, and the multitude of ways to ensure that their rights are recognised.

■ Translated by David Buchanan.

■ Nicole Khouri is a sociologist and associate researcher at IMAF (Institute of African Worlds), UMR 8171, Paris, and at CEaA (Centre for Studies on Africa, Asia and Latin America), University of Lisbon, Portugal (khouri.n@wanadoo.fr).

Michael T. Rock and Michael A. Toman, China's Technological Catch-Up Strategy: Industrial Development, Energy Efficiency, and CO₂ Emissions, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 274 pp.

JEAN-PAUL MARÉCHAL

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, China acquired the world's second largest economy and became the top carbon dioxide emitter as well as the leading consumer of energy. The future of the planet's climate is thus bound up with the Chinese economy's evolution.

Therein lies the interest in the work of Michael T. Rock and Michael A. Toman, who take stock of evolution in four industries – aluminium, cement, iron and steel, and paper – that have contributed substantially (at least the first three) to the country's transformation and are among the highest CO₂ emitters in China. While industry as a whole accounts for 60% of China's CO₂ emissions, the four sectors cited represent nearly 60% of industrial emissions. *China's Technological Catch-Up Strategy* seeks to understand – by examining these four high-energy consuming industries – the impact of technological upgrading on the Chinese economy's energy efficiency and CO₂ intensity.

It is clear from the outset that the Chinese economy's energy efficiency has been increasing over the past three decades. This can be seen from the fact that between 1980 and 2010, the Chinese economy's CO₂ intensity fell from nine kg to three kg of CO₂ per dollar of GDP created, while that of industry slid from 18 kg to a little more than three kg.

Such an evolution was possible because of deliberate public policies. Right from the early 1980s, the authorities put in place energy efficiency criteria in a certain number of industrial sectors and included adherence to these criteria in the checklist for evaluating cadres. China inaugurated an industrial restructuring policy that took the form of a vast programme of mergers and acquisitions with the slogan "grasp the large, let go the small." Despite some difficulties in implementation, this modernisation strategy deeply transformed the four industrial sectors studied in this book.

Between 1985 and 2010, CO₂ intensity in cement production fell by 36% (p. 69), that of iron and steel by 64% (p. 105), of aluminium by 49% (p. 145), and of paper by 57% (p. 182). The differences between the levels of emissions obtained and what would have corresponded to the reference scenario were considerable. Thus in 2010, cement factories prevented the emission of 904 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere (p. 70), iron and steel factories about 2.5 billion tonnes (p. 106), aluminium firms nearly 175 million tonnes (p. 135), and paper mills about 185 million tonnes (p. 179).

What the authors say regarding cement production holds almost word for word for the chapters on the three other sectors and summarises the book's conclusions. Rock and Toman note that "none of this would have been possible without a strong central government committed to a pragmatic approach to industrial development and high-speed technological learning in energy intensive industries" (p. 73).

The results obtained through detailed study of the four branches are confirmed by statistical studies presented by the authors. They show that higher energy prices combined with investment in new technologies and formation of larger companies led to diminution of energy intensity (p. 208).

Of course, this does not mean CO₂ emissions have fallen in absolute value, but simply that there is now a decoupling between growth in GDP and that in greenhouse gas emissions. Between 1971 and 2011, China's GDP rose 33-fold, from US\$127 billion to US\$4,195 billion, with an average annual growth rate of a little over 9.2%, while during the same period, energy consumption rose from 392 million tonnes oil equivalent to 2.727 billion tonnes, a 6.9-fold increase, with a growth rate of almost 5%. Given these conditions, it is possible to better understand why in climate negotiations, China systematically stresses the need to take into account intensity indicators. The 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), for instance, aimed to reduce CO₂ emissions by 11% per unit of GDP.⁽¹⁾

China is by far the planet's top CO₂ emitter and will remain so for a very long time. With 10.3 billion tonnes of emissions, it accounts for nearly a third of global emissions (35.3 billion tonnes). Besides, China's per capita emissions are nearly eight tonnes, equivalent to the level of the EU's 28 countries (France being a bit lower at five tonnes).

Of course, some of these figures need to be regarded with caution: in early November 2015, it was learned that Beijing had massively underestimated

1. For more details on these figures, see Jean-Paul Maréchal, "La Chine et le climat. Mur de l'environnement et bras de fer sino-américain" (China and Climate: The Environment Wall and Sino-US Tussle), in Pierre Alary and Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux (eds), *Capitalismes asiatiques et puissance chinoise* (Asian Capitalisms and Chinese Might), Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2015, pp. 95 and 107.