

Righteous Revolutionaries: Morality, Mobilization, and Violence in the Making of the Chinese State

Jeffrey A. Javed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 312 pp. \$34.95 (pbk). ISBN 9780472055494

Le Tao

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

Email: taolet@sfu.ca

Land reform was an integral part of the Chinese communist movement. Previous scholarship has established that after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 land reform involved collective violence and that it was significant in communist China, not only for the redistribution of land. Reflecting and building upon these consensus, Jeffrey A. Javed's book, *Righteous Revolutionaries*, makes fresh contributions to the field.

The book elaborates a novel model to explain how collective violence was mobilized in China's post-1949 land reform. Javed argues that, instead of selectively rewarding participants or exploiting pre-existing conflicts, the Party harnessed moral norms that had long been shared within a rural community to rouse collective violence against local elites. First, cadres did "moral boundary work" (pp. 60–62), citing or framing previous moral transgressions by landed elites or other local powerholders to depict them as the evil out-group, in contrast to the righteous in-group composed of the peasants. Second, "moral theatrics" (pp. 62–64), such as speaking bitterness, were used to dramatize the alleged transgressions, generating strong emotions among peasants: outrage against the out-group and sympathy toward fellow in-group members. Third, cadres carefully orchestrated struggle sessions in which peasants unleashed their strong emotions, resulting in collective violence against targeted local powerholders. This three-step process was recursive, as collective violence would reinforce the moral boundary demarcated in the first step.

Javed's book persuasively highlights this moral mobilization of collective violence as a state-building effort. It morally discredited the old elites in rural China, depriving them of their remaining symbolic power. They were delegitimized not only as individual powerholders, but also as the landlord class; the moral boundary work involved deliberately attaching the alleged moral transgressions to the category of landlord. The Party thus popularized its ideology in the "newly liberated" countryside and established its moral authority there.

Javed supports this new interpretation with sources about the region administered by the East China Bureau during the land reform campaign (1950–1952). Based on statistical analyses over a data set he hand-codified from 250 county gazetteers from that region, Javed argues that moral mobilization is the best explanation of land-reform collective violence there. He also cites a large number of archival documents, personal diaries and oral-history interviews to illustrate how the process exactly unfolded in that region. Specifically, Javed has made insightful observations that highlight the contrast between Huaibei, which was low in landholding inequality and in landlord-tenant conflict, and Jiangnan, which was the opposite, although both localities were under the jurisdiction of the East China Bureau. Curiously, it was in the more equal Fengyang County of Huaibei, not in the more unequal Baoshan County of Jiangnan, that the rate of households receiving the "landlord" label was significantly higher (p. 134). Moreover, as observed by Javed, moral boundary work in Fengyang, where most victims of collective violence were not landlords, tended to cite "norms of benevolence," which were to govern relationships between local political elites and the community (pp. 135–136). In contrast, moral boundary work in Baoshan, where most victims were landlords, tended to cite "norms of

propriety,” which were to govern landlord-tenant relations (pp. 136–137). Such findings add sophistication to the book.

Hints for future research can also be gathered from this insightful book. For Javed, one major fruit of moral mobilization was the popularization of the Party’s ideology in rural China. Essential to that ideology were the boundaries between the peasant class and the landlord class. On the one hand, Javed argues that the job was done by “[imbuing these new boundaries] with moral content using familiar normative appeals” (p. 61). On the other hand, he finds that most struggle targets in Fengyang, which he considers representative of Huaibei, were not landlords (p. 149). At first, it seems to be an inconvenient fact that contradicts Javed’s argument: when most alleged moral transgressors were not labelled as landlords, how could the Party convincingly tie the quality of moral corruption to the category of landlord? To be fair, Javed did touch upon this question when writing about the “sequencing strategy” (pp. 84–86). But the strategy was adopted not only in Huaibei but also in Jiangnan, where most alleged moral transgressors did receive the “landlord” label. So, a complete answer to the question should demonstrate what extra efforts were taken in Huaibei to successfully establish among peasants a credible connection between moral corruption and the landlord class, despite the fact that most struggle targets there were not labelled as landlords. Moreover, these extra efforts might or might not be part of the land reform campaign, and this point has important implications for researchers. The “anti-tyrant, anti-bandit” campaign that preceded the land reform in Fengyang, according to Javed, also employed moral mobilization of collective violence (pp. 147–148), and the land reform there overlapped temporally with the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries. For the same group of implementers on the ground, the boundaries between these campaigns might be quite blurred, if not non-existent. Taking them as a whole to test the moral mobilization model is likely to be fruitful.

doi:10.1017/S0305741023000565

Law as an Instrument: Sources of Chinese Law for Authoritarian Legality

Shucheng Wang. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2022, xv + 223 pp. £85.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781009152563

Björn Ahl

University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany
Email: bjoern.ahl@uni-koeln.de

“Where do we find law in China?” is a question that students of Chinese law ask at the beginning of their studies. This seems to be a question with a straightforward answer. However, as Shucheng Wang demonstrates in his recent book, what kind of norms can be considered to be legal norms is a very complex question. His book is timely and relevant, given that China’s post-2013 legal development is not only characterized by human rights regression but has also seen an emphasis on legality and professionalization of legal institutions.

In the introduction, the author sets out one of his main theses by stating that national statutes are not as important for the decision of cases by the Chinese courts as judicial interpretations of the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) or other judicial documents, both of which are regarded as *de facto* primary sources of law (p. 7). With this thesis, Wang takes a realist approach that implies