

Speech and Sense of Justness in China

An Interview with Isabelle Thireau

By Emilie Frenkiel

According to Isabelle Thireau, there is a political realm in authoritarian regimes, where citizens voice their expectations and evaluate the legitimacy of decisions, public policies and leaders, thus contributing to the assessment of what is acceptable and what is good government.

Isabelle Thireau is a sociologist specialising in Chinese society. As Director of Studies (Professor) at the EHESS, Director of Research at the CNRS and a member of the Centre for Studies on Modern and Contemporary China (EHESS/CNRS), she studies the requirements of justice and issues of moral and political legitimacy as they arise in the context of the normative upheavals that 20th and 21st-century China has experienced. She is currently involved in a historical and sociological research project on the city of Tianjin, with an initial publication, *Des lieux en commun. Ethnographie des rassemblements publics en Chine*, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2020, just published.

She is also the author of *Enquête sociologique sur la Chine contemporaine, 1911-1949*, (with Hua Linshan), Puf, 1996; *Disputes au village chinois. Formes du juste et recompositions locales des espaces normatifs*, (with Wang Hansheng) Éditions de la MSH, 2001; *Les Ruses de la démocratie. Protester en Chine contemporaine* (with Hua Linshan),

Seuil, 2010; and *De proche en proche. Ethnographie des formes d'association en Chine contemporaine*, Peter Lang, 2013, and recently published 'S'accorder sur ce qui est. Les dimensions politiques d'un rassemblement public à Tianjin', in *La politique au coin de la rue*, a dossier coordinated by Carole Gayet-Viaud, Alexandra Bidet and Erwan Le Méner, *Politix*, n°125, vol. 32, 2019, p.161-190.

Would you agree that your work on China' Reform Era (post-1978) examines the resources, spaces and norms for acting together in China?

Isabelle Thireau: The current situation has fuelled all sorts of reflection, and without making issues pertaining to research on East Asia the immediate priority, I can't help but wonder about the failings on our part, as researchers working in this geographical region. Indeed, with regard to what had been going on in China since December 2019 and was going to be affecting us a few months later, we have not been able to provide enough elements of analysis, or our views have not been heard. Likewise, our work has not prevented the spectre of 'Asian' or 'Confusion values', which are supposed to explain the acceptance by some of the restrictive policies to which others are reluctant to adhere, from raising its head once again in this time of pandemic. Singapore, Hong Kong, North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan are just some of the countries that are undoubtedly much more contrasting than those in Europe, among them democracies such as Taiwan, where the use of technological devices that make extensive use of personal data is more widely accepted because it is notably part of a political dialogue between citizens and leaders that gives the former some form of assurance regarding the aims, implementation and provisional nature of these devices.

But let's get back to your question. I'll try to answer it briefly, starting with a brief overview of my background. I started my PhD dissertation in 1981, five years after the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao, four years after Deng Xiaoping came to power and the launch of what was then known as 'the four modernisations' — agriculture, industry, science and technology, and military defence. I completed it in 1984, at a time when a policy labelled as "reform and openness" was taking shape, and the changes we were seeing appeared to be irreversible. In the meantime, and against all odds, while investigations into the Chinese world had previously been confined to Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora, the possibility of carrying out field investigations in China had started to become a reality. Sociology, which had been banned as a

bourgeois science in 1952, was formally reintroduced in 1979. These circumstances, of course, had an impact on the dissertation I was in the process of writing, which focused on how marriages in rural areas had adapted while circumventing the new official policy. How, for example, was the portrait of the ancestors hidden in Guangdong province behind the portrait of Mao, before which the newlyweds bowed down? How did pebbles thrown sharply and abruptly to the ground imitate the sound of firecrackers? Such historical context also influenced the choice of topics I would go on to research, topics that were prompted by the new realities that have continued to emerge since the early 1980s and that are difficult to summarise not only because there are so many of them, and so diffuse, but also because we are still ignorant today of many of the developments that have actually, rather than theoretically, marked the past decades.

