PART I.

State Boundaries in a Food Network

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Participation and Anaglyphic Boundary Repertoires

Introduction

I first met Dong Jie at a workshop for rural social workers that was conducted by a Beijing-based rural development NGO and hosted by a peasant association in Shanxi Province in the autumn of 2013. During the lunch break, he introduced himself to me and other participants as the founder of a 'peasant cooperative' in a village in Sichuan. He proudly told us that the cooperative had four hundred member households and emphasized that the whole village participated, citing the many successful 'participatory trainings' (*canyushi peixun* 参与式培训) it had offered during its startup phase. As I learned during the following months of ethnographic fieldwork, this emphasis on participation was typical of how Dong Jie represented the peasant cooperative to outside, mainly urban middle-class, visitors.

An ethnographer *could* introduce readers to this key actor in the following, apparently unproblematic, way: Dong Jie is the 43-year-old agronomist of Qiuling Township. He also serves as the party secretary of another village in the township, a position to which he was assigned as an outsider because of internal conflicts there in 2014. Married and the father of a teenage daughter, he lives with his elderly parents in an apartment a few minutes' walk from the township's administrative offices, about ten kilometres from Daxi Village. He began working at the township's agrotechnical station about twenty years ago, immediately after completing his studies in pomology at a forestry university in another province.

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However, Dong later presented himself to me, NGO staff and organized urban middle-class consumers as not a state actor but a critic of ‘the state’s’ approach to agriculture. He criticized its support for ‘modern agriculture’, pointing to the problematic consequences of its promotion of ‘chemical fertilizer’ and ‘agrochemicals’. He also disparaged its ‘law on specialized peasant cooperatives’ and ‘organic certification schemes’ for focusing on the production of commodities and making money. He argued that ‘peasants’ should not rely on state programmes funding such cooperatives and certification schemes. Instead he followed the discourse of the New Rural Reconstruction Movement and promoted what intellectuals and NGOs involved in the movement called ‘comprehensive’ peasant cooperatives, which offered social and cultural services alongside economic and financial cooperation. This comprehensive cooperation was thought to build ‘community’ and ‘civil society’, as organized peasants and consumers would unite in providing ‘mutual aid between city and countryside’. Dong Jie represented these goals as different from those of the state. His aim was to transform the peasants’ values and perspectives on ecology rather than induce them to practise organic agriculture through monetary incentives. ‘Participatory education’, in contrast to the ‘top-down’ education offered by the state would be the key to this envisioned change.

~~A State Official’s~~ Dong Jie’s Distancing of the State

This might suggest the following argument: Above we see a state official closely cooperating with NGOs. Studies of Chinese politics suggest that this is not unusual but part of a broader trend, noting that ‘individual government bureaucrats and offices often develop very close partnerships with Chinese NGOs’ (Hsu 2017: 14). In this case, we simultaneously see not only a blurring of the boundary between state and non-state by an intermediary but, paradoxically, a state official discursively distancing himself from the state while trying to connect urban middle-class consumers to the village’s cooperative in an emerging food network.

It is sometimes difficult to find the proper words to approach the state through its boundaries. Following the ethnographic practice of contextualizing actors and events, the introductory note above offers an initial description of Dong Jie. It is inevitably narrow, but the holistic ambition to paint a comprehensive picture that covers both his professional and family life is still visible. This puts something in

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front of the curtain that is irrelevant or even invisible to some audiences of Dong Jie's performative distancing of the state.

The tempting argument about a state actor distancing the state does something that is routine in many studies of politics across the social sciences. It transforms, in hindsight, markers of difference into substantial attributes: instead of examining, it assumes that select markers such as an official title and being on the payroll of the township are indeed continuously relevant and thus transforms situationally performed state boundaries into continuous state substance.[1] Thus, the argument invites the reader to follow the initial diagnosis of simultaneous and apparently contradictory processes of blurring and sharpening the state boundary. This kind of discursive framing overlooks the potential of studying performed state boundaries in their situatedness and multiplicity.

In this chapter, I suggest that state boundaries multiply without being blurred when audiences have differentiated access to performances of state boundaries or differentiated familiarity with repertoires of boundary markers. In such cases, an actor may simultaneously stand inside and outside of the state without taking an intermediary position that would demand the navigation of tensions.

This argument emerges from my exploration of repertoires of performed state boundaries in educational events for peasants. It starts from how Dong Jie explained the contrast between the agricultural trainings offered by the state and those offered by rural development NGOs to me and other organized urban middle-class consumers. As I turn to these events, it will become clear that boundary work is not solely discursive but that the boundary is also performed through rituals. These performances of state boundaries enabled access to organizations that valued peasant participation and offered resources for projects with peasant participants.

Dong Jie's pursuit of peasant participation in agronomy did not blur the boundary between state and civil society. Rather, his participatory style of agronomy was valued by different audiences – both colleagues at the township government familiar with Mao's 'mass line' and a Western-oriented segment of the urban middle-class familiar with globally circulating buzzwords and models of participatory rural development. Notably, the very same practices made Dong a good state official for one audience and a valuable part of civil society for the other.

Moreover, this case was not just another example of 'Chinese politics' simply because it was happening within the territorial boundar-

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ies of the People's Republic of China. Prevalent images of China may invite interpretations of Dong's agronomic practices as a typically Chinese – whether cultural or socialist – blurring of the state boundary, this time in an alternative food network. Instead, I argue that at least two versions of China emerged. Dong's practices were enacted as a revival of a past Maoist China by one audience and as a globally travelling alternative to the present Chinese state by the other. This, and also the phenomenon of Dong's duality as state and non-state actor not causing tension was made possible by the multiplicity of repertoires through which state boundaries were performed. The conclusion introduces the notions 'segregated multiplicity' and 'anaglyphic multiplicity' to develop a vocabulary for grasping how different versions of performed state boundaries interact. Furthermore, it suggests that – apart from differently performed state boundaries – Maoism and the liberal global participation buzz share more than commonly acknowledged. Although the NGO's participatory education might at first glance appear to be a Western import, we may well be seeing the return of Mao's idea of the 'mass line', transformed by long travel and arriving in a transformed setting as well.

Bringing Performative Boundary Work to Agro-food Studies

Agro-food Studies has mainly investigated so-called alternative food movements in the West, interpreting their emergence as expressing a shift in governance mechanisms from state to civil society (Renting, Schermer and Rossi 2012). As argued in the introduction, a clear-cut dichotomy between state and civil society plays a prominent role in dominant liberal Western self-images (Hann 1996). This has led to diagnoses of a blurred boundary as a failure to separate state and society or a mark of the weakness of civil society in non-Western countries. Indeed, some authors have interpreted food initiatives in China as 'less alternative' as well as a sign of a 'weak civil society' due to interventions by and entanglements with the state (Scott et al. 2014; Si, Schumilas and Scott 2015).[2] While I agree with some of their other characterizations of Chinese food movements,[3] my study challenges this mapping of difference based on the state-versus-society framework. Such an approach mainly reproduces the dominant Western liberal self-image rather than contributing to our understanding of what is happening on the ground in both China and the West.

