

As the author himself notes at one point in the Introduction, this story of the early Chinese court takes us beyond the notion of “bureaucratic creep in a classic Weberian sense” (10). The last chapter of the book makes clear that the bureaucracy of the Han was “invented” out of a convergence of political calculus and literary engagement, not the result of rationalization of a once magical but increasingly disenchanting worldview in early China, as Max Weber argued more than a century ago. It would have been instructive to hear more explicitly Habberstad’s assessment of—or confrontation with—this old paradigm. I am also curious to hear what this startlingly new picture of the Han empire may mean for comparative studies of the old empires of the ancient world. How would we now situate early imperial China in world history, if the old measure of rational bureaucratization is rendered hollow in favor of a history of political particulars? I eagerly look forward to seeing how Habberstad may flesh out these various implications of this greatly adventurous book in his future publications.

A Frontier Made Lawless: Violence in Upland Southwest China, 1800–1956

By Joseph Lawson. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019. 288 pp. \$35.00 (paper).

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Joseph Lawson’s *A Frontier Made Lawless* was written primarily to address “one of the most important questions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese history” (8): the relationship between regional violence and large-scale warfare that catastrophically disrupted state and society for so much of the period. He legitimately questions standard explanations centered on explosive population growth that the state—locally corrupted by paramilitarized opium production—could not manage.

The introduction critically considers the foundational assumptions behind these conventions through a more diversified understanding of the types of violence that pervaded the region of Liangshan in southwestern China. Although the author claims that the book “is not a comparative study” of a uniquely violent Liangshan (5), he keeps a consistent eye on contrasts with other Chinese provinces and borderlands—including Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, Guizhou, and Yunnan—throughout the book, and maintains an even more persistent attention to the generally destabilizing influence of the central state as it made its turbulent transition from the dynastic Qing to Republican China.

Thus, Liangshan becomes an unusual southwestern region where there was minimal violence arising from land scarcity and where Han migration into indigenous borderlands was not the central cause of conflict. Instead, Lawson identifies three major instances of large-scale, extra-regional violence—the Taiping “War,” early Republican

interprovincial conflict, and Japan's invasion of China—as undermining Liangshan's own home-grown contrivances for containing violence, especially over land resources.

Chapter 1 re-interprets land disputes—a paradigmatic source of violence throughout southwestern China. Lawson rejects standard “Malthusian” explanations for this violence and instead identifies a failure of human institutions for conflict mediation that, along with ill-conceived Qing and Republican developmental schemes, allowed conflict to flourish. The source of conflict was, consequently, “cultural-political,” rather than environmental (12).

This is a relatively unqualified dichotomy, lacking in ecological nuance, that problematically informs Lawson's often usefully revisionist perspective throughout the book. As described by Martin Schoenhals, modern Liangshan's Nuosu population generally live at agriculturally—and even pastorally—forbidding elevations between about 6,500 to 9,800 feet, with Han almost inevitably occupying the more arable lowlands. As a result, even today Nuosu farmers remain among China's poorest. Such potentially explosive environmental intersections of society and ecology are insufficiently considered in *A Frontier Made Lawless*. Lawson's critique of reductive arguments—often made by Qing governors—about land scarcity that assume overpopulation was the only significant obstacle to regional agriculture is itself a bit reductive. The current plight of Liangshan Nuosu instead demonstrates that there are stark ecological constraints on the region's agricultural possibilities—whatever the social dynamics at whichever point in history.

As his perceptive discussion of forest cover and indigenous hunting shows, Lawson by no means ignores environmental relationships. However, there is far more scope for ecology's effects on human relations than his main arguments allow, even as he rightly observes that “standards of living everywhere are limited by a mixture of ecological, social, cultural and political factors” (60).

To some extent, researchers may reasonably disagree over culture–nature dichotomies, but it is impossible to dispute that southwestern biomes happened to constitute ideal habitats for uniquely profitable commercial cultivars like poppy, and that they were characterized by mountainous terrain and malarial dynamics that constrained infrastructural development well into the twentieth century. These ecological checks on human agency cannot be summarily dismissed in favor of people-centered commercial and political constructs as the main—indeed exclusive—sources of regional violence. There is more than adequate evidence to argue that the roots of regional human conflict were environmental (i.e., cultural and ecological) without reducing them to merely Malthusian structures. Lawson does not absolute deny this, but he does not add a sufficient amount of ecological nuance to *A Frontier Made Lawless's* key contention that Liangshan violence thrived in a legal vacuum.