The rapid succession of highly contrasting historical sequences since the fall of the Chinese Empire in 1911, and the various types of obstacles we have experienced with regard to understanding them, undoubtedly explain the need to work simultaneously on several periods of the 20th and 21st centuries and to continuously go back and forth between the present and various periods in the past. This being the case, one of my first works was a study of the village of Ping'an (Guangdong province) over the first half of the 20th century, a village characterised both by the importance of the lineage system as it manifested itself in China's southern provinces and by the presence of a large community of overseas Chinese. I won't go into the content of the study here, but it was the result of a long investigation carried out in China, Hong Kong and the United States. Suffice it to say that this work proved to be of great use, a few years later, when it came to understanding how past forms were both revived and transformed from the 1980s onwards.

Disagreements and discussion surrounding the meaning of justness

Books & Ideas: This initial work, as you point out, marked the start of a research program on the actual forms of coexistence, association and coordination observed within Chinese society; the recognition and legitimisation processes that determine the ways in which social reality can be tested and imagined by those who experience it. The emphasis during the latter half of the 1980s was notably on observing the

partial de-collectivisation of land that was taking place—one of the first major reforms adopted by Deng Xiaoping. The question of the meaning of justness as fairness then became immediately obvious. What would be considered a fair distribution of the right to use communal land? What would be an acceptable or, on the contrary, illegitimate inequality — a question that became particularly salient in the late 1980s, when the ‘red-eye disease’ (as envy was referred to) emerged, resulting in the destruction of certain domestic crops and the poisoning of communal ponds that were rented out to the highest bidder?

This investigation surrounding problems relating to distributive justice was then extended to the questioning of just, valid and appropriate action. By the late-1990s we were sharing a common observation with some Chinese colleagues, this being that in all of the villages in which we worked separately, we were witnessing tensions, disagreements and conflicts over the correct way to proceed in various situations, where weddings, building new houses or using temples, for example, were concerned. Within the various localities under study, a plurality of uses anchored in different moments of the past were called in to put the situations encountered into perspective and devise the actions and decisions that best suited such complex normative context. In fact, the partial decollectivisation of land has been interpreted by some as a renouncement of the policy that had been adopted since 1949, thus allowing village inhabitants to once again look to the past and to draw upon the rules and principles deemed legitimate and relevant in order to guide ongoing coordination efforts. Some villagers took the principles in force prior to the advent of the People's Republic of China as a guiding basis, whilst others continued to make use of the rules recognised during the Maoist decades and others still referred to regulations and even laws observed abroad. Rather than resorting to exclusive principles to resolve the disagreements thus arising, local arrangements were crafted that often resulted in the same object being inscribed in multiple sources of legitimacy. I'll give you an example. A debate arose in the mid-1990s in one of the villages I was investigating at the time, a village in the Nanhai district of Guangdong province. Some twenty or so families from the neighbouring Guangxi province had settled there to farm village land on a sub-contractual basis, since local households had taken to more lucrative industrial or commercial activities, and they were asking for their young children to be allowed to attend the village nursery school. So divergent were the initial responses from local inhabitants that a village meeting was called. Discussions on the day were very lively, with some—the majority of those present—maintaining that access to the nursery school, as a village amenity, should be reserved exclusively for members of the village. These migrants, as it was pointed out, had no blood relationship with or connection to

any of the villagers, meaning that they were not members of the village. Furthermore, their 'residence permits' stated that their official place of residence was, and indeed remained, within Guangxi province. Two reasons, both valid in their own ways, were therefore put forward to highlight the fact that migrants did not belong to the village community and to deny them access to the nursery. Others present that day, however, spoke up to point out that, in spite of everything, "all people are people." This principle of equality was then adopted using an expression that was certainly heard during the Maoist period but that suddenly now became universal in scope, whereas in the past it had formed the basis for the distinction between 'the people' and 'the enemies of the people.' The former then re-entered the fray with a new argument, claiming that, since "the nursery was financed through the village's collective fund, these people from outside the village had not contributed to it and could not, therefore, benefit from it." By the end of the meeting, a new rule based on a unique arrangement shaped by the various valid principles put forward had eventually been adopted: it was decided that the children of migrants would be allowed to enrol at the nursery but would be required to pay 50 yuan per month as opposed to the 30 yuan that the children of the village were required to pay.