Such diagnoses of 'weak' or 'failing' non-Western civil societies have also been invited by work in Agro-food Studies that has tended

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to overlook the role of the state. This has been pointed out by Jakob Klein, Yuson Jung and Melissa Caldwell (2014: 13), who question 'whether the ideological and spatial distancing that is presumed to exist in alternative food movements based in advanced capitalist societies is, in fact, real' and conclude that it is more likely a 'myth': 'alternative food movements . . . require state support and market structures in order to function and be legitimized'.

Instead of assuming that state and society are (or should be) distinct entities and may be either strong or weak, or that the distancing is only a 'myth', this chapter attempts to move beyond one-sided commitments to either a sharp or a blurred state boundary by paying attention to the production and multiplicity of performed state boundaries as outlined above. Before analysing the agricultural trainings offered by state and NGOs, I will sketch the specific historical setting in which these performances took place.

Accessing Resources through Peasant Participation

What sources of funding were available when someone like Dong Jie wanted to pursue participatory rural development in Sichuan in the 2010s? Scholars of contemporary Chinese politics have noted that close cooperation between local state and NGOs was not uncommon at that time (Hsu 2017: 14). This section asks what made founding a peasant cooperative and collaborating with rural development NGOs and organized urban middle-class consumers a sensible strategy for a township agronomist. After looking at the fiscal reforms of the 1990s and the 2000s and their consequences for rural governance, I argue that performances of peasant participation have become one way to access additional resources for rural development.

Strategic Selectivity in Rural Governance in China

In the processual and contingent neo-Marxist understanding of the state as a social relation, actors' current strategies are faced with the state's current strategic selectivity (Thiemann 2024: chapter 5). This, in turn, is conceptualized as the outcome of interactions between their past strategies and the state's past strategic selectivity (Jessop 1990; 2008). China Studies suggest that the fiscal reforms adopted in 1994, 2002 and 2006 (Li L. 2007; Kennedy 2013; Chen A. 2014; Ahlers, Heberer and Schubert 2016) have had a crucial influence on the relation between state and non-state actors in rural governance.

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After the market reforms and decentralization of resource allocation in the 1980s, the central government's revenues dropped to only about a third of the combined revenues of all provinces. The 1994 fiscal reform shifted tax revenue from provinces to the centre while also shifting responsibility for many costs to county and township governments. As a result, the funds distributed by the centre to local authorities no longer covered the costs of local services, so county- and township-level governments introduced new local taxes and fees to close the gap and continue providing the services.

After increasing complaints and protests about this 'peasant burden', the central government's 2002 Tax-For-Fee Reform abolished most local fees. In 2006, the main agricultural tax collected from rural citizens was also abolished. While this relaxed the tense relations between village officials and rural citizens, it also left many county – and especially township – governments with budget deficits. The Chinese government therefore dramatically increased transfers and subsidies from the centre to rural areas based on the 'Construction of a New Socialist Countryside' framework announced by Document No. 1 in 2004. Nonetheless, most local governments in agricultural regions had to seek alternative sources of revenue to control their fiscal deficits. Townships located close to urban centres could gain cash by leasing their land, while many others adopted a strategy of cooperating closely with the private sector to build a tax base through 'attracting investment' and fund and provide services through public-private partnerships.

In this context, where local governments were unable to fund themselves through taxes and fees, the state's strategic selectivity favoured activities by local officials to acquire resources through other channels. Dong Jie's pivotal position in the food network not only promised to attract NGO support and urban middle-class consumer purchasing power but also garnered media and higher-level attention, improving not only Daxi Village's but also Qiuling Township's chances of successfully competing for rural development project grants offered by the provincial and central state authorities.

Peasant Participation in Lists

Peasant cooperatives in China can seek various kinds of support, such as a simplified registration process, financial subsidies and tax breaks. Some of these have been linked to calls for peasant participation and represent part of a larger trend towards a 'public participation imperative' in Chinese policy (Ahlers, Heberer and Schubert 2016: 64). In

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2013 and 2014, the peasant cooperative of Daxi Village successfully applied for support. It was one of only five villages in the whole prefecture (with a population of about five million) to receive one of these grants, which reward the cooperatives with the highest numbers of registered peasant members. According to the 2007 law regulating specialized peasant cooperatives, a minimum of five citizens, of whom 80 per cent must be 'peasants', may form a cooperative. Here, the term peasant refers to a rural household registration rather than actual engagement in agricultural activities. The prefectural government offered financial support for infrastructure investments in villages on condition that the cooperatives contribute matching funds; state money would be transferred only after the completion of a project. In Daxi Village, it funded (among other things) precast concrete paths for combine harvesters between the rice fields.

The availability of such resources for rural development helps explain the cooperative's push to register more members in Daxi Village. Party Secretary Wang Zhaochen was also the formal chairperson of the board of the peasant cooperative, which he led together with Village Leader Kang Sunbin. With the other members of the village committee, they met with the nine group leaders in advance, informing them about policies 'coming down' from the township government. Since the establishment of the cooperative, they had also coordinated the agricultural activities of the villagers by issuing instructions to the group leaders. In December 2014, the village party secretary and the village leader asked the group leaders to get more villagers to sign on as members.

During a December 2014 meeting of Villagers' Group No. 9, Group Leader Lei Wenfeng raised the issue of cooperative membership and lamented that only thirty households in his group had joined. He offered to take over the task of filling out all the necessary information on the application form and then read aloud all the names of current cooperative members in his group, publicly shaming those who had not yet signed up. He insisted that the cooperative was there 'for everyone' and that therefore everyone should become a member. Curiously, he did not specify what rights, obligations and benefits membership entailed, and none of the attendees asked him about this. Instead, he explained that the member's full name, age and identity card number, as well as their rural household registration and the kinds of crops they cultivated, had to be recorded on the form. He produced several blank registration forms, and seven people left their places in the circle and came to his table[4] to sign up their households as members.

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One might think Lei had not bothered to explain what it meant to join the cooperative because it had already been explained. Still, one woman had a basic question before signing up and asked if it was possible to become a member if she only cultivated a small piece of land. Another woman submitted two applications, explaining that two households lived in the same building. She signed one with her own name and one with another name for the other household. An old man signed an application for someone who was not able to write. The group leader accepted all this, merely adding that he would fill in the missing blanks. After a few minutes, the membership registration process was finished.

The whole process appeared focused on writing – on producing a registration form that was legible to the state. It did not require any comment on the rights, benefits and obligations entailed by formal membership. The most important obstacle to becoming a peasant member appeared to be the time spent filling out the forms. Becoming a member of the cooperative did not have any financial consequences. There was no membership fee, no shares and no dividends. Furthermore, all villagers' group members, regardless of whether they were formally members of the cooperative, could join in its collective orders of maize seed or sell it rice if they wanted. On the other hand, the group leader's public complaining and shaming of nonmembers brought home the message that all households were at least expected to register in writing as members of the cooperative.