Chapter 2 focuses on his first case of influential violence beyond Liangshan—the mid-nineteenth century Taiping War. In a Liangshan variation of a standard devolution of central military power to localities, “rudimentary highland state building” ensued (13). This involved weak state mobilization of Nuosu, who were exploited by Nuosu elites for their own local agendas—justified to central authorities as part of operations against dynastic “rebels.” Lawson's main point is that this opportunistic violence would not have emerged without the Taiping War, which spread state devolved violence across China into Nuosu Liangshan just as into Muslim Xinjiang and Gansu. Such persuasive comparative interventions—at both the provincial and central levels—is one of the strengths of *A Frontier Made Lawless*.

In Chapter 3, Lawson challenges opium as the conventional explanation for regional violence in the Qing and Republic. He contends that regional opium production “did comparatively little to fuel violence until the 1940s,” but instead argues that—if anything—opium was a benefit to Nuosu livelihood (13). Lawson rightly concludes that opium poppy was grown in Liangshan not because the region was a “lawless haven beyond the reach of the state” but because “of factors related to the natural environment” (108)—namely that Liangshan’s mountainous terrain was ill-suited to most other agricultural practices, but quite congenial for high quality, profitable poppy.

There are, nevertheless, a few qualifications applicable to Lawson’s skepticism regarding opium violence, which certainly may be exaggerated. During the Qing, Nuosu enclaves were under semi-autonomous “native chieftain” (*tusi*) jurisdiction that legally put them beyond the reach of state operatives under almost all circumstances—including those of poppy eradication. Within roughly sixty years, congenial cultural and ecological conditions transformed Sichuan into the world’s largest opium producer. By 1895, provincial revenue derived from opium was likely being underreported—according to figures cited by Liu Zenghe—by about 57 percent.

By the Republican period such hidden wealth helped make fiscally possible many warlord mini-state successors of the Qing—especially in the southwest, where poppy cultivation was centered. Qin Heping, whose book-length treatment of Sichuan opium production does not appear in Lawson’s bibliography, even held that opium was the economically decisive factor in the continued existence of warlord regimes. The foundations of this critical—perhaps even existential—warlord opium revenue were laid during the late Qing under unequal treaty provisions. Legalized opium revenue—the single largest source of customs taxes—provided dynastic debt servicing via the collection activities of the semi-colonial Imperial Maritime Customs Service, which took over key Qing revenue collection duties during the administrative chaos of the Taiping War.

In sum, it may be true that there was little localized drug traffic violence on the part of Nuosu poppy-growers in Liangshan between the onset of southwestern cultivation in the 1820s and the 1940s. However, opium revenue—partly realized through the regionally external dynamic of imperialist relations during the Taiping War—that was rooted in the main producer provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan funded a great deal of institutionalized, multi-ethnic lawlessness on regional, national, and global scales. Lawson’s analysis—admirably comparative on both multi-provincial and national scales in many other respects—is uncharacteristically constrained by the confines of Liangshan and by his narrow conception of drug violence when applied to opium here.

Chapter 4 covers Liangshan’s next major period of violence, during the 1910s, when interprovincial warfare broke out in the wake of the Qing demise and the onset of warlord rule. Lawson instructively compares the dynamics of period conflict to contemporary imperial transitions occurring in Europe and Anatolia, noting in contrast that Liangshan groups were mobilized along economic—rather than along ideological nativist and nationalist—lines. He emphasizes that opposing groups were also formed from clan, not ethnic, differences, although Han tended to operate in agricultural societies—originally formed for frontier colonization purposes—in cooperation or conflict with Nuosu clans. These restive groups were recruited by weak state structures to maintain security, but also negotiated among themselves. By the mid-1920s a nominal peace prevailed in Liangshan under its bicultural warlord, Deng Xiuting, that would last into the mid-1940s. Deng relied on local, multi-ethnic notions of law and custom that might seem chaotic to outsiders, but Lawson argues that violence was brought under

significant control in a manner similar to that effected by Colombian paramilitaries during the 2000s. This admittedly militarist construct was only destabilized by the return of the Republican state, which inflamed inter-ethnic violence through suppression of Nuosu poppy cultivation in the 1940s.

Chapter 5 considers a regionally distinct mode of violence. Captive-taking for ransom and forced labor appears virtually traditional, with some records indicating that it could be more prevalent than killing in certain periods. Lawson nevertheless emphasizes that both Nuosu and Han took captives for various purposes—despite standard Han denunciations of Nuosu “slave society” as justification for violence against indigenous peoples. Indeed, Han local administration quickly modified captive-taking for its own putatively legitimate purposes by establishing jails to temporarily confine elite Nuosu hostages to ensure their enclave’s good behavior, resulting in an array of further abuses.

