

adds a swath of irony, for he begins with an allegorical critique of Chinese journalism that finds a major fault of typical news reporting in China to be “lack of attribution” (p. xiii).

The problem of lack of citations is most glaring in the first four chapters, which offer an overview of China’s media, characterized overall as a well-oiled machine producing predictable fare designed to promote and legitimate Party power, with detailed elaboration and many examples that introduce nuance and subtlety but never retreat from the overriding thesis. Woven through this background section are many conversations the author has held with undefined numbers of unnamed journalists, compounding the lack of specificity in sourcing; these informants generally are introduced as one or another reporter, as in “One old-time reporter I talked to...” (p. 5) or “One former Xinhua reporter I talked with...” (p. 12). Maintaining anonymity reinforces the idea that disclosing the inner workings of the propaganda machinery or, worse yet, criticizing its workings could draw retribution. The absence of clarification as to time, place or circumstance of these conversations, meanwhile, makes it impossible to gauge whether the interviewing was systematic, serendipitous or otherwise.

Nine subsequent chapters present case studies of Chinese media coverage of specific topics arising since the founding of the People’s Republic, ranging from the Korean War and the “liberation” of Tibet to the Cultural Revolution, Nixon’s 1972 visit and Mao’s death to the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and *falun gong*. Here, Young should be commended for his enterprise in reviving important historical episodes and raising interesting questions. His research is seriously constrained, however, by his reliance in most instances on one single media source per topic – *People’s Daily* or another Party newspaper; consequently (although an argument might be made for the representativeness of *People’s Daily* in certain periods), the studies provide little basis for generalizability across media or comparability across time. He offers some catchy labels for recurring motifs he discovers, such as “public announcement” formats and “guerrilla-style” coverage, that confuse more than clarify, and makes overly generous inferences about origins, purposes and likely effects.

Lest I be accused – as a member of that very community of international scholars studying media in China whose work I wish this author had consulted more closely – of sour grapes, let me emphasize that nothing makes me happier than new understandings of the subject preoccupying me for most of my academic career. I consider this book a good effort and an interesting read – despite a great deal of redundancy and a penchant for turns of phrase (out of the blue, bang for the buck, force to be reckoned with...) in need of stronger editorial abridgement – that unfortunately lends ammunition to outmoded conventional wisdom. It represents a considerable drift – if not a great leap – backward.

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*Environmental Litigation in China: A Study in Political Ambivalence*

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Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013

300 pp. £60.00; \$99.00

ISBN 978-1-107-02002-3 doi:10.1017/S0305741013000842

Ten years ago, when I told people I was writing a book on intellectual property in China, they joked that it must be a very short book. Such a response betrays a

view which privileges outcomes while ignoring political, economic, social and normative structures and processes. In China, however, the former tend to be rather modest, while the latter are manifold, complex, contradictory, and critical to understanding state institutions and societal dynamics. Rachel Stern, too, focuses on process rather than on outcomes in her illuminating new book, *Environmental Litigation in China*, which she uses as a wormhole through which to document China's broader legal developments over the past dozen years.

Drawing from an extensive pool of English- and Chinese-language primary and secondary sources, internal documents and close to 200 interviews, Stern literally takes us into the courts, legal clinic offices and smoke-filled backrooms; as well as into the thought processes of the various actors – judges, lawyers, plaintiffs, defendants – involved in environmental litigation. Her principal argument is that the Chinese state is marked by a significant degree of ambivalence to which legal actors respond, often navigating, sometimes exploiting, as a way of overcoming traditional dilemmas of authoritarian regimes' approach to law.

Stern eschews a traditional political science approach in which the goal is to link variation between cause and effect. Instead, given the quality of her data, she wisely focuses on processes, teasing out various themes which, in turn, revolve around extensive discussions of the primary actors involved. Her questions focus more on what, how, and even when, than on why. She thus forces us to confront a messy world of contradictions, chance opportunities and sudden changes in thinking and strategy, one in which the more one attempts to generalize, the less one understands what is actually occurring.

