

and examines how a changing institutional context “alters the opportunities and constraints faced by the policy actors” (p. 20), a more structured discussion on the exact opportunities and constraints would have been helpful. At times, the book includes claims that are broad without strong supporting evidence. For instance, Huang argues that China will not rise globally “if its people continue to breathe polluted air, drink toxic water, and eat tainted food” (p. 186). This is something of a head-scratcher because China *has* risen over the past decades despite domestic environmental pollution. Nevertheless, Huang’s assessment that the Chinese state is both resilient and fragile is of course true and fits nicely in the global debate on the implication of China’s rising power for the global world order.

In sum, Huang has made an important scholarly contribution to our understanding of the Chinese state’s bureaucratic capacity to tackle its continuing environmental health crisis. The book’s main takeaways on the limits of China’s state capacity are as timely as ever in the current Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic we have seen that there are strengths and limits to China’s coercive state capacity – the state used its centralized power to make decisions quickly while local governments implemented the “zero-Covid” mandatory lock-down policies very fiercely. While Beijing demonstrated its state-directed mobilization and coercive capacities, the top-down response came at high social and economic costs. Huang makes an important point that despite China’s high state capacity and mandate-driven implementation capacity, it is unclear if it has sufficient mobilization and cooperation capacity to address the environmental health problems in the near future. Huang’s book combines rich knowledge and profound insight about China’s environmental health crisis and it should be treated seriously by those interested in understanding more about the Chinese state’s environmental health crisis and government response.

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*Chinese Environmental Law*

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Chinese environmental law, like many things in China, has undergone dramatic change in the reform era. Early research on this area of law documented China’s burgeoning environmental crisis and the frequent failure of law on the books to translate into genuine performance in practice. Scholars have thoroughly documented the institutional and political dynamics that led to weak legal implementation and enforcement. In the last decade, China has substantially elevated the policy priority of environmental protection. Leaders have vigorously promoted a notion of “ecological civilization” and sought to transition China’s economy toward “high-quality” growth. This shift in priority has been accompanied by a torrent of new environmental laws, regulations, administrative measures, judicial interpretations, plans and policies. The level of activity has been difficult even for specialists to track.

In this context, Yuhong Zhao’s book, *Chinese Environmental Law*, is an indispensable treatise on Chinese environmental law that documents both historical

developments and legal reforms in this more recent period through February 2020. While there are treatises of this sort in Chinese, this is the best and most comprehensive overview I have seen of Chinese environmental law and legal institutions in the English language.

The book consists of three sections. Chapters one and two serve as an introduction to China's environmental crisis, sources of law, and the key institutions of environmental protection. Chapters three through eight each cover a particular law or issue area – the framework Environmental Protection Law, environmental impact assessment, air pollution, water pollution, waste management and soil contamination. Chapters nine to 12 describe Chinese environmental torts, administrative law, criminal law and public interest litigation.

The coverage here is impressive. Notably, Zhao has managed to capture the ferment of Chinese environmental law development in the Xi era. This includes major developments such as the action plans on air, water and soil and the establishment of public interest litigation, which have garnered sustained attention from outside observers. It also includes coverage of the range of lesser-known institutional and regulatory reforms that have emerged from China in the last decade, including environmental permits, environmental taxes, ecological compensation schemes, environmental insurance rules, total pollution control, designation of key regions, the river chief system, equal accountability of Party and government leaders, the expansion of environmental crimes, the proliferation of environmental tribunals, and bans on the import of solid waste. If you are not sure what some of these are, this book offers an explanation. For those who have been studying Chinese environmental law over the years, this book reminds us just how much work has gone on in China to construct a comprehensive environmental law regime.

At the same time, there are omissions. Significantly, there is virtually no mention of climate change. This may be because China has not yet passed a climate change law or an omnibus climate change regulation. Moreover, President Xi announced China's 2060 carbon neutrality target in September 2020, after this manuscript was submitted. Yet, China has been active in climate change planning and policy for many years. The book rightly introduces plan and policy documents (along with law) in the context of other issue areas and the book could have discussed these and as-yet-incomplete efforts to pass a climate change law. The book also does not cover "green" environmental issues like endangered species or habitat protection, nature reserves, ecological redlines and resource protection. The coverage here is firmly within the traditional realm of "brown" (pollution-related) issues. Zhao may just be adhering to conventional field-related line drawing among Chinese scholars, but the omissions are worth noting.

As is typical of treatise-style treatments of law, the book is not overt in forwarding a particular argument about Chinese environmental law; the work presents itself as an encyclopedic treatment of a body of law. Yet, the structure of the book and discussion of law and institutions implicitly support certain narratives that are contested in other scholarship.

For example, in mainly cataloguing the (admittedly impressive) flowering of Chinese environmental law, the book fits squarely within official narratives that treat China's legal construction as evidence of the merits of a top-down, state-driven system. Relatively limited space is devoted to the role of environmental groups and citizens. Problems of implementation or enforcement that are the subject of much other scholarship also receive relatively little discussion (although the book helpfully highlights a large number of litigation case studies as a way to shed light on law in practice).

To be fair, the focus on state (as opposed to citizen) action reflects the direction of things on the ground in China. And the limited treatment of implementation is a product of both the newness of some of the developments described and an indication of just how much more research needs to be done. In a period where field research in China has become much more difficult (due to Covid-19 and shifting political dynamics), our understanding of Chinese environmental regulation in practice has narrowed. I have written elsewhere about how continuous cycles of reform coupled with uncertainty about actual performance can create a sort of “symbolic legitimacy” for the Chinese party-state.

As a book in the comparative law space, it is also worth noting that this volume only glancingly addresses how we should understand the very role of law within the Chinese system. To its credit, the book covers state and Party policies and plans and notes that “Chinese law is highly policy oriented and environmental law is no exception” (p. 28). Yet this seems to underplay the role of Party plans and policies and the importance of bureaucratic mobilization through cycles of five-year plans. And it may overstate the role of law within the Chinese system. This is not a simple question, to be sure, but some sense of the author’s views on this issue would have been welcome.

In the end, this book is a terrific contribution to a growing body of research, and an essential resource for anyone interested in Chinese environmental law. It has organized a tremendous amount of material and will serve as the launching point for many new research projects to come.

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*Remains of the Everyday: A Century of Recycling in Beijing*

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The need to engage with Joshua Goldstein’s *Remains of the Everyday: A Century of Recycling in Beijing* may not be apparent at first. For anyone interested in understanding China’s modern waste recycling challenges, there are a plethora of writings on the subject that have appeared since around 2017. A fair share of this surge in academic engagement can be attributed to the emphasis and attention that the central government and Xi Jinping himself have dedicated to matters of waste management, the circular economy, ecological civilization and zero-waste cities. Given that context, Goldstein’s publication is very timely as it captures the scientific and political zeitgeist at a critical stage. Yet, far from replicating what has become the commonplace canon (recycling performance analyses, formalistic modelling, etc.), Goldstein’s work, which arguably constitutes the most encompassing analysis of recycling in Beijing and by extension urban China to date, offers something decisively different.

In contrast to the dominant analyses from the engineering and economic fields, Goldstein tackles Beijing’s recycling challenge from a historical perspective with a political-economical toolbox that gets as close as is possible to recycling practitioners and the (discarded) material. The result is a thorough exploration of recycling