Peasant participation documented through numbers of registered peasant members was one way of accessing resources for agricultural projects in the ecological village. Dong Jie and the rural development NGOs also emphasized the importance of peasant participation. As I will show below, they avoided bureaucratic paperwork in public performances of civil society and community, even though they used written forms such as lists of participants when organizing the workshop on ecological agriculture and sustainable living behind the scenes.

Adding the Ecological to State Boundary Repertoires

Specific performances of peasant participation were key to enrolling urban middle-class consumers and their purchasing power in Dong Jie's project to make Daxi into an ecological village. These performances were linked to a specific distinction between organic and ecological agriculture. Dong contrasted the organic certification pro-

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moted by the state with the ecological agriculture supported by community and civil society: the former only required compliance with written regulations, while the latter required a personal transformation in one's relation to nature. For an audience familiar with this distinction, the repertoire of state boundaries broadened and provided an additional lens on Dong's participatory agronomy.

State Certification and the Ecological as 'Not Yet Organic'

During my fieldwork between autumn 2013 and autumn 2015, the Daxi Village cooperative was producing and marketing 'certified organic' rice, as well as vegetables that were labelled 'ecological' but not certified as 'organic'. Some urban middle-class consumers who did not trust the state's market-oriented certification schemes for organic commodities[5] had organized associations through which they hoped to provide their families with 'healthy' and 'ecological' food purchased directly from peasants. Because Daxi Village could be conveniently reached from the provincial capital Chengdu by car in less than two hours, such interested outsiders frequently visited the village.[6]

'Ecological agriculture' was a contested term in the emerging food network. In January 2015, an entrepreneur complained during a preparatory meeting for the NGO workshop on sustainable and ecological living that the lack of a proper definition of 'ecological' was a problem: customers did not know exactly what ecological meant. Therefore, he pleaded for a unified, precise definition with clear criteria, lamenting that everyone had a different perspective on the issue. However, the others present at the meeting, including Dong Jie, fiercely opposed his proposal for a clear standard.[7]

Many people used the terms 'harmless' (*wu gonghai* 无公害), 'green' (*lüse* 绿色), 'organic' (*youji* 有机), 'ecological' (*shengtai* 生态) or a combination such as 'organic-ecological' (*youji shengtai* 有机生态) interchangeably. The first three terms also refer to various certification schemes initiated by the Chinese government: only 'ecological' has never been an officially recognized production standard. Sometimes, 'ecological agriculture' was used as a broad term that also encompassed the various kinds of organic certification. Still other actors differentiated certified 'organic agriculture' from uncertified 'ecological agriculture', albeit in very different ways.

'Ecological' was sometimes understood as meaning 'not yet organic' – not yet meeting the certified production standard 'organic'. During an agricultural training programme for 'new peasants' orga-

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nized in Daxi Village by the county agricultural bureau in autumn of 2014, a county official responsible for the quality and safety of agricultural products took this position. He started his talk by referring to the ecological village where the training took place, noting that even though Daxi was not yet widely known across China it already enjoyed a good reputation. He explained that he and his colleagues were somewhat more relaxed when it came to this village as peasants there mainly used bio-gas slurry for pest control. However, every year his office would 'go down' to other places in order to check if there were pesticide residues on the vegetables in villages and markets.

In his lecture, he described the food safety problems resulting from the incorrect or excessive use of pesticides, presenting the state's certification for 'harmless', 'green' and 'organic' agricultural commodities as one solution. He claimed that most localities of the county met the requirements for the 'harmless' label at present, but some localities were not certified due to the expensive investigation and certification process. He explained that local governments offered financial support for certification, noting that before the lecture he had discussed the question with Dong Jie. Referring to this conversation, he conceded that it was now possible to speak of 'ecological rice', as did the village's cooperative, even if it did not yet meet the 'organic' label's rather strict standards.

Here, the county official constructed an image of the state as above the village and encompassing it, as strict but understanding and benevolent, and therefore as best able to deal with the problem of food safety. He invoked the 'spatialization of the state' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) as vertically 'above' and 'encompassing' its localities, both when he spoke about Daxi Village's reputation in China and when he spoke of the county as encompassing a number of localities that complied with the 'harmless' standard even though they were not certified yet. Furthermore, this theme of scale and encompassment came up on another occasion, when he told his story of regulating and controlling mobility as an official.[8] He presented the state as strict when he spoke about securing food safety through rigorous standards, but it was also an understanding and benevolent state that acknowledged the high costs of certification and therefore offered subsidies. Building on this image of the encompassing and strict but also understanding and benevolent state placed above society, the official's statement ranked the nonstandardized 'ecological' below the state's standardized 'organic'. From the perspective that he presented, the 'ecological' was not only a lower stage in the hierarchy but could only appear as a transitional stage on the way to the 'organic'. As not

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yet organic, the status of the 'ecological' appeared unclear and potentially dangerous and should therefore not be accepted permanently, but only temporarily.

Ecological Agriculture as Opposed to State Certification

Dong Jie and other actors in the emerging food network, such as NGO staff and members of consumer associations, rejected the state's certification scheme for organic agriculture. Their performances of civil society reflected the state's approach to organic agriculture as a mirror image and avoided the bureaucratic paperwork associated with certification. When Dong Jie explained his model of ecological agriculture to potential supporters, he claimed that there was a crucial difference between certified 'organic' and noncertified 'ecological' farming, arguing that these two concepts were based on two 'completely different' modes of thinking.

State-supported organic agriculture was still embedded in the paradigm of 'conventional agriculture' of trying to 'control nature' (*kongzhi ziran* 控制自然). 'Industrialized agriculture' used chemical inputs for control. Organic agriculture indeed restricted itself to organic inputs but nevertheless used these inputs for the same purpose of control. In contrast, ecological agriculture did not aim at controlling nature, which would necessarily produce problems: the concepts of industry could never be transferred to the realm of agriculture. This was because agriculture was about the interaction of living not dead things, as I often heard Dong Jie argue. He also rejected the state's certification schemes, warning that by enabling premium pricing for organic products[9] certification would bring in the profit motive, if not outright fraud.

This warning about illegibility recalls an observation of Veena Das (2004: 227) concerning the 'signature of the state' in a completely different context: '[O]nce the state institutes forms of governance through technologies of writing, it simultaneously institutes the possibility of forgery, imitation, and the mimetic performances of its power.' As the state wants to ensure food safety through certification, 'instability [is simultaneously] introduced by the possibilities of a gap between a rule and its performance'. Dong Jie and other actors in the food network mobilized this fear of fraud by discursively and performatively distancing themselves from the state and its certification schemes.

In contrast, according to Dong Jie, ecological agriculture was based on the principle of understanding natural processes 'holisti-

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cally'. Instead of splitting nature into isolated units and trying to control them by developing better agrochemicals, 'following the rules of nature' (*zunxun ziran guize* 遵循自然规则) meant manifesting the spirit found in Daoism. As well as Daoism, he said he had been inspired by ecological agriculture in Japan, especially after he read a Chinese translation of Masanobu Fukuoka's *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*, and argued that 'traditional agriculture' in China had resembled this kind of Japanese ecological agriculture.

