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Book Review

The power of place: contentious politics in twentieth-century Shanghai and Bombay

by Mark W. Frazier

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Last year, 2019, observed a striking global landscape of contentious politics. Understanding and explaining this wave of street protests demand rigorous intellectual interventions. Mark Frazier's *The Power of Place* is a timely contribution that takes us back to a century ago and guides the city tours of Shanghai in China and Bombay (currently Mumbai) in India starting in 1919. This book documents and compares the parallel episodes of urban struggles for citizenship rights, and their rise and fall as the two cities transformed. This comparative research aims to examine how urban political geographies have been shaping the conceptions of urban citizenship, facilitating popular mobilization, and bringing people onto the streets. This fascinating account of a century associates the seemingly unrelated episodes of popular mobilizations and urban transformations together. It is not only of tremendous social relevance for enriching the historical knowledge of urban social movements in recent time, but also a remarkable addition to the field of urban political geography and the area studies of China and India.

This monograph successfully addresses three research gaps in the literature of urban political geography. Firstly, as entitled around the notions of power and place, it goes beyond the recurring analytical focus of contentious politics on public space but examines its interaction with forms of urban political geographies, foregrounding the significance of workplace and neighborhood. This delimits the notion of urban social movements as those protests which “connects with questions of urban conditions and issues of social inclusion” (19). Secondly, it deepens the meaning of the popularly cited, yet rarely probed, claim of “the right to the city” by answering “when, who, and how such rights to the city are asserted” (13) through interrogating the concept of urban citizenship. Thirdly, its comparative approach does not try to frame or fit the stories

within the dominating discourses and abstractions, e.g., globalization and neoliberalism, as the self-explainable causal mechanisms. Instead, through the detailed empirical documentation of urban dwellers' experience, it shows the stories should be centered on the ways of how cities adopt and practice broader systemic processes that define these abstractions in places.

Following an introductory chapter, this book is organized in seven chapters plus a concise conclusion. The tale of two cities begins by bringing the readers to the two Asian port cities during the turn of the twentieth century for illustrating the production of modern cities (Chapter 1). Although Shanghai was under a formally fragmented urban sovereignty because of the International Settlement and Bombay was under unitary colonial governance, the two cities shared some similarities that the foreign capital's investment in the textile industry created large social groups of workers, yet housing scarcity resulted. In 1919, the Versailles Peace Conference invoked the nationalist aspirations in many places including Shanghai and Bombay. Frazier explores how the spontaneously emerged nationalist mobilizations have politicized the societies and connected with the working class (Chapter 2). The strength of this network depended on the emergence of solidarity for the boycott of foreign goods and the patriotic sentiment among different classes on the basis of national citizenship, as in Shanghai. But, as in Bombay, this network might be weak when the national mobilization failed to empathize with the oppressive working and living conditions of the labors, who could not afford the national products, leading to spatially and culturally segregation. The anti-imperialist and nationalist movements continued to develop in the 1920s, but they were contingent on the geopolitical and military threats in the following two decades (Chapter 3). Nonetheless, the movements created a stronger bond with labor to reshape the conceptions of citizenship, by drawing from the experience from the Paris Commune to the Communist Party in Shanghai (104) or, in Bombay, by explaining complex concepts such as class exploitation and injustice to the labors situated in their social milieu (113).

After the dissenters established the new regimes in the 1950s, they sought authority and power expansion through urban planning and policies (Chapter 4). Both cities relocated the factories away from the city centers and addressed the housing problems left by the old regimes. While Bombay envisioned what the elites would desire through the modernist, rational, and comprehensive planning against *chawls*, Shanghai emphasized the propaganda campaigns of the Party and placed Party representatives in everyday *lilong* spaces and work-units. But these measures had created a new marginal group of precarious workers who participated in another round of anti-elitist mobilizations in the 1960s

(Chapter 5). The Shiv Sena in Bombay and the Workers' Revolutionary Rebels in Shanghai, having contrasting ideologies, led the cities into respective development paths. During the last decades of the century, the state authorities' manipulation of urban land property, that encouraged land speculation, caused controversies over demolition and relocation, triggering small-scales and relatively narrow struggles for inclusive claims to urban services (Chapters 6 and 7). By restricting the informal settlement from expansion, constructing infrastructures and reassigning land uses, urban planning, which reconfigured the urban political geographies, aimed to eliminate the sources of grievances and contention. Yet, the recurring debates surrounding urban citizenship continue to take place in various forms of contentious politics.

The most intriguing observation is the repeating pattern occurred after the opposers had gradually acquired power. Once those who upheld inclusive claims assumed power, they sought stabilizing their authority by formulating exclusive planning measures to transform the urban geographies, and meanwhile attempted to discourage resistance from marginal groups by channelizing popular mobilizations into the state apparatus or absorbing them into electoral politics. Those marginal groups, striving for their citizenship claims, might potentially become the new opposers. This shall be an alerting lesson regarding power for all the contemporary contentious politics.

Overall, this book is a must-read. It lays the foundation for exploring urban political geographies of the twenty-first century, such as the recent nationalist propaganda and the *weiwén* (stability maintenance) regime of China, the utilization of smart technology in urban surveillance, and the role of cyberspace in collective mobilizations.