Studying the emergence of new moral and social norms

With peasants originally from the villages I studied leaving for the city, I turned my attentions more towards the issue of internal migration, with two main issues in mind, namely to analyse associations formed by migrant workers in Beijing with a view to establishing mutual aid and solidarity initiatives, and the introduction of a series of labour norms and standards within private companies in the Pearl River Delta, new companies that hired employees who were also new because they came mostly from rural areas and found factory work with which their elders were unfamiliar. I then tried to observe the development of shared usages and expectations that orientate normative life and debates in these new workplaces. Such study was based not only on archive materials such as employee letters, minutes of mediation and arbitration sessions, contracts, factory regulations and agreements that had been the subject of a written commitment, but also on interviews with a hundred or so migrants from rural areas and some thirty migrants from urban areas staying in the cities of Beijing, Xi'an, Nanjing, Wuhan, Tianjin, Changchun and various places along the Pearl River Delta. This research also took into account observations made in the

dormitories and workshops of four companies in southern China. Particular attention was then paid to the emergence of labour laws in China by studying the way in which judgements of legitimacy expressed within the factories during the drafting, implementation and denunciation of internal regulations were expressed. In other words, the question we were then faced with was this: how are claims and denials regarding the validity of the rules and expectations formulated in these new workplaces expressed when labour laws are yet to be stabilized and implemented?

Books & Ideas: Your work reminds us that there is also a political realm in authoritarian regimes, where citizens voice their political expectations and evaluate the legitimacy of decisions, public policies and leaders. Your work contributes to a better understanding of the concept of what is just and acceptable, what is good government, and what the role of representative means in the eyes of Chinese citizens. Can you outline your main findings and the conceptual tools and methods on which your approach is based?

Isabelle Thireau: It was difficult, for a long time, to really get to grips with the initiatives, capabilities and skills of those who are governed in China, that is to say with the ‘power of the governed,’¹ since this appeared to deny the authoritarian or totalitarian nature of the regime. In other words, if the situations and actions observed by the researchers were not intended to, and indeed did not, undermine the existing regime, then they were inevitably reinforcing it. As a consequence, they were not really worth being observed and investigated. However, if we recognise, as indeed Hannah Arendt does, that power is first and foremost a relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, and that the latter, regardless of the situation, are essential to the political legitimacy of the former, the question of where these processes of legitimisation stem from and the forms that they take, as they might be observed in various situations and on various scales, once again becomes relevant.

This being the case, the concept of the ‘intermediary public’ developed by Alain Cottureau in the late 1980s was certainly a fertile one. The ‘intermediary public’ is positioned on an intermediate scale between private or community membership and anonymous fellow citizens, and links individuals between whom there are ties that establish varying degrees of proximity. It allows for face-to-face interactions during which, through the interplay of various forms of rapprochement and distancing, the

¹I am referring, here, to the beautiful title of a recently published book by Baciocchi, S., Cottureau, A. and Hille, M.-P. (dir.), *Le pouvoir des gouvernés. Ethnographie de savoir-faire politiques sur quatre continents*, Brussels, Bern, Berlin and New York, Peter Lang, 2018.

imagination of those far away can be rectified by the experience of those close by, regardless of the various forms this process may take. Last but not least, intermediary publics set a stage for the confrontation between multiple types and sources of legitimacy. With this in mind, I have endeavoured to develop the analysis of ways of evaluating public decisions and policies by successively observing different kinds of 'intermediary publics' in different (religious, economic, civic, etc.) spheres. In each case, studying methods of evaluating public policies and studying the process of developing common normative benchmarks proved to be inseparable.

Rather than offering up any overly general conclusions, I would like to highlight one aspect, among others, of the work carried out, that being the importance placed on the issue of language, and speech. The issue of speech and its political aspects first aroused my interest as early as the monographic study conducted on the village of Ping'an during the first half of the 20th-century, since the power of 'fathers and elder brothers', or those responsible for lineage affairs, was referred to, at the time, as the power to 'say things' (*hua shi*, 话事), meaning to speak out to assign meaning to the reality, to qualify it and to interpret it.