Instead of characterizing the 'ecological' as simply 'not yet organic', this notion understands it as fundamentally different, claiming that it is rooted in Chinese 'traditional culture' and stands in opposition to certification and, therefore, 'modernity', 'the West' and, last but not least, 'the state'. In his negotiations of the ecological, Dong Jie represented the state as a unitary actor that consistently supported the kind of industrialized and organic agriculture that he rejected, despite his own position in the township administration. For him the terms organic and ecological served as a marker of the boundary between state and non-state, and he invested much time and effort to teach others about this distinction, thereby broadening their repertoire of performed state boundaries. For those not familiar with this part of the repertoire, the distinction between organic and ecological agriculture remained irrelevant for the distinction between state and non-state.

The ecological agriculture he envisioned required not only a change of farming inputs and methods, as stipulated by the state's organic production standards, but also that farmers transform themselves as persons by changing their perspective and values towards the relation of humans and nature. At the NGO's workshop on ecological agriculture, before an audience that included urban middle-class consumers, peasant participation was therefore performed as different from the state's agricultural trainings.

Performing the State in the Classroom

Various actors showed interest in teaching peasants how to practise agriculture. The county's agricultural bureau offered trainings on 'mechanization' for 'new peasants', and workshops offered by the Chengdu branch of a Hong Kong-based community development NGO focused on sustainable and ecological living. However, Dong Jie characterized the training conducted by the agricultural bureau as

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'top-down' education and contrasted it with the kind of participatory education he and the NGO offered. By choosing these events for analysis, I follow the contrasts drawn by actors in the food network, who suggested looking for the state in the trainings of the agricultural bureau and for civil society and community in the trainings of the NGO. However, I move beyond that perspective and look at the two cases through the analytical lens of performative boundary work, as set forth in the introduction. My focus is on the process of recruiting peasant participants, as well as the stage designs, rituals of registration and team building, and presentation of material rewards.

Recruiting Peasants, Waiting for the State

The county's Training Centre for Peasants' Scientific and Technical Education (*nongmin keji jiaoyu peixun zhongxin* 农民科技教育培训中心) held agricultural trainings in Daxi Village in the autumn of 2013, as well as in the autumn and spring of 2014. These took place in the assembly hall of the village committee, which was rather unusual: this centre usually conducted trainings in their own facilities in Yinhe City and sent buses to collect the participants from their villages. In this case, they decided to go to the countryside because the organizer from the county's agricultural bureau knew Dong Jie and had heard about the cooperative's trainings and the assembly hall. Therefore, the organizer expected the people in Daxi Village to be accustomed to attending trainings and hoped to recruit participants more easily. The centre informed the village leadership of the number of participant spaces available, and the village leaders delegated the task of recruitment to the nine villagers' group leaders, who in turn invited members of their groups to participate.

On the morning of the first day of the training, I talked to three villagers who were waiting for it to start. They told me that they were participating because they had been asked to do so but that they did not know about the contents of the upcoming meeting. Only the 'officials' knew, they claimed. They said they were told only that the training would last for four days and that they would be paid at the end.

When the officials finally arrived at the village, the participating villagers had already gathered on the village square in front of the assembly hall. Making citizens wait is a strategy of state control, according to Javier Auyero (2012). He argues that waiting teaches them to be patient and suggests that they have no alternative. In this case, the villagers continued to wait. Many were chatting and smoking and

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apparently enjoying themselves. And these villagers had to continue waiting as the officials prepared to stage the state. Outside on the village square, a table was set up with two chairs on one side; inside in the assembly room, the officials tried to hang a red banner with the name of the training programme and also symbolizing the socialist state and the party but had trouble attaching it to the wall.

Meanwhile, two other officials sat down behind the table outside and began the registration ritual. Having come to the village and created the impression of scale and encompassment through their mobility (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), the state officials now assumed a fixed position and made the citizens come to them: the 'patients of the state' (Auyero 2012) had to wait again. In this case, interestingly, the performance reversed the initial process of recruiting. Initially, the education centre had sought participants, but now it appeared as if the participants wanted something from the state. At the table, peasant participants bent over to write their names and phone numbers on a list, confirming both with a red fingerprint. Abstracting from their concrete diversity and relationality, participants were constituted in this process as both unique (name, phone number, fingerprint) and equal ('peasants', meaning rural citizens) individuals that could be counted. This procedure of confirming attendance with a red thumbprint was repeated every morning and every afternoon before the sessions started.

A Stage for the State

After the registration ritual was complete, the lectures were held in the village committee's assembly hall with the identical chairs and tables for the audience arranged in closely spaced rows. At the end of the room, another row of tables and chairs faced them: what Goffman (1956: 66–86) called the 'front region', the space of power reserved for special actors. As part of the front region, a screen was fixed on the wall. In the right corner, there was a cabinet holding audiovisual equipment: speakers, microphones, a computer and a television set.

The identical seats in the 'back region' were reserved for 'the masses', and the front region was for the 'teachers' from the agricultural bureau. As the villagers entered the room after registering, most of them looked for seats in the back rows, as if some invisible power was keeping them a safe distance from the front where the officials were still trying to hang the red banner. Perhaps the participants were simply not interested in the training and preferred to socialize discreetly at the back; in any case, the latecomers were left with the seats

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in front. The assembly room filled up, but the training did not start. Only once the county officials finally managed to hang the banner did the organizer begin his opening speech.

During their lectures, the county-level agronomists made prepared presentations using the projector. No time was set aside for interaction, although the experts sometimes alluded to the village's ecological agriculture. In a 2013 training on mechanization, the experts from the agricultural bureau taught the villagers the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' agriculture. They postulated that in traditional agriculture, only small areas of land are cultivated and the aim is to produce enough for the cultivators' own household consumption. The level of technology used in the production process is low. By contrast, modern agriculture would mean scaling up, mechanization and commoditization. In China, the teachers claimed, agriculture was still traditional and focused on providing people with enough income to be adequately 'clothed and fed'. The peasants' problem was only being able to cultivate a small area of land: someone with seven mu was poor, but someone with more land would be rich. Therefore, the state was now promoting 'scaling up'. A basic human 'quality' (*suzhi* 素质) was necessary to become rich and to overcome China's 'backward' agriculture. The new peasants needed to develop new kinds of consciousness for the modernization of agriculture: 'market consciousness', 'consciousness of scientific technology' and 'legal consciousness'.

Having just arrived in the village and being eager to learn about the images of agriculture presented by state officials, I was probably the most attentive person in the whole room. Most of the villagers seemed bored or like they were just passing the time. The only exception was on the village square, where a combine harvester for rice that was on display generated great interest and excitement among the participants. Everyone crowded around the machine, and several men and women asked the manufacturer's representative questions. When asked what the machine cost, he named such a high price that the whole group burst out laughing.

As the time for each session ran out, the door opened, and the organizer entered. The teachers then skipped parts of their prepared presentations and quickly finished. After each lecture they asked a single prepared question, and the villager who answered correctly received a prize, such as a bag of washing powder. Nevertheless, villagers only raised their hands reluctantly. After returning home for lunch, villagers gathered again in the afternoon, waited for the officials, confirmed their presence and attended the lectures. When the

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organizer announced the end of each morning and afternoon session, the lecture room emptied in a minute. In the afternoon, the officials who had been chatting and playing with their smartphones in the office next door while the other experts gave their lectures also immediately headed to their cars and left the village.