Here, Lawson again effectively employs a comparative approach to note the persistence of hostage-taking in imperial Chinese practice, the Ming state’s literal kidnapping of southwestern indigenous boys to serve as eunuchs, and the Qing state’s routine military practice of taking prisoners for servitude. He could have added the seventeenth-century hostage raids by Tsarist Cossacks in search of sable pelt ransoms in the north-eastern Qing frontier’s Amur basin—a variant of the Russian tradition of *amanat* employed against non-Christian peoples whose oaths were not trusted. Nevertheless, his analysis more than adequately demonstrates how violence, like hostage-taking, was relativized along ethnic lines of Nuosu “savagery” and Han “civilization.”

Chapter 6 examines Liangshan’s third major period of violent external destabilization, during World War II. The war displaced huge numbers of eastern China residents—and even the capital of the Republic itself—to Sichuan. As a result, central authorities were able to directly intervene in the province for the first time. Among a variety of resources exploited for the war, opium was uniquely disruptive, as it was increasingly used as a more stable and available currency with which to pay Republican troops. Locally influential Han poppy cultivators did manage to redirect plundering soldiers away from their own crops into Nuosu fields. Thus, the fragile local order established in the 1920s disintegrated into Nuosu–Han conflict—often justified by the state as attempts to “modernize” the “savage” Nuosu. Significantly, Lawson shows this violent resurgence occurred not because of the absence of the state—as per the standard historical narrative—but because of its unprecedentedly direct and disruptive presence.

The concluding “Coda” chapter briefly covers the early PRC period, when the state successfully established an unprecedented degree of local control through more technically upgraded military and administrative apparatuses. Most of the chapter, however, usefully considers Liangshan violence in world historical perspective as a comparative example and as an implication for social theory. Comparatively, the region exhibited many of the “crisis-begets-crisis” patterns also visible in Latin America and some Ottoman lands, as well as manifested typically aggressive settler extractions of indigenous resources and take-overs of markets. In terms of social theory, Lawson stresses that the chain of crises behind Liangshan violence cannot be reduced to exclusively local or center causes, arguing that the Liangshan experience obscures such distinctions. This dynamic problematizes analytical frameworks that favor either strong state building (Weber) or extreme localized decentralization (James Scott) as the solution to bring violence under control.

Somewhat paradoxically, *A Frontier Made Lawless* tends to reject both forms of “necessitarian thinking” while strongly asserting the necessity of a legal institution to resolve property disputes. It may be more helpful to consider Liangshan institutions not so much as a “worn machine”—problematically, yet functionally, connected to a larger and cranky state mechanism as Lawson concludes—but as a complex organic system whose whole is intermittently and unpredictably greater than the sum of its interacting parts. *A Frontier Made Lawless* nevertheless constructively reconsiders some of the truisms of the history of southwest China well-beyond Liangshan.

Shang Yang, The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China

Edited and translated by Yuri Pines. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. viii + 351 pp. \$60 (cloth).

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For nearly two decades, a first edition of J.J.L. Duyvendak’s *The Book of Lord Shang: A Classic of the Chinese School of Law* has occupied a revered space on my bookshelf. Though its blue binding is worn and scratched, and its rough cut pages filled with my own commentary and illuminated with colorful sticky notes, the book served me well throughout the writing of my master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation. There are two main reasons for the continued relevance of Duyvendak’s translation since its initial publication in 1928. The first is the quality of analysis and translation. Working within the limitations of his time, Duyvendak managed to produce an erudite study of a much neglected philosophical text by drawing upon the “latest” advances in the linguistic approaches to textual analysis. The second reason is the overall lack of scholarly interest in Shang Yang and the text attributed to him. Throughout much of China’s long history texts ascribed to “Legalists” and “Legalism” were often shunned in favor of texts boasting a Confucian or Daoist pedigree. Thus, while Duyvendak’s translation has served as *the* English-language translation for nearly a century, other texts such as the *Analekts* and *Daodejing* have been subjected to numerous translations, analyses, and reinterpretations. After centuries of neglect, Shang Yang now has a new champion. Yuri Pines, known for his work on the philosophical traditions in pre-imperial and early imperial China, has published *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China* (2017), a text that brings the study of Shang Yang, Legalism, and the *Shang jun shu* into the twenty-first century.

As a testament to the continued influence of Duyvendak’s original work, Pines’s own text is similarly divided into two large sections. The first section, comprised of four chapters, provides the necessary context and analysis for understanding textual history of the *Book of Lord Shang* and its putative author. The initial chapter, “Shang Yang and