Speech, and its political usages, then became privileged objects of analysis in order to analyse the point at which the Communist Party penetrated the countryside, namely the organisation of sessions known as 'speaking bitterness.' Such accounts were told during the land reform that took place according to the region at stake between 1948 and 1952. They preceded the redistribution of land to households and transformed local hierarchies much more radically than the latter. Land reform teams then burst into every village, identifying men and women who were likely to "speak bitterness," that is officially to describe the sufferings of the past and seek revenge. A farm worker would lash out at the man who had hired him, a daughter-in-law would complain about her mother-in-law's mistreatment, a young peasant would denounce the uncle who had refused him a loan... In these times that were described as revolutionary, such accounts ground a distinction between the present and the past, attesting that what had been no longer was. They were told in the new prevailing language of the time and thereby presented previously unknown categories and sources of legitimation as common and valid. There was no judge or institution that could debate and decide between the victim and the accused, meaning that the language of the accusation, and moreover the power to accuse, suddenly changed, leading to the distinction being made, in the new vocabulary of social classes, between two groups—those who had the power to make accusations, on the one hand, and those who were not only accused but also deprived of speech, including accusatory

speech, on the other. Those who were consequently deprived of a voice, were not always the same people who would lose part of their property when the land was redistributed, that is to say the better-off, whether they were ‘landowners’ or ‘local tyrants’. In contrast, the accused incriminated during the “speaking- bitterness” sessions were those who could hitherto ‘say things’ and were listened to before, regardless of the source of their authority.

The various consecutive political campaigns in China following the land reform and until the early 1980s were based on forms of face-to-face interactions embedded in the hierarchical and statutory structures that characterised Chinese society at the time. This face-to-face interaction notably took place between the local group of ‘activists’—which was officially supposed to account for some 10-20% of the population of each village and factory—and isolated individuals. An exclusive language was then systematically introduced, remaining silent, that is not uttering the words expected was often forbidden; the action completed had to conform to the words that had been spoken.

The expression of the petitioners’ sense of injustice

The issue of speech was, however, examined in a more direct manner in a research program on the legitimate arena for speech associated with the Letters and Visits administratio—a complex administrative network gradually established as of 1951 and whose official aim was to establish a channel for direct interaction between the population, on the one hand, and local and national representatives of the Party and the State,² on the other. It therefore provides a legitimate sphere for speech since it is linked to an official, although not judicial, institution. and one that the Chinese population besieged during the 2000s; indeed, over thirteen million written or verbal complaints, both individual and collective, were submitted to this administrative network in 2003 alone. Since then, whilst it is regularly claimed that such written and verbal complaints have decreased in number, the corresponding figures are no longer published. This was a long and arduous investigation involving a corpus of several thousand letters submitted to ‘Letters and Visits’ bureaus at various levels of the Chinese administration since 1955. Observations were made across several bureaus

² See the report by J.-L. Rocca: <https://laviedesidees.fr/Chroniques-chinoises-du-mecontentement-ordinaire.html>

and interviews conducted both with employees of these bureaus and with complainants. The investigation highlighted the extent to which this administration, which is now the primary administration for expressing grievances and feelings of injustice in Chinese society, is also a political space where common expectations regarding the relationships that should prevail between those who govern and those who are governed can be voiced. As far as complainants are concerned, what is often at stake is a redistribution the positions of the respective parties on questions of legitimacy by pointing out the illegitimacy not only of the wrongs done to them but also on the part of the authorities, should they fail to respond to the abuses committed by those acting in their name. As they reaffirm the special relationship that exists between themselves and those they are addressing, and identifying themselves as individuals who are capable of judgement, the complainants consequently describe in their letters what should not be, taking up the principles that both parties in the relationship recognise as being valid. This being the case, it is not at all surprising that they should call not only upon moral rules that are considered valid but also upon the official language as expressed through public commitments, legal texts and national directives. That said, it would be wrong to see such extensive use of official principles as the expression of a willingness to act in accordance with the established rules. There are indeed multiple official points of reference that complainant can use to describe the meaning of the particular actions or situations they encounter, the official language having manifested itself in various forms and expressions since 1949. A very broad spectrum of moral and ethical rules can also be summoned. Far from being automatically imposed, the shared framework of reference deemed to be both relevant and valid to give meaning to the situations faced is therefore selected and combined by the aggrieved in various and often creative ways. The inertia of the 'Letters and Visits' system has often been highlighted. However, focusing solely on the concrete and public outcomes of these letters means, once again, looking only at the political power aspect and ignoring the political skills and capabilities demonstrated by those writing the letters. Indeed, those complainants who submit dozens of letters are demonstrating specific expectations with regard to justice, conveying a sense of responsibility and legitimising as well as re-interpreting shared political and moral principles. Understanding their words and their evaluations means understanding their contribution to the complex task of organising, putting into form and into meaning individual experiences. It is also, therefore, a matter of assessing a shared meaning to social reality.