Participation as Paid Work

The group leaders promised the villagers monetary compensation when they recruited them for the agricultural bureau's agrotechnology training. On the last day, the county officials asked participants to come to the front individually and gave each 80 RMB, three packets of maize seeds and a booklet confirming their completion of the training. This ritualization of the end of the training appeared as a moment of balancing accounts after which both sides could leave and independently continue their own affairs.

One villager complained to me that 20 RMB per day was not enough. It was more important to work; for example, to dig up sweet potatoes, as he would normally do in that season. His wife participated in the training, and when it ended in the afternoon she immediately left the venue and went out to the fields to help him. He claimed that no one would have attended the training if the officials had not paid for attendance: villagers who worked in the nearby city could earn 100 RMB per day. From this perspective on labour, asking someone to attend a meeting without offering money for it might appear an utterly immoral proposition.

In contrast, Dong Jie and others connected with the New Rural Reconstruction Movement criticized the government practice of paying villagers for participating in agricultural trainings, charging that this demonstrated the trainings' uselessness and that peasants only participated for instrumental reasons. For them, genuine participation did not require a financial incentive. As we will see below, this idea became enacted as part of performing the NGO workshop as different from the training offered by the state.

Upholding a Distance between State and Peasant

In Dong Jie's view, the interaction between teachers and participants in the trainings of the agricultural bureau was very limited. In our conversations, he maintained that their teaching was not consistent with the kind of ecological agriculture the village aspired to. However, it was their job to spread this kind of information, and the state

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spent a lot of money on such useless trainings. Nevertheless, the township agronomist's closing statement on the last day of the training thanked the teachers for always getting up early to come to the village. He also thanked the participants, stressing that he understood that it was now the busy season for farming. He closed by inviting the villagers to reflect on what they had learned during those days based on their own perspectives and experience, as otherwise the effort of the teachers would have been for nothing. These comments did not challenge the higher-level officials directly but signalled to the villagers – and (maybe even more) to me, the anthropologist and food coop organizer – that his vision of agriculture was different from the state's. Dong Jie here promoted 'participatory education', but in contrast to his performances in front of urban middle-class citizens, he restrained from distancing himself discursively from 'the state' in front of higher-level officials and rural citizens on the stage of this formal meeting.

To the foreign ethnographer and Western-oriented urban middle-class consumers, Dong Jie othered the Chinese state as offering useless top-down education, thereby legitimizing his and the NGO's project of transforming the countryside. However, another interpretation of what Dong Jie criticized as 'limited' interaction between teachers and villagers, contrary to this negative image of top-down education, is possible. One might characterize it as focusing on the supply of information and therefore as a quasi-liberal approach to education that keeps a distance between the state and its citizens. The participants did not challenge the narrative of the experts, while the officials did not demand much more of them than registering, waiting and repeating back what the experts had told them when questioned at the end. By performing the training in this particular way, the state officials and the participants performed a clear boundary between the public sphere of the state and the private sphere of their agricultural ideas and practices. Participants in the training were not required to take a stance and defend it against experts in extensive discussions. Furthermore, the villagers were not forced to enter a cycle of reciprocity through more intensive social interaction such as sharing a meal with the officials, which might have added further moral pressure to perform conformity in group discussions, as we will see below.

Performing Civil Society in the Classroom

In June 2015, Dong Jie initiated and organized a workshop on 'sustainable living' and 'ecological agriculture' in Daxi Village, in cooper-

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ation with the Chengdu section of a Hong Kong-based community development NGO. I looked forward to the NGO workshop with interest, as I would finally get the opportunity to see Dong's participatory method in action. Here, I argue that the NGO workshop, in performatively distancing the training offered by the state, tried to eliminate the distance between the organizers and the participants – and between the teachers and the students – to create civil society and community.

Recruiting Peasants and Consumers as Civil Society

In the first preparatory meeting for the workshop in January 2015, Dong Jie, the NGO staff and consumer activists agreed that it was necessary to transform people's value through education to achieve sustainability and ecological agriculture. However, there was some disagreement about who should participate. After further discussion, they identified four potential constituencies as proper participants in the workshop: 'peasant households', 'local governments', 'enterprises' and 'consumers'.[10]

In June, about forty names appeared on the list of participants, and everyone was assigned one or two of the following identities: 'peasant friend',[11] 'ecological peasant friend', 'consumer', 'NGO' (using the English language acronym), 'collaborator', 'volunteer', 'student', 'teacher', 'researcher', 'ecological producer',[12] 'business owner' and 'government'. The list of participants was merely pinned to the information wall: unlike the agricultural bureau training described above, there was no formal performance of registration. Instead, some of the categories were used in an opening-day team-building ritual that I will describe below.

Most participants were categorized as peasant friends and ecological peasant friends. The recruitment of these peasants resembled the recruitment process for the agricultural bureau's training. A higher-level official – in this case Dong Jie – asked the leaders of five local villages to register two to four villagers each. For the villagers who were called on to participate by the group leaders, there was no difference between the two events: recruitment for both looked like a political demand from above, executed by village leaders, but this performance was not visible for urban middle-class participants to the workshop.

Besides the peasant participants, NGO staff and consumers took part in the workshop. Unlike the peasant friends, they were not recruited to fill a set quota. Dong Jie, the township agronomist, was the

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only participant listed as a government official, and Wen Erqiang, the local rice mill entrepreneur who cooperated closely with the peasant cooperative, was the only one listed as a business owner. In the first preparatory meeting, these latter two categories had been acknowledged as possible constituencies. However, in the following meetings Dong Jie and the NGO staff had apparently managed to achieve their desired mix of participants: peasants and consumers. Officials and entrepreneurs were largely excluded from their civil society performance as representatives of the state and the market. As I understand it, in order to avoid the category of 'business owner' among the participants, Dong Jie and the NGO staff decided not to invite certain individuals and also to create the category of 'ecological producer'. That category referred to individuals who owned a business and employed wage labour for their ecological agriculture. Calling them 'ecological producer' rather than 'business owners' suggests that they operated their business to translate the idea of the ecological into practice rather than 'only' to make a profit. I interpret this as an attempt to realize the image of civil society as a community of peasants and consumers, distanced from the state and the market.

Participation as Unpaid Commitment

During the four days of the workshop, one peasant household prepared food for all participants. The NGO reimbursed this household for the food, spending almost exactly the same amount of money each day on each participant's food that the agricultural bureau had paid them for one day's attendance. I interpret this as another way of avoiding the appearance of the profit motive within the food network. The NGO performed the authenticity of peasants' interest in their vision of ecological agriculture by refusing to pay them for their participation, even though they did not save money by doing this.

