

a discriminated minority. But the struggles of local representatives to obtain some infrastructural improvements – sometimes successfully – show that interdependencies cannot be understood in mere ethnic terms but needs to be resituated in wider figurations.

Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra brings us to another theatre of conflict with his chapter on the borderlanders' perspective in Kashmir, which resolutely moves beyond state-centric and security analyses. He successively examines how people have experienced displacement, fencing, or landmines. This specific border is one of the most violent one on Earth; it cannot be described in terms of fluidity and flexibility, as often done elsewhere to characterise a supposed globalised world.

The volume's last contribution turns back to the case addressed in the introduction, the Shia-Sunni conflict in Gilgit. Emma Varley offers a detailed description of the consequences on the healthcare system of the hostility between religious communities and state's inability to promote civil security and non-discriminatory public space. She shows how hospitals are sites of inclusion and exclusion at the same time and participate in segregated geographies and segregated governance. Everyday life is strongly affected by the sectarianisation of medical institutions.

More than a juxtaposition of studies, this edited volume consistently emphasises people's perspectives. It has the merit to propose an overall argument beyond considerable differences in methodological approaches and writing styles between the contributors. In spite of the general coherence and quality of individual chapters, however, readers interested in the everyday experience of conflict in places such as Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, or northern Pakistan-Kashmir may have two grounds for frustration. First, the various authors display little reflexivity on the conditions of fieldwork in a context of conflict. If a researcher is interested in studying everyday life, he or she has to negotiate his or her presence with real persons who have to manage concrete problems. Field research is a specific social relation by itself. How does it influence the knowledge produced? Ethical, methodological, and epistemological issues are inextricably intermingled, an aspect hardly touched across the whole volume. Second, it comes as a surprise that anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have not more to say on the vast apparatus of humanitarian and development organisations intervening in situations of conflict and the impact of their presence and work on the life of their expatriated and local staff, as well as the people targeted by their programmes. Can we understand the everyday experience of people confronted to violence and insecurity without considering the myriad of international and nongovernmental organisations supposed to mitigate their suffering?

Alessandro Monsutti

Steinmüller, Hans, and Susanne Brandtstädt (eds.): *Irony, Cynicism, and the Chinese State*. London: Routledge, 2016. 193 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-94314-8. (Routledge Contemporary China Series, 132) Price: £ 95.00

This is a very good collection of articles in the sense that it draws our attention to a couple of important questions that confront us – not just those whose focus is on China. Built on a prior workshop and a following conference on the similar topic, the intent of this volume is to take up the problem of irony and cynicism as a lens to examine the ongoing moral transformation that China faces today. The term "state" in the title should be read, in its essential meaning, as "a state of being" under the Chinese rule (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, "Of Revelation and Revolution"; Vol. 1. Chicago 1991). The material and sources of the volume cover a wide range of themes, chiefly ethnographic but also sociohistorical in terms of its mode of presentation. Both Hans Steinmüller's "Introduction" and Michael Herzfeld's "Afterword," in their respectively insightful ways, made two useful summaries of all the nine pieces included, and this should justify my avoidance of writing another summary.

This volume raises an important question, which is the question of *horizon*. If an empirical study requires a certain theoretical background as its conceptual horizon, a careful reading of this volume would bring us back to the question: What is or should be the theoretical horizon, from which our empirical investigations must emerge, i.e., when we study today's China? Of course, this is not saying that a certain kind of theory should be followed or not; we are speaking of a horizon as a meeting-point when we conduct empirical research that would tie our immediate interests to a number of conceptual problems. "Horizon" is not merely the sociohistorical or theoretical background; it is the intellectual refraction through which our specific studies become illuminated. For example, behind the notions of irony and cynicism there came the postsocialist literature as a horizon, and the meaning of these terms obtained their true significance in the known problem of the socialist-postsocialist transitions. That is why, for example, in the "Introduction," the volume refers to Yael Navaro-Yashin, Alexei Yurchak, and Caroline Humphrey, etc. in order to indicate, in the East European context, such as from Turkey to Mongolia, there was a cynical reaction to the irony of the Soviet states. "What about cynicism and paranoia in China?" (4). Is this not an adequate and provocative question? What does it imply? How do Chinese people cope with a similar condition of life, from Maoism to post-Maoism, for example? Can or should we borrow those terms from the East European context to the ethnographic studies of China? A patient reader would, when reading the volume with care and attention, raise such a question: Given the importance of China's recent past, what is or should be an adequate intellectual horizon upon which we may draw broader comparative light?

