

activism shaking the halls of Zhongnanhai, but Eisenman's research demonstrates that this story was simply too good to be true.

For this reason, Eisenman notes his suspicion that some readers will find his book disturbing. As a cultural historian, I fully understand the pitfalls of gauging audience reaction, but I must disagree. Yes, there may be a few who are committed to the story of brave Xiaogang farmers standing up to the Communist Party, but I optimistically believe that the vast majority of scholars will appreciate the opportunity to distance themselves from this false narrative. I recommend this book to anyone who works on rural China. Our common understanding of the commune is based on the disasters of the Leap and China's rapid economic growth after the downfall of collective farming. Eisenman's book fills in the gaps of the commune's history, while convincingly arguing for a reinterpretation its economic legacy.

Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949

By M. Taylor Fravel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
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Reviewed by David Bachman*

University of Washington

*Corresponding author. Email: dbachman@uw.edu

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Taylor Fravel has written what will undoubtedly be the definitive work on China's military strategy from 1949 to the present, at least until Chinese party and military archives are open to researchers. Fravel sets out to explain when and why China's strategic guidelines (*zhanlue fangzhen*), or military strategy, has changed and in what ways. He identifies nine instances when strategy has changed, with three clear cases of major strategy change (1956, 1980, 1993) and five cases of relatively minor change (1960, 1977, 1998, 2004, and 2014). He argues that major change occurs when a major change in the nature of warfare has taken place and when the Chinese political elite is united. Minor change occurs when the elite is united, but when there has not been a major change in the ways wars have been fought. He notes one major exception to this pattern. That occurred in 1964 when Mao personally intervened to reset Chinese military strategy to lure the enemy in deep. In all the other cases, proposals for changes in military strategy were proposed and worked out by the military high command and approved by the party leadership. He contrasts conventional military strategy, dominated by the military leadership, with China's nuclear strategy, which he convincingly argues has been the sole purview of top political leaders.

Fravel is a political scientist at MIT, and he is concerned to situate his research in the context of relevant studies of civil–military relations, military innovation and diffusion, and aspects of the general qualitative literature in political science. Most of the book, however, is a deeply researched history of military strategy making and the attendant doctrinal changes in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The scholarship is exhaustive. In particular, the coverage of the 1956 strategy is pathbreaking—few have paid much

attention to 1950s era military strategy in decades. More controversially, Fravel argues that the 1964 strategy initiated by Mao, focusing on luring the enemy in deep, was not the product of fears of a US and/or USSR invasion, but part of Mao's strategy to lay the groundwork for the Cultural Revolution. His chapter on nuclear strategy amends the earlier standard account by John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai. More attention has been paid to military strategy in the reform period in Western writings, but here again, Fravel provides much more comprehensive discussions based on a wider range of sources than do earlier works. All in all, this book will be one of the benchmarks in the study of the military in the People's Republic of China for a very long time.

While this book is probably definitive about Chinese military strategy, it should not be read as a complete history of the PLA or of China's use of force since 1949. While, for example, active defense can characterize the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the formal military doctrine of the period was defending the motherland by preparing for an invasion in North China. The same could be said about the Zhenbao border clash, the seizure of the Paracels in 1974 and so on. This leaves open the question of what exactly China's military strategy actually explains in terms of the behavior of the PLA.

Related to this point about the limitations of military doctrine in explaining Chinese military behavior is the issue of the rationality of the strategies adopted. In 1956 the first formal strategy was adopted, to prepare for an invasion of North China. But the US had no intention of invading China at that time (official US doctrine relied on "massive" retaliation with nuclear weapons). Similarly, in 1980 when active defense became the formal strategy to defend against a Soviet invasion, there was much less likelihood of a Soviet invasion in 1980 than there was in 1969 (when the strategy was lure in deep).

Fravel is ambiguous in how he regards the 1964 lure in deep strategy authored by Mao. He makes a strong argument that Mao did this to prepare for the Cultural Revolution (and not a US or Soviet invasion of China). But while calling this a major change in strategy, he doesn't see it as such in a number of places in the book. On page 182 he sees the 1993 strategy as the third major change in strategy (along with 1956 and 1980). On page 147 he says "[a]lthough Mao had changed China's strategy to luring deep in 1964, it had never been adopted formally by the PLA." So, was this a change in strategy or not? Was it implemented?

Major changes in military strategy, Fravel says, are identified by shifts in operational doctrine, in force structure, and in training. They are codified in various kinds of field manuals, announcements of force reductions and reorganizations, and discussions of training activities. Shifts in the nature of warfare are somewhat less clearly defined, but they involve new kinds of military operations, new equipment and transformative weapons systems, how existing equipment is used, and so on. On this basis, the 1964 strategy might not have been a major change—doctrine may have changed, but force structure and training don't appear to have. Conversely, the 2014 minor strategy change (for which there is the least documentation at the time of writing) with its fundamental redesign of the military establishment may be more than the incremental change it is portrayed as being.

Finally, in his conclusion, Fravel suggests that with the current deterioration in relations, and growing strategic rivalry, between the US and China, Chinese decision-makers could opt for a change of strategy, perhaps a major change of strategy, to account for the new state of US–China relations. This may be true, but it is not in keeping with the argument he made in the rest of the book. US–China tension does not reflect a change in the nature of warfare, one of his key explanatory variables for

major military strategy change. It should not, by the logic of this study, lead to a major change in military doctrine.

Even with these questions, Taylor Fravel's *Active Defense* is an extraordinary work of scholarship. The research is rich, and the analysis deep. It will be a very long time for any work on China's military strategy will surpass *Active Defense*.

Forming the Early Chinese Court: Rituals, Spaces, Roles

By Luke Habberstad. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017.
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Reviewed by Vincent S. Leung*

Lingnan University

*Corresponding author. Email: vincentleung@ln.edu.hk

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The history of the Han empire is at once familiar and strange. It is familiar because we actually do know a fair amount about what happened. Most histories of the Han are a rehearsal of essentially the same sequence of events—the legendary battle between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, imperial consolidation of Emperor Wu, rise of a Confucian elite, the interregnum of Wang Mang, and so forth—all of which are documented in well-preserved contemporary records. It is also strange, however, because we actually understand so little of it. Bearing the burden of being the grand beginning of imperial China, the Han has long had a historiography shot through with nationalist foundational myths, of one variety or another, that are less concerned with how the Han historically came to be than how it participated in the invention of China in hindsight. This is a type of historiography that is less interested in why a certain event happened, than in the simple fact that it did happen; narratives of Han history are therefore often mere chronological collections of events, intended mainly for historical identification rather than historical