I encountered such ways of dealing with the question of monetary reward for ecological agriculture several times during my fieldwork in food networks in Sichuan, Henan and Shanxi Provinces. For example, a young man who had returned from working for a rural development NGO in Beijing to practise ecological agriculture in his home village in Henan recounted that urban consumers had wanted to buy some goats that an old villager had been pasturing in the space between the fields every day. He did not tell the peasants how much the consumers were willing to pay, because he reasoned that this information would encourage them to raise even more goats, undermining their ecological pasturing practice. In the process

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of converting to ecological agriculture, he had only allowed peasants to plant a very small parcel of ecological wheat in the first year and had required them to eat it themselves in order to understand that it was good. Only after they had understood the idea of ecological agriculture were they allowed to start selling commodities. He proudly emphasized how he imposed such rules on the peasants whom he was trying to organize in his home village.

Similarly, a leader of the cooperative association in Shanxi Province, a man in his early thirties, explained to participants in a workshop for rural social workers that the peasants were selling ecological products to them. However, the association only paid the peasants the market price for conventional products. Otherwise, he explained, the peasants would expect constant price increases and would suspect the association of reselling the commodities at even higher prices and keeping the difference. The free lunch offered during the NGO workshop in Daxi Village fits into this picture of performing peasant participants' untainted commitment to ecological agriculture.

A Stage for Civil Society

The NGO workshop took place at the office of the rice mill in the village. Participants who arrived early were included in preparing the stage for this civil society initiative. In contrast to the workshop offered by the agricultural bureau, the boundary between organizers as active and participants as passive was not maintained: the former did not keep the latter waiting while they finished the preparations. Instead, they encouraged participants to help with the work, shifting the responsibility for fulfilling predefined tasks to them. First, the big wooden executive tables and chairs had to be removed from the office. Then NGO staff asked participants to cover the floor with a kind of colourful foam mat designed for children to sit on. After this task was finished, everyone had to take off their shoes before entering the room. In the corners of the room, display boards introduced the village's cooperative. On one side, three empty flip charts were set up, representing the supposed openness of the discussions that were about to follow in contrast to the prepared presentation slides the teachers from the agricultural bureau used.

As I mentioned earlier, at the trainings of the county's agricultural bureau a lot of effort had gone into hanging a red banner above the front region of the assembly hall as a symbol of the socialist state and party. At the NGO workshop, there was no socialist symbolism. In the middle of the room, the NGO associate specifically responsible

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for the teaching methods prepared a low table covered with a yellow and blue cloth. On it, he arranged red, green and orange tea candles in the shape of the letters S, E and L. 'SEL' was the English-language abbreviation for the title of the NGO workshop 'sustainable and ecological living', which was never spoken in English during the workshop, only in Chinese. Hollow plastic lottery balls in these three colours, plus five additional balls in other colours, were placed on top of the candles. Each colour represented one of the prepared identity categories of a person, whose name was written on a piece of paper and placed inside the ball. A lamp that gave off soft diffuse light and produced fog was also placed on the table, creating a kind of mystical atmosphere.[13] This arrangement was finished off with a small figurine of a person standing in a humble posture in a grey bowl decorated with bluish-green flowers.

After all the participants were sitting in a circle on the floor, Dong Jie stood up, in front of the flip charts. Instead of a clearly marked 'front region' facing an audience in the 'back region' (Goffman 1956), the layout of the village committee's assembly hall, this layout appeared as a circle with a bulge. This stage design of a circle created the impression that the powerful space at the bulge might (at least potentially) shift to another person in the circle.

In his opening statement, Dong Jie explained that people with many different 'identities' would participate in this workshop and that everyone could offer a unique perspective.[14] Hence, he claimed, everyone would be a teacher as well as a student. Everyone was to think for themselves, develop independent ideas, and not simply accept what teachers said on faith. However, he also advised them not to completely disregard someone else's statements, because perspectives were not fixed but could change. He emphasized that they were not divided into students sat at the back and teachers at the front, as in school. Instead, a participatory form of education was intended. It had been a conscious decision not to meet at the village's assembly hall or school, where the meeting spaces were set up with front and back regions. I understand this as part of the attempt to create a distinct civil society style here in contrast to that state style of education.

After Dong Jie's introductory comments, an NGO staff member asked the participants to introduce themselves and to present their goals and expectations for the upcoming workshop. One by one, the participants were to stand up, walk to the table in the middle, take a ball from one of the candles, light the candle, introduce themselves, open the ball and read out the name of the next participant. In this initiation ritual, the placement of candles and balls in the centre of

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the room symbolized the community of the participants, while their arrangement in the shape of the letters of the English language abbreviation of the workshop's title suggested the identity of the participants in relation to each other, on the one hand, and the topic on the other. The topic of the workshop could only emerge if each person, with his or her specific identity, was in the right place in relation to the others. The workshop was thus presented as something not external to the participants but constituted by them: by civil society, as the organizers imagined it. The NGO staff appeared separately as blue balls below the letters, suggesting that they only had a marginal and supporting function. Dong Jie, on the other hand, had a pink ball placed in the middle of the red balls of the 'ecological peasant friends' forming the letter S, which suggested a central but organic leadership role among them.

While most community-building rituals were concentrated at the beginning of the workshop, attempts to create the image of a community continued throughout the four days. For the last day, NGO members had prepared a presentation with photos from the workshop. For the whole event, one of the NGO participants had been documenting every session with a camera. This way of mediatizing for oneself what one had just done was another method rural development NGOs in China frequently employed. This represented what the group had done together during the last few days as a successful and important process worthy of minute visual documentation: something worth remembering. In contrast, the agricultural bureau's training ended with a ritual of balancing accounts that symbolized the interaction's end and released the participants to go their separate ways with certificates bearing their names and confirming they had successfully completed the training. Again, the NGO performance avoided such bureaucratic techniques.

Instead, the photos represented a community that had grown together during their interactive participation, which had been both enjoyable and exhausting. The organizers intentionally designed the NGO workshop without long presentations by 'experts'. Although the distancing education the state offered had visibly bored some of the participants, others experienced the NGO's participatory education as intrusive. Several 'peasant friends' appeared uncomfortable and embarrassed when they had to introduce themselves and speak up in the form the NGO had prescribed. Although the declared aim was for all equally to be teachers and students, it was always one of the NGO members who finally summed up the discussion of each session. I recognized this pattern of presenting the established NGO

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perspective as the supposed synthesis of participatory discussion.[15] Despite different projects of ecological and modern agriculture, the actors who came to the village shared the desire to educate persons, whom they assigned to the category of peasants, who needed to learn about agriculture due to their position in the production process.

The Travel of Mao's Idea of the Mass Line

Sometimes Dong Jie, half-joking, half-serious, said that he liked to 'go down to the countryside' (*xiaxiang* 下乡). His colleagues likewise pointed out that he did this more often than other township officials. This term carries different meanings and positive as well as negative associations. For example, it was used by the county official at the agrotechnical training described above to refer to officials leaving their offices and visiting rural citizens to control them. Most (in)famously, millions of educated youth were sent 'Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside' for economic and educational purposes during the Cultural Revolution (Perry 2011: 32). I believe that Dong Jie and the other township officials always used the term half-jokingly to avoid being identified with or endorsing this historical period. But there was also a positive Maoist ideal that party cadres and state officials should pursue: they should 'communicate with the masses . . . in order to establish closer ties between the regime and the people', as they did during a largescale to-the-village campaign during the Yan'an period of the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1940s (Kelkar 1978: 57). In pursuing participatory education among peasants, Dong Jie was not acting outside of the state but performing as a good cadre and official who was immersed in the masses, even if he was using some strange educational methods.

