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Rankins, Kenneth

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Review: Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China

By Anna Lora-Wainwright

Reviewed by Kenneth Rankins

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Lora-Wainwright, Anna. *Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 2017. 272pp. ISBN: 978-0262533850, paperback, US\$30.00.

China's major urban areas have experienced great economic development and expansion of middle and upper classes over the last few decades. With this new financial wealth, these populations have been given louder voices and power to combat environmental hazards within their communities. All the while, the rural areas of China have not seen the same level of financial growth and healthier living conditions. *Resigned Activism: Living with Pollution in Rural China* explores the social, economic, and environmental impacts of pollution on the daily lives of rural Chinese residents through case studies in Baocun, Qiancun, and Guiyu areas of rural southern China with different experiences and viewpoints of the pollution present within their communities.

Victimhood is a key, but complicated issue throughout the book, as the residents of Baocun, Qiancun, and Guiyu are both the victims and beneficiaries of the pollution within their communities. Thus, developing any potential sustainable solution is challenging because those industries cannot become more environmentally friendly without first ensuring that any changes would not make the residents victims of a potential economic crisis. Lora-Wainwright calls attention to this frustrating circumstance in each case-study, as residents grudgingly allow and hesitatingly oppose the environmental conditions in their areas.

Although the balance between economic and environmental or health concerns is present in Lora-Wainwright's examination of each site, Baocun, Qiancun, and Guiyu each contend with unique circumstances. The residents of Baocun receive compensation from the phosphorus mines that pollute the area, creating an economy all too dependent on those payments. In Qiancun's lead mines, locals are afraid to take

actions to improve their living conditions because they do not want to lose their jobs. However, Guiyu's residents are the main owners of the e-waste production within the community, which has made many families wealthy. Even though the area is doing well financially, the e-waste production has led to major soil degradation, negatively impacting the area's farming industry and drinking water. Sadly, the residents accept pollution as a part of life and are skeptical of the impacts, even as they struggle with them.

Resigned Activism is a valuable book that does an effective job of detailing the complexity surrounding environmental risks in rural China, while recognizing the major challenges that exist within those communities. In educational settings, this book could be useful for generating discussions exploring rural power dynamics and environmental justice. Lora-Wainwright is currently revising *Resigned Activism* to better reflect the contributions of her collaborators, which will surely lend additional distinction to these already fascinating case studies.

Kenneth Rankins, kennyrankins42@gmail.com, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

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