

## Paul Kendall: The Sounds of Social Space: Branding, Built Environment, and Leisure in Urban China

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Paul Kendall is a lecturer in Chinese Studies and holds a Master degree in ethnomusicology. His research focuses on the relationships between place promotion, built environment, leisure, and ethnicity. His book *The Sounds of Social Space: Branding, Built Environment, and Leisure in Urban China* is mostly based on his 2010 field study that he conducted in Kǎilǐ (凯里, in the following written as Kaili). The location is a small Chinese county-level city with around 478,642 inhabitants (as of 2010). Kendall came to the self-proclaimed city of one hundred festivals to research the music of ethnic minorities and in search of the cultural authenticity that is promised by the city's branding. But soon he experienced a backlash as more and more people kept telling him to not waste his time in Kaili and rather go to the surrounding villages to experience true *mínzú* (民族; refers to Chinese ethnic minorities) culture (cf. p.14).

The theoretical groundwork of the book is heavily based on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad consisting of the perceived, conceived and lived space (cf. *The Production of Space*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 1992). But Kendall also considers other theories, mainly concerning space, such as Michel de Certeau's binary of temporal tactics and spatial strategies (cf. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University

of California Press, 1980). Of high importance is the term *shēng* (原生态; culturally authentic/original ecology) – a concept that is used to talk about the allegedly „unpolluted native“ (p.78) and that must be critically reflected. It describes the cultural authenticity that is promised by the city's branding and sought out by many Chinese due to the cultural identity crisis stemming from the cultural revolution during the Mao era.

In his search for *shēngtài* music, the author presents many personal encounters with different groups of musicians in Kaili. Reappearing interviewees are members of choirs (which mostly consist of middle-aged and elderly people), university students, such as the group K-Vox, as well as the owner of a karaoke restaurant, the Bright Star. The author analyses their behaviour, location in the city, and fluidity in both the groups itself but also within space, as well as administrative hierarchies. Furthermore, he compares the different vocal techniques like *mínzú* (民族) and *bel canto* style with methods of popular music that are more successful with the younger generation.

Paul Kendall's work is located in the field of ethnomusicology, which researches the cultural and social context of music rather than the elements of music theory itself. This explains

why factors like spatial organization, history, culture, and tourism are important topics in the book. He steps away from idol culture, which is a big component of modern music culture in China, and instead he pays attention to amateur music and lesser-known professionals – like a lead guitarist performing with his rock band at the Bright Star. Therefore, the book offers an original insight into music culture in Chinese everyday life in small cities such as Kaili. Thanks to the detailed retelling of Kendall's experiences during his trip to the city, the reader can almost experience the culture first hand. *Sounds of Social Space* was published in the category of Urban Studies/Anthropology but it also relates to Media Studies, as the publication explores the cultural, societal, and branding aspects of music. Overall, the book can be recommended across many fields, even if one is not an expert in ethnomusicology or Chinese Studies. The frequently used

Chinese words are written in a Roman script making them easy to read for everyone, even though this may be a weak point for those who are familiar with the language. Opposite to *pinyin* (拼音; the phonetic writing, which I opted to use in this review), Kendall's book does not offer any instructions on correct pronunciation, nor which characters coincide with the word. This results in the loss of the meaning and origin of some words. Other than this minor flaw, which may only be noticeable to Chinese native speakers, the book is beautifully written and edited, enriched with photos taken in Kaili and excerpts from interviews to create a eclectic publication. For researchers it offers a great starting point to deepen the study of how music and other media are intertwined with spatial structures and affected by branded spaces.

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