Without any blurring of boundaries, Dong Jie and his participatory approach to agronomy could thus simultaneously be on the side of the state for his colleagues at the township and on the side of civil society for Western-oriented urban middle-class citizens. How was this possible? I suggest this is because he was not simultaneously on both sides of one boundary but that there were two differently performed state boundaries that relied on different repertoires of markers of difference.

Still, it is intriguing that Dong Jie's pursuit of peasant participation, which was inspired by models of the global participatory rural development buzz and avoided any socialist symbolism, reminded

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these township officials of Maoism. Ideas travel (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996), and maybe the 'mass line', the method of leadership Mao Zedong formulated in 1943,[16] has found its way back home. In the 1960s and 1970s, radicals in the Global North were not only inspired by Maoism but the participatory approach of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (Francis 2001: 75). Although other influences on Freire (2000) are often emphasized retrospectively, there are also several references to Mao Zedong in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For example, Freire quotes extensively from Mao's *Selected Works* (for example from *The United Front in Cultural Work*).[17] We can see that maybe Mao's mass line had returned in an altered way,[18] having been translated by radicals and then pulled into development NGOs and other organizations with the former activists' deradicalization in the 1980s and 1990s, the time when participation went mainstream in the development industry.

In this sense, what is, on the one hand, an import of Western liberal civil society that values a clear-cut state boundary may at the same time be a returning version of the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist aim to dissolve the boundary between state and society (Grzymala-Busse and Jones Luong 2002: 533–34). Of course, it has been translated into different terms (the masses are no longer classes but ahistorical producers and consumers of food; the leaders are no longer party cadres but NGO staff) and dressed in different clothes (with a lamp with soft diffuse light and a fog machine in a Westernized Buddhist-like team-building ritual replacing the red banners of Maoism). Furthermore, the boundary between the revolutionary (now in environmentalist rather than socialist terms) leader and the masses is now dissolved within a civil society performed in contrast with the socialist state and its 'useless' top-down education.

Conclusion: Segregated and Anaglyphic Multiplicity

This chapter analysed performances of peasant participation in educational activities through the lens of boundary work. Following Dong Jie's discursive boundary work, I studied agricultural trainings offered by the county's agricultural bureau and a Hong Kong-based NGO to identify the repertoire of stage designs, properties, costumes, characters, scripts and sequences used by Dong Jie and other organizers of the NGO workshop to distance 'the state' in performance.

Dong Jie and other actors in the food network associated organic certification negatively not only with modernity, the West, profit,

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science and top-down control of people and nature but also with the state. In contrast, they framed ecological agriculture positively – traditional, Chinese (or East Asian) and concerned with holistic relations between people and nature – and associated it with civil society and community. In their enactment of participatory education, they avoided foregrounding bureaucratic documents, replacing the state's registration ritual with team-building rituals. Instead of making citizens wait for the state, the NGO encouraged active engagement in setting up for the workshop. It avoided creating a spatial hierarchy separating citizens and officials into front and back areas and instead staged the event by arranging participants in a circle to create the impression that the powerful site of the speaker might potentially shift to anyone else in the next moment. Furthermore, it avoided state symbolism such as red banners. Instead of monetary compensation, it offered a free communal meal, which avoided the impression of having to pay for peasants' participation as the state did. Finally, instead of concluding with a ritual balancing of accounts that created no persistent relationships between the participants of the training offered by the agricultural bureau, a photo slideshow represented the community that supposedly had been built by the participants in the NGO workshop. Actors in the food network thus reversed or avoided negative state images, thereby producing legitimacy for their interventions in the countryside and sustaining support for their rural development project among Western-oriented urban middle-class consumers who were critical of the socialist state and its past interventions in people's lives. Moreover, some performances of state boundaries were not visible for the urban middle-class audience. Dong Jie, who initiated the NGO workshop, worked at the local township administration. For the trainings offered by the state and the NGO alike, he performed himself as being on the side of the state in order to activate a hierarchical chain of command for the recruitment of peasant participants.

Conversely, Dong Jie avoided explicit discursive distancing of 'the state' in front of higher-level colleagues and rural citizens as in the case of his closing speech at the county's agrotechnology training. Yet for those familiar with his repertoire of performative distancing, the use of certain terms – ecological instead of organic – or his specific way of giving banquets with simple, mostly vegetarian dishes – as described in the opening vignette of the introduction to this book – simultaneously marked a state boundary. For others, this version of the boundary between state and non-state remained irrelevant.

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I suggest that this case of multiple state boundaries can be instructive for an anthropology of the state that has long emphasized the blurring of the boundary and excelled in analyses of intermediaries. Sometimes the blurriness of the state boundary is merely the effect of social scientific research that retrospectively turns markers of difference into substances. Sometimes 'intermediaries' do not occupy 'in-between positions'. For his pursuit of peasant participation in rural development, officials at the township government valued Dong Jie as a rare instance of a good, if somewhat strange, cadre who would have made Chairman Mao proud. At the same time, for Western-oriented urban middle-class consumers these activities made him a precious part of a global civil society effort against a productivist state that supported the wrong kind of agriculture. Like Mao, the Hong Kong-based rural development NGO wanted to transform the 'whole' person and hopes to create new subjectivities. Both Mao and the NGO valued the perspectives of the masses and emphasized close interaction with them, but instead of performing the Marxist withering away of the state by dissolving the state–society distinction, the NGO emphasized civil society's distance from the state.

In this case, these two versions of the state boundary interacted without coming into conflict. This was made possible because of two different forms of multiplicity: segregated multiplicity and anaglyphic multiplicity. Segregated multiplicity may be the most banal constellation keeping different versions of state boundaries from colliding and creating tension. Performances of state boundaries rely on various elements such as stage designs, props, costumes, characters, sequences and dialogues. Certain elements of performed state boundaries can be (made) visible for one audience (or one part of the audience) and not another. For example, Dong Jie did not criticize 'the state' at the county's agrotechnology training. While he avoided certain monologues, his appearance still included other elements of the performed boundary between state and civil society. This is where anaglyphic multiplicity comes in.

Anaglyphic multiplicity emerges through the interplay of markers of state boundaries and audiences' familiarity with these markers. Anaglyphic images require both colour-coded images and colour-decoding glasses to make a three-dimensional image emerge. Without colour-decoding glasses, the superimposed red and cyan lines look strange but only viewed though special glasses they will together create a three-dimensional boundary. Dong Jie's references to the distinction between ecological and organic agriculture can only be decoded if one is familiar with how this distinction can be mapped

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on the distinction between civil society and state. The same is true for 'simple', vegetarian meals offered at the NGO workshop that to some marked civil society as alternative to the state but to others only appeared stingy and disrespectful.