The issue of speech is, of course, inseparable from the issue of action. I recently carried out a study a series of surveys of public gatherings in the city of Tianjin that

showed, for example, how, using fragile sensitive, non-institutionalised methods, 'volunteers' working to safeguard architectural heritage had acquired the possibility ability to 'speak out', that is to say to debate the legitimacy of the situations they observed, to challenge the apparent realities of a situation and to preserve hundreds of buildings from almost certain disappearance. There are many more examples of this kind that underline what Chinese citizens are now, in spite of everything, capable of.

Books & Ideas: What is according to you specific about fieldwork in the People's Republic of China ?

Isabelle Thireau: Fieldwork in the People's Republic of China had a lot in common with any other field investigation, but there are undoubtedly certain practices that take on a specific relevance. Avoiding overhanging interpretations, for example, and trying to understand the meanings that might be specific to certain groups and situations or to become familiar with what is locally local relevant is the sort of advice that could be offered to any investigator. This advice, which implies long-running investigations, is all the more valuable when dealing with Chinese society, where the investigator is faced with a very diverse range of statements that are deemed by respondents to be valid or 'speaking,' depending on the situation. Such diversity notably requires questions such as 'who is speaking?', 'with whom are they speaking?' and 'who are they addressing?' to be systematically asked. More specifically, if we are to attach any real importance to language, it is vital, first and foremost, that we understand the ways in which it is used in different situations and the connections that are effectively established between the words themselves and the empirical realities to which they refer. This, of course, means that preference should, wherever possible, be given to ethnographic approaches, and the reciprocal exchange between researcher and respondent that this implies, as well as to the detailed description of the respective situations in which the statements are made. It is also important that judgements and evaluations that support and legitimise the actions and interactions observed and make them intelligible, however complex and sometimes contradictory such judgements and evaluations might be, be taken seriously. In other words, it is a matter of trying to understand, simultaneously, "the production of meaning, the construction of reality, and the functioning of society," with their inevitably political dimension.³

³Veron, E., 'La sémiologie et son monde', *Langages*, 58, 1980, p.61-74.

The aforementioned reciprocal exchange on the ground implies, especially where China is concerned, following the advice of those being interviewed and relying on their familiarity with the situation and the context in order to determine how the fieldwork should be conducted. Situations that might appear trivial to us can, in fact, quickly become a source of concern or embarrassment to them; conversely, observations that were previously thought to be out of reach can suddenly become accessible. It is important, therefore, to involve them in the inquiry, bearing in mind that we have a responsibility to halt the latter if necessary. I consequently ceased an investigation that had been on-going for several years in an association set up by migrant workers in the suburbs of Beijing one day back in 2008, when the Olympic Games were being held there, when its head, who had become a friend of mine, asked me to hide in the library at her nursery school to prevent the village authorities, to whom I was no stranger, from spotting me during these times of increased political control.

But field research is also affected by *words that name fieldwork inquiry* in China, and that readily associate it with various forms of official investigation, procedures aimed at gauging the population's 'state of mind' or preventing the circulation of grievances and the organisation of concerted action, just as it is affected by the practices and debates that take place among our Chinese colleagues. The latter have trained in sociology and anthropology since these disciplines regained their rightful place in 1979. They have made use of various approaches, paradigms and debates that have been observed outside of China for decades and that have suddenly swept into the country *en masse* in a somewhat disorganised manner. They have gone on to rediscover the very rich history of these disciplines in China, a history that began in the early 20th century and culminated, before being interrupted in 1952, in the formation of a Chinese sociology comprising five main currents, these being social survey, Marxist sociology, the Chinese school of sociology, the academic school of sociology and social history. These five currents all provide different answers to the question of what types of reforms should be implemented in China and therefore what type of fieldwork, inquiry, investigation should be favoured. In 1933, for example, sociologist Tao Menghe set out the principles of the social survey movement, which advocated living in the countryside with the people, adopting scientific methods and striving to understand Chinese national sentiment:

