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Une après-midi à Shanghai:
L'enfance et la question
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Camille Salgues, currently a postdoctoral researcher at the CERI Research Centre – Sciences Po Paris, stayed and worked in different Chinese universities, but also worked as an English teacher in several underprivileged schools for migrant children in Shanghai, where he gained an in-depth knowledge of youngsters who became the focus of his book, *Une après-midi à Shanghai: L'enfance et la question anthropologique de l'âge* (An afternoon in Shanghai: Childhood and the anthropological question of age).

Camille Salgues's research is in line with childhood studies, and specifically employs the concept of children's agency, stressing that children have a capacity to act independently and make their own decisions. This stream of research, which diverged from education sciences, developed in the late 1990s in anglophone academia through scholars such as Doris Bühler-Niederberger and James Allison. Today it is very prominent in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, but to a lesser extent in France. French specialists in this field are very few, making this book all the more important for the French academic community. Although Camille Salgues is tightly linked to childhood studies, he is developing an original research path built in reaction to mainstream childhood studies. His methodology consists of ethnographic observation, making use of the three years he spent in Shanghai's transitional areas (buffer zones between newly developed and "to be developed" urban zones). He spent long periods of time with the children: teaching them English, playing ping-pong or Chinese chess with them, and idling in malls or in the rubble-strewn areas where they lived. He does not envision children as a social category built by adults but rather tries to "observe the subtle interactions between [them]" (p. 47) by putting himself at the child's level.

The author wishes to reopen the discussion on childhood in the field of humanities and social sciences through a sociology of age. He first highlights that education is an adult issue rather than a children's one. Children do not talk about their lives through

an educational lens but they do consider age a relevant category that bears important significance for them. According to Camille Salgues, these children do not see school as a place for education but as a structured environment for them to meet, play, and interact with others. This approach differentiates his work from mainstream childhood studies. In other words, for him, there should not be a sociology of childhood but a sociology of age. This criticism against the predominant way in which adults consider children responds to analyses by Chinese scholars, who tend to consider children only through an educational lens (Xue and Li 2022).

More specifically, this book is a milestone in Camille Salgues's analysis of Chinese migrant children. Although his research was conducted in Shanghai, Shanghaiese children are hardly seen in the scenes described in the book. The school being dedicated to migrant children, the absence of local children within the school seems logical, but is more surprising in public parks, where interactions with local children should be possible (Chapter One). Both groups seem to live segregated lives even in public spaces, as described in a scene where local children go fishing around a paying pound while migrant children are catching fishes in a muddy public pool nearby (p. 49-51). As Shanghai children stay mainly indoors taking private classes, or engaged in activities planned by their parents, they do not have time to idle around the way migrant children do. This leads the author to state – contrary to observations by mainstream Chinese scholars (Chen, Wang, and Wang 2009; Zhou 2016) – that there is no feeling of inferiority, because migrant children and local children have no opportunities to interact or compare themselves with each other. For the author, bringing local children into the picture is irrelevant.

While this book focuses on Shanghai, the author's research interest for children and childhood expands beyond the experience of migrant children in big cities. Indeed, Camille Salgues also did fieldwork in rural Guangdong among so-called left-behind children (*liushou ertong* 留守兒童), which led him to publish an article comparing the environments and situations of migrant children in Shanghai and the left-behind children in rural Guangdong (2021). In Shanghai, the author stayed for three years, a period during which he worked as an English teacher in a school dedicated to migrant children, which later became his focus of interest. His long period of interaction with these children allowed him to legitimate his presence and become accepted by them, preventing him from being seen as an intruder when playing games or ping-pong with them. In Guangdong, however, he stayed for a shorter period and could not develop such close relationships with the kids. Unlike Shanghai where migrant children were living with relatives (most often their parents) and close to one another, managing to build a community of their own despite precarious living conditions, children in Guangdong were living in proper houses but without their parents and were geographically more dispersed.

Each chapter of the book is structured around a specific area where children meet at different times of the day: a public park, a mall, a school, an arcade, and amidst the urban rubble where they live. Scenes are described by the author through the use of field notes, sometimes complemented by drawings to help the reader better visualise the situation, after which the author engages in theoretical analysis closely related to the short scene he described.

The 15 drawings depicting the environment where the children live are noteworthy: through them, Camille Salgues attempts to guide the reader and point out the most important elements in the scene described, instead of providing photos with faces blurred out as is commonly done nowadays. This makes the dilapidated areas look more artistic and directs the gaze to the main elements discussed.

Besides contributing to French childhood studies, this book will also benefit readers in migrations studies thanks to the renewed perspectives it offers on Chinese internal migrations. While studies on internal migrations often focus on the issue of *hukou*, Camille Salgues voluntarily goes beyond this topic and allows readers to rediscover a well-known city like Shanghai from a child's-eye-view perspective.

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