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Book Review: Diaspora Space-time

Trémon, Anne-Christine. 2022. *Diaspora Space-time: Transformations of a Chinese Emigrant Community*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 272 pp., \$21.99.

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In *Diaspora Space-Time*, anthropologist Anne-Christine Trémon provides an in-depth ethnography of how the relationship between Chinese diasporas and their hometown communities transformed in the midst of the rapid urban, economic, political, and social changes in China. Building on Trémon's previous research on Chinese diasporas in Tahiti, this book follows in their footsteps as they embark on return trips to "search for their roots" (p. 167) in their ancestral hometown village in Shenzhen, China. While Overseas Chinese studies have traditionally focused on China's dependency on Chinese diasporas during the reform era since the 1980s, this book joins the latest research on Global China to provide more nuanced and timely insights into the evolving roles of Chinese diasporas in China's geopolitical ascendance and ethno-nationalist revival (Chen 2022; Liu 2022).

Trémon observes that China's relationship with Chinese diasporas had long been characterized by the request for diasporic support and remittances from an impoverished and underdeveloped homeland. Yet, the meteoric rise of China on the global stage over the past decades has made the relations between the homeland and diasporas more equal and reciprocal. As China moves toward the core of the world system, Trémon argues, this more balanced relationship perceives diasporas not so much like privileged kins as like equal members of a globalized lineage community (p. 226). Trémon's participants described this rebalancing or inversion of the homeland-diaspora relations as "the turn of feng shui" (*feng shui lunliu zhuan*) (p. 127). Indeed, the changing fortunes of the Chinese homeland and diasporas as reciprocal players are deeply embedded in the grassroots transformations that have swept through China in the past 40 years. Trémon offers a rich account of these local dynamics through the examples of diaspora donations (Chapter 2),

collective funds (Chapter 3), heritage preservation (Chapter 4), mobility narratives (Chapter 5), ancestor worship (Chapter 6), and roots tourism (Chapters 7 and 8).

In particular, Trémon provides a sharp analysis of the shifting perceptions of (im) mobility among hometown villagers who chose to stay behind during China's emigration waves in the 20th century. These stayers rationalized a posteriori their previous act of staying put in the village by reframing it as a "felicitous decision that later led to an improved livelihood" (p. 128). While leaving China for better livelihood abroad was widely regarded as a rational choice throughout the second half of the 20th century, China's recent economic development and enhanced social welfare enable these stayers to retrospectively justify their decision of staying and reconceive immobility as a desirable and even prescient choice. These evolving narratives surrounding (im)mobility offer a unique lens to examine China's rise and fall in the world system as well as its transformative roles in global migration.

Diaspora Space-Time is a thoroughly researched book that captures the broader geopolitical and socioeconomic transformations through the microscopic investigation of a long-established emigrant community. However, this book is not without factual inaccuracies. For example, in Chapter 1, there are repeated references to the Tiananmen Square repression occurring on June 6, 1989, when, in reality, it took place on June 4, 1989. Additionally, on page 37, while correctly noting the colloquial name "*liusi*" (6-4) in Chinese for the Tiananmen Square incident, it is mistakenly translated into "4-6." Despite these minor discrepancies, this book stands as an admirable scholarly endeavor to unravel the implications of China's ascent on its relationship with Chinese diasporas. I enthusiastically recommend this book to researchers who study Global China, diaspora engagement, and emigration communities.

References

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- Liu, Jiaqi M. 2022. "When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions: Diaspora Institutions Amid China's Geopolitical Transformations." *International Migration Review* 56 (4): 1255–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211072824>.