My research thus explains how Dong Jie gained support for his vision of rural development from both local governments and from NGOs. It not only shows how his distancing of the state legitimized interventions in the countryside to a Western-oriented segment of the urban middle class critical of the interventions of an authoritarian state and the monetary support of a productivist state but also demonstrates that this performative distancing did not affect his position in the township government: the markers of the performed distinction were either not visible from there (segregated multiplicity), or, if in view, were not recognizable as such (anaglyphic multiplicity).

Notes

1. Of course, social scientists are not the only ones in the audience who retrospectively solidify state boundaries in this way. The multiplication of performed state boundaries over time is explored in the second part of this book.
2. These papers set out from the assumption that China is an 'authoritarian, yet neoliberal state with limited civil society involvement. . . . Unlike in the West where civil society-based initiatives have spearheaded the development of ecological agriculture, in China state intervention has played a much stronger role' (Scott et al. 2014: 158–59). '[R]ather than being rooted in a fertile civil society context . . . , AFNs [alternative food networks] emerged in China within the context of widespread food safety scares' (Si, Schumilas and Scott 2015: 310). '[T]here is a disconnect in values between the organizers of these AFNs and their customers. This disconnect is largely due to the fact that most AFNs in China were introduced from the west, rather than being indigenous initiatives with a broad social base. The lack of strong civil society organizations in China is also a contributing factor' (Si, Schumilas and Scott 2015: 309).
3. One of the main findings of the geographers Si Zhenzhong, Theresa Schumilas and Steffanie Scott (2015: 299) is that 'healthfulness of food is the most prominent element' in food initiatives in China. This resonates with what I observed in the food network I studied in Sichuan Province and in other projects I visited in other provinces.
4. The positioning of this table is interesting for thinking about how village 'self-governance' is performed in contrast to 'the state'. Here and at other villagers' group meetings, the spatial arrangement differed from that at assemblies hosted by the village committee. This meeting took

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place in the yard outside the home of a member of the villagers' group. This was not the group leader's house, although a special meeting of the village committee and all group leaders concerning 'environmental sanitation' – mainly keeping the roads, paths and yards clean – had once been held there. While the group leader's house was located slightly behind the other houses, at the bottom of a wooded hill, the one selected for this meeting was near the centre of the villagers' group. The rough circle of chairs in the yard included a sofa on the veranda and various wooden and plastic stools provided by the host family and neighbors. At one point in the circle there was a table for the group leader. On the other hand, meetings of the village committee of group leaders and villagers' representatives, like the one concerning the Minimum Livelihood Allowance that will be analyzed in Chapters 5 and 6, took place in an assembly room with a 'back region' containing identical chairs and tables for 'the masses' and a powerful 'front region' (Goffman 1956; Albert 2016: 44–46) with a single line of tables from which the village party secretary, the village leader, the other members of the village committee and any higher officials visiting the village addressed 'the people'. At the villagers' group meeting, these villagers performed the 'self-governing' character of the villagers' group written into the 'Organic Law of Village Committees' by arranging various seats into a circle with interchangeable tables. The centre of the circle was kept empty rather than a stage for the group leader as a central figure doubling and embodying the abstract notion of the community as a whole. A similar spatial arrangement was used when staging the 'participatory training' in contrast to the state's 'top-down' approach.

5. In Yan Yunxiang's (2012: 721) study of food safety in China, the informants also blame market actors for being 'too greedy' and criticize 'corrupt officials' for causing regulatory failures.
6. Chapter 2 studies how state boundaries were negotiated through performances of consumer participation in the food network. It also discusses how state certification was staged in the shop of a consumer association in Chengdu.
7. There were different voices on the question of certification. At conferences related to CSA and peasant cooperatives that I attended in 2013 and 2015, the issue of 'participatory certification' (*canyushi renzheng* 参与式认证) popped up every now and then, usually using the English acronym 'PGS', which refers to IFOAM's 'Participatory Guarantee System'.
8. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002: 987) argued, regarding the spatialization of the state, that '[t]he ability to transgress space (the prerogative of "higher" officers) was also a device of encompassment, as it was their position in the vertical hierarchy that gave officers the privilege of a particular kind of spatial mobility, a mobility whose function and goal was to regulate and discipline.'

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9. Dong Jie's critique of certification strikingly resembles arguments in Agro-food Studies. In the US context, for example, Julie Guthman (2004) has argued that pushes for certification significantly contributed to the 'conventionalization' of the organic farming movement.
10. These categories were, however, associated with different images. One of them imagined the peasants as uncaring vis-à-vis consumers and as needing education to improve their quality. An NGO staff member pointed out that peasants were also consumers, while another imagined the peasants as needing support. Yet another saw the peasants as common people in conflict with the government.
11. As far as I know, the term 'peasant friend' *nongyou* (农友) is fairly rare in contemporary everyday discourse. Even in the food network, it was almost never used. It is usually simply translated as 'peasant' but has also been used to refer to poor peasants, not in a derogatory sense but with reference to their revolutionary potential and their ability for self-organization. For example, the term is used in 'The Peasant's Song' (*nongyouge* 农友歌) from 'The East is Red' (*dongfang hong* 东方红), a revolutionary opera dating to the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. I decided to translate it more literally as 'peasant friend', since the second character implies a close relationship of friendship (*youhao* 友好). This translation is a good fit for the intention of NGOs and urban consumers in the food network, who aspired to create direct connections with rural agricultural producers.
12. Literally 'those who practise ecology' (*shengtai shijianzhe* 生态实践者).
13. One of the participants, a teacher living in Chengdu, identified as Christian and refused to participate in one of the more mystical community building rituals because she associated it with Buddhism. Her husband, one of 'those who practised ecological agriculture' (rather than 'owning business'), also had presented himself as a devout Christian on other occasions, but he still took part in this ritual while she waited outside of the room in the courtyard. Dong Jie himself commented that he did not mind the Buddhist symbolism, even though he often referred to Daoism in explaining his understanding of ecological agriculture and governance.
14. As discussed above regarding the list of participants and the balls containing the names of the participants, these identities were performed as confined and fixed as certain predefined categories emerging from certain images of civil society and community, which was distinguished from both the state and the market.
15. The aim of this chapter is not to reproduce existing critiques of participatory development. For one fierce example, see Cooke and Kothari (2001).
16. '[A]ll correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain

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these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge' (Mao 1965: 119).

17. 'Our cultural workers must serve the people with great enthusiasm and devotion, and they must link themselves with the masses, not divorce themselves from the masses. In order to do so, they must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. . . . There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them' (Mao quoted in Freire 2000: 94, Fn. 10).
18. Andrew G. Walder (1987: 158) argued that 'the reconstituted Western Maoism is very different from actually existing Maoism. In China, you could not have mass participation without the Mao cult. . . . In the West, you could pretend that the latter had no necessary connection with the former. In China, it had everything to do with the former: indeed, it defined what leading Maoists meant by the terms democracy, participation, and class struggle.'

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