Abstract

The thesis is an ethnographic description of a climate change mitigation campaign among retirees in the urban residential community Dongping Lane in central Hangzhou, and an examination of local understandings of connections between everyday life in the community and global climate change. Conceived under the heading low-carbon life, the campaign brings together community officials and retired residents who volunteer to participate.

Based on eight months of fieldwork, the ethnography takes a series of proposed changes to everyday life consumer practices, introduced by the campaign organizers, as a point of departure for an examination of what happens when a requirement to save energy and resources, as a response to global climate change, encounters local ways of knowing the world.

Developed through meetings, workshops, competitions and the promotion of exemplary individuals, the campaign is conceived as part of wider state-sponsored efforts to foster civilized behavior and a sense of belonging to the residential community among urban citizens in China. The campaigners connect unspectacular everyday consumer practices with climate change and citizenship by showing that among them, making contributions to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is becoming part of what it means to be a good citizen.

When the campaigners in Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life, they rarely talk explicitly about global climate change. Instead they connect their low-carbon life practices with concerns over health, comfort and convenience. Conceived as pleasurable, easy to approach, and good for the body, low-carbon life comes to be seen as a series of hobby-like activities that residents can engage in as part of their quests for good and meaningful lives in old age.

Campaigners engage in trans-historical and cross-cultural comparisons, contrasting their campaign efforts with the mass-mobilization campaigns of the Mao era as well as with approaches to consumption and climate change in other places and among other groups of people. Through these comparisons they make sense of their own present engagements and of their place in the world.
Focusing on the various ways in which campaigners seek to further their understanding of low-carbon life, the thesis examines how they use comparisons, connections, examples and evaluations as means of making the climate change mitigation practices of the campaign sensible and meaningful to their particular ways of knowing the world.