Chapter five, the strongest in the book, takes us through the vertiginous world of incentives, constraints, opportunities and dangers that judges face every single day. Yet, even within this inhospitable climate, judges can – and sometimes must – innovate in unexpected ways. Similarly, chapter six is a thorough survey of environmental litigation lawyers, exploring their motivations, professional trade-offs, propensities toward political risk-taking, as well as their own ambivalence about serving the socialist state. Here, too, innovation occurs, whether consciously or not, particularly in the case of venue-shopping.

Chapter seven on international influences does not quite fit in as well as the others, but I am glad Stern decided to include it. Although highly visible, international activity's impact on environmental litigation in China is at best modest, for reasons ranging from structural (INGOs' propensity to focus on issues of human rights and democratization) to idiosyncratic (many Chinese use international legal training opportunities to work on their English).

The only dimension in the book I found somewhat wanting is her treatment of the state (chapter four). She draws from Migdal's "anthropology of the state," in this case regarding the question of ambivalence. She makes a point of distinguishing "ambivalence" from "arbitrariness" (p. 100), embedding a degree of intentionality into the mix (which I think is warranted), but ultimately avoids further examining the state in a sufficiently systematic fashion. There is very little about how judges, lawyers, and litigants interacted with various government bureaucracies other than the environmental protection bureaus. She hints that this occurs (i.e. interaction with the agriculture bureaus on environment issues), but it would have been nice to have read a bit more on how this can actually positively affect outcomes more broadly. Similarly, Stern provides some excellent insights into how the CCP might actually strengthen the legal process, yet says practically nothing about the complex budgetary arrangements within the (primarily local) governments in which the courts she examines are embedded. Instead, she substitutes the idea of "political

ambivalence” (“conflicting official [or quasi-official] signals, defined as observable indications of official preferences, regarding the desirability of state action” p. 4). As a result, the lion’s share of her descriptions and discussions are about the behaviour of various state-, non-state and quasi-state actors in response to this ambivalence. But this is arguably an interactive process, not simply a reactive one.

Although her prognosis is not terribly heartening – over the past decade, things on the litigation front in China have changed relatively little – Stern does offer some important glimmers of hope. First, the entire legal professional profession appears to be much better trained than it was just a decade ago. Second, there appear to be a growing number of professional institutions – formal associations, merit-based designations and rigorous professional requirements – that allow legal actors to use their professionalism as a way of securing some autonomy from state demands. Thus they can carve out the legal “policy space” that is key to more effective governance, including the legal realm. Finally, the processes she has documented have provided an increasingly “sticky” and hospitable environment for “an elite conversation over public interest law” (p. 211).

In addition to the thoughtful narrative choices she makes (the book is replete with vivid anecdotes and examples), Stern writes in an extremely approachable manner. Her prose is precise, yet extremely engaging. She admirably avoids jargon. This makes *Environmental Litigation in China* far more accessible than most books on Chinese law. It will not only be stimulating for graduate students, but appropriate for upper-level undergraduates as well. It will appeal equally to legal scholars, China watchers in academic and in policy circles, and to those interested in law and society more generally.

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*The Devouring Dragon: How China’s Rise Threatens Our Natural World*

CRAIG SIMONS

New York: St Martins Press, 2013

viii + 289 pp. \$27.99

ISBN 978-031258176-3

*China and the Environment: The Green Revolution* Edited by SAM GEALL

London and New York: Zed Books, 2013

247 pp. £16.99; \$29.95

ISBN 978-1-78032-341-1 doi:10.1017/S0305741013000854

China’s environmental problems and their impact upon the country’s economic expansion has been a major concern for over three decades. During this period the scale of China’s economic and environmental impact upon the globe has expanded exponentially. At the same time, globalization has impacted how China addresses issues of environment and development. Both of these books address socio-economic impacts of the environment from very different angles. They do not contradict each other but rather amplify one’s understanding of how and why the Chinese are continuing to degrade the environment and yet showing some signs of hopeful change. American journalist Craig Simons’s book is focused on how China’s economic growth is impacting the globe as well as the domestic environment. His prologue does a good job of setting the scene for those Americans who have not thought much about China’s growth in the context of world degradation: for example, the rebirth of mining for the Chinese