

Hongren Yang, *Shequ ruhe dongqilai?: heizhenzhu zhixiang de paixi, zaidi shifu yu shequ zongti yingzao* [Making Community Work: A Case Study of Lin-Bien] Taipei: Zuo an wenhua, 2007. 315 pp. NT \$280.

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Received: 13 October 2009 / Accepted: 13 October 2009 / Published online: 13 November 2009
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Making Community Work: A Case Study of Lin-Bien will inspire scholars interested in the tangled history of technology and society. Its broad implications will prove relevant to science, technology, and society (STS) studies, the social and cultural history of Taiwan, and sociological theory.

Hongren Yang asks a very basic question: How does Taiwanese society change? With the eye of a social anthropologist, the author approaches that question through a fruit. The history of the Black Pearl, *lianwu* in Chinese or wax apple (*Syzygium samarangense*), examined through the lens of “local practice,” allows Yang to trace the evolution of planting techniques and their connection to local politics and community development. The threads of politics, community, and agricultural techniques are neatly woven into a fabric that describes social and technical processes. The results speak to several academic debates, and in a very practical way, we come to see how, within a discrete social movement, professional knowledge and technical systems relate to lay practitioners' in the context of STS, how political forces transform/translate the factions in a local community, and how the cultural logic of a professional community's public discourse can articulate a village community's traditional discourse.

To tackle these issues, the author produces painstaking case studies that yield insightful conclusions. Indeed, this may be one of the most solid case studies Taiwan has yet produced in the STS field. While the key concepts, such as “embodiment” and “tacit knowledge,” are borrowed from Western scholarship, the author

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convincingly sets the theories in the local context. Yang scrutinizes the blending of theoretical knowledge and local tacit knowledge in the cultivation of a foreign fruit. The work of the agricultural technician involves him/her in the transformation of economic structures (Taiwan's banana exports were stagnant), material and environmental contingency (saltwater marshes, pesticides), and, more importantly, a range of "invisible techniques" mastered through practice.

The book also connects STS studies to politics. Western STS researchers tend to worry that if their field follows the "general symmetry" principle proposed by actor network theory, STS will lose its political commitment and agenda. At the same time, they are concerned about being unable to find room for political intervention into the evolution of science and technology. Yang uses the intertwined histories of technology, politics, and community to show that technical communities are essential to political organizations and, hence, contribute significantly to the improvement of local communities. This approach may have resulted from the contingent relationship between agricultural development and Taiwan's sociopolitical history.

Working from the concept of embodied practice, the author suggests that the discursive habitus of modern intellectuals is not essentially at odds with that of traditional villagers. This idea could reshape the Taiwanese debate over modernity and modernization. By mobilizing the concept of translation from actor network theory to contextualize local culture, morality, technological practices, and everyday life, the book goes beyond the familiar and all-too-simple contrast between the traditional and the modern. The author suggests that without bringing the perspective of the modernizers into accord with that of the villagers, a modernizing discourse is doomed to be merely a discourse. So whether we look at the technological development of the *lianwu*, political reforms, or the making of a community, the central idea is translation, which will permit a real alliance between the villagers and the activists pushing for modern community values. The author skillfully imports a discussion of embodied practices into the original translation model and converts changes in technology, politics, and culture into an embodied transformation of social texture.

By describing the everyday work, the routine cultural translations, and the habitus of self-taught agricultural experts, whom I am calling "agricultural technicians," Yang suggests that these are "technical people," effectively somewhere between traditional farmers and formally educated horticulturalists. These technicians make the community function and bring change to history. This is certainly true of the Black Pearl technicians who help with community and political mobilization, the public intellectuals working on local history and conservation projects, and the new breed of politicians who can bring the technicians, villagers, and intellectuals together. The approach deviates slightly from existing social theory, which is modeled on the development of European and North American capitalist society. Instead of the proletariat described in Marxism, the white-collar middle class in modernization theory, or the students and other actors described by the post-1968 theorists, agency is assigned to a heterogeneous group that tries to bridge the worlds of modernization, traditional culture, and local politics.

Making Community Work has implications for Taiwanese sociopolitical history. Shifting the focus away from intellectuals and big demonstrations in the streets of

Taipei, this case study presents a cast of less flamboyant characters in Taiwan's towns and villages. The tempo of change is slow: the technical, intellectual, political, and community workers unite to slowly transform a modern discourse into the local habitus. They offer us an alternative to modernization.

Translated by Shin-Yi Lin.