“We have only been using scientific methods and studying social conditions for 10 years here in China. In the past, literate civil servants ran the country according to Confucian precepts, with no regard whatsoever for social reality, and the one who best succeeded in imitating their elders was deemed competent. When the Western artillery pulled them out of this illusion, they bowed down in apparent admiration for this foreign civilisation, resulting in the systematic mass importation of Western ideologies and systems, without anyone caring how China would handle it. It was thought, at the time, that society would benefit from studying these systems and reproducing them identically. Unfortunately, however, the more widespread they became, the more Chinese society sank into chaos and darkness. A handful of discerning individuals then saw the error in imitating others without first knowing oneself and stood up to promote the social investigation movement. They advocated the use of a scientific method that was appropriate to the study of Chinese society. It is important that we know our own society first in order to use this knowledge to advocate a plan for social reform.”⁴

Even today, the issue of investigation or inquiry remains a political matter in China.

There are many other points to be addressed where fieldwork is concerned, such as the issue of translation, which arises as soon as the investigation and the return of its findings involve a shift from one language to another. It arises here specifically, however, as a result of the various ways in which the relationships that exist between words and the realities they are supposed to name have been distorted since the mid-20th century. More specifically, if we refer to the triadic nature, outlined by C.S. Peirce, of the semiotic relationship between an object, a sign and an interpretant, and if, without going into further detail on the notion of the interpretant, we are happy to simplify it by talking about interpretative habits, how can we translate without taking new, unconventional and previously unconsidered interpretative habits into account? How do you go about translating while taking into account the differences in the perceived meanings of words such as ‘people’, ‘democracy’, ‘masses’, ‘organise’, ‘work’ and ‘work of thought,’ both in China and elsewhere?

⁴Menghe, T., preface to Jinghan, L., *Enquête sociale générale sur le comté de Ding*, Shanghai, Shanghai Century Publishing Group, 1933.

Books & Ideas: What developments have you observed over the course of your investigations?

Isabelle Thireau: There is just one that I would cite, this being the fact that the researcher's own investigation or inquiry tends to increasingly overlap with those of their respondents. My work initially sought to understand the pluralisation at work in Chinese society and the formation of less uncertain normative benchmarks and forms of coordinated actions by observing specific spheres or situations that did not exclude Party and State administration. However, modern Chinese society is faced with doubts and indecision that, far from diminishing, appear instead to be intensifying. Answers to the question 'what kind of world do we live in?', which might have stabilised after several decades of economic reform, appear, on the contrary, to be becoming increasingly uncertain. They cannot be separated from the nature of the political regime, or more precisely from what Claude Lefort refers to as the *symbolic institution of the social*. The fact that those we interact with through our research can refer to Chinese political power as either communist, socialist with Chinese characteristics, capitalist, liberal, authoritarian, totalitarian, Orwellian, nationalist, fascist or imperial, depending on the circumstances, highlights not only the multiple perspectives but also the great indecision that mark the foundations attributed to the current political system. Yet such foundations, while they are always to be defined, restrict and guide possible debates on 'good government,' 'good institutions' and ways of 'living together'. They constitute fundamental resources when it comes to debating the meaning of justness and social reality. The current confusion over the foundations of political power in China, and the contradictions between what is officially said about it and the political measures that have actually been put in place, have contributed to the largely illegible nature of the current experience for those who are living it. As a consequence, Chinese citizens seem to be themselves embedded in all kinds of inquiries. They are conducting such *enquêtes* together, in public squares, in religious gatherings, in gatherings that have become institutionalised through the sheer force of their repetition, *enquêtes* that are also prompted by the extent and complexity of day-to-day situations that people are experiencing as being vague, uncertain and opaque. There are indeed things people are wary of and there are realities, including the meaning of words and the meaning of public commitments, that people are doubtful of. There is that which is immediately deemed bad, even where confirmation of this is yet to be obtained, and there is that which is simply unclear, opaque or uncertain and which triggers another type of concern, this being that we do not know 'what it is all about', to use an expression used by several respondents.

In this respect, the Covid-19 epidemic has undoubtedly triggered a new, sudden and unexpected form of investigation for Chinese citizens to figure out, together, the experience faced and the means of dealing with it, a moment that one can only hope will help to strengthen rather than suppress the places where people gather even among strangers, consolidate forms of concerted action as fragile as they may be, undertake short-term collective initiatives despite the strong political pressure faced in recent years.

Translated from the French by Tiam Goudarzi
with the support of the ANR TIANJIN.