This volume has brought us back to this ground-question: What should be the intellectual horizon (or horizons) from which we must derive light in order to shed on our anthropological investigations? More specifically, to what extent should we continue to derive our conceptual energy from the postsocialist literature? Not too long ago, from Berkeley to Cambridge and vice versa, there was a lively conversation on the problem of postsocialist transition. For example, Alexei Yurchak, my colleague at

Berkeley, has written an influential study of cynicism during Brezhnev's time in the Soviet Union, which the volume acknowledges as one of its theoretical sources. Or shall we think of the Chinese author, Hu Ping, his treatment of Chinese irony still tells a good story? However, on the other hand, one may also wonder, how far can we continue in such a lane of thinking? Is today's China still the same world as Hu Ping portrayed, for example? Or can we still pose Brezhnev's type of cynicism as a trope (e.g., K. Burke) for understanding what is happening in Beijing? Ranging from neighborhood struggles to Korean investment in Qingdao, from "implicit irony" to "rebel as trickster," from local governance to the use of Internet as a means of cynical response, etc., the volume contains an empirical richness helpful and suggesting, but the question it brings the volume answers much. Or shall we say, there is "Irony in Action" (Fernandez and Huber, Chicago 2001; cf. Santangelo's "Laughing in Chinese," Roma 2012) in any state political economics, with the ongoing American presidential election as an example?

Morality or ethics is the wider reference with which all the contributing authors have tried to engage. This is the second important issue this volume has brought to our attention. If we do not make a further distinction between morality and ethics, a distinction which the various authors did not themselves make, we could say, as the volume suggests, that ethical or moral problems, often ugly and disturbing, are the usual reasons for people to turn to irony or cynicism as a mode of self-protection or possible reaction. A variety of ethnographic cases are provided by the volume to show that difficult moral conditions of life, under the current rule of the party-state, tend to generate ironic or cynical responses in daily life. Like other anthropological studies, "everyday life" is taken as the ground for locating those moral or ethical problems we find in today's China. For this, Hans Steinmüller in his excellent "Introduction" used the term "the micro-ethics of everyday life" (8), and such a term accurately captures a general thematic orientation of the volume. In other words, the micro-ethics is an *everyday* phenomenon. Similar to other anthropological uses of the *everyday* or everyday life, if one may ask? We are familiar with such as "everyday modernity," "everyday Buddhism," and so on. Do we want to give this usage a theoretical meaning alone (cf. P. Bourdieu's theory of practice)? Or would we rather give it a more specific connotation, for example, as employed by Veena Das? This is not a criticism of the term but a wish to gain fuller explications of the ground upon which Chinese moral or ethical problems are tied to their own "everydayness."

Finally, a question that comes to mind when reading this volume is: Is the irony of China a Chinese irony? It seems, as the volume suggests, ethnographic studies of today's China may itself become an intellectual ground for us to think about what is happening around the world. This is an excellent collection, not because it has answered all the questions it poses, but because it provides another necessary angle for us to think about ourselves in relation to that which is conveniently called "China," a world in which we find not only a past but also future po-

tentials for investigations. An inquiry about today's China, therefore, has become a study of our own future possibilities.

Xin Liu

Stolle, Nikolaus: Talking Beads. The History of Wampum as a Value and Knowledge Bearer, from Its Very First Beginnings until Today. Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2016. 424 pp. ISBN 978-3-8300-8827-1. (HERODOT – Wissenschaftliche Schriften zur Ethnologie und Anthropologie, 16) Price: € 129.80

Wampum has played a vital role in the lives of many different societies across North America. Used as everything from currency to sacred ritual object, fashion accessory to purveyor of knowledge, the shell bead that has come simply to be known as wampum is ever present in the historical record of the 17th century and beyond. Yet wampum has largely blended into the background. Anthropologists and historians who look carefully at wampum tend to do so through a narrow lens, and fail to come to terms with wampum as the multifaceted material object that it is. However, Nikolaus Stolle in his new work "Talking Beads" has set out to place wampum at the center of discussion, by tracing the bead through its many forms.

This endeavor is a large and difficult one, and Stolle presents a thoroughly researched manuscript. The scope of his work can be seen by simply glancing at the table of contents, where it at once becomes evident that he has addressed all aspects of wampum use. Not only does he examine the vast utilitarian nature of the bead, he also provides his reader with a series of beautiful charts, including one large foldout, offering the visual essence of beads and belts. These charts have a great deal to offer academics with an interest in wampum.

Stolle lends his voice to a small group of academics who focus on various aspects of wampum. Most of the work done on the subject is relegated to the past, as the late Lynn Ceci arguably contributed the seminal works on wampum through a series of articles around 30 years ago. More recently, Mario Schmidt has offered a different interpretation of the Iroquois/Dutch economic relationship in his article "Entangled Economies. New Netherland's Dual Currency System and Its Relation to Iroquois Monetary Practice" recently published in *Ethnohistory* (62.2015.2: 195–216). Additionally, we all eagerly await Paul Otto's forthcoming monograph "Beads of Power." While the subject of wampum has lain largely dormant since the 1980s, it seems there is a wide and current revival of interest in the subject and Stolle is on the cutting edge of that discourse.

Stolle's work with belts is particularly noteworthy. Not only does he walk his reader through a tutorial on the weaving and manufacture of belts, he offers a visual representation of every belt he is able to trace through the historical documents. Beyond that, his work with these belts as knowledge bearers is perhaps the most comprehensive done on the subject. Stolle traces the use of talking sticks as mnemonic devices as a precursor to belts used in the same way (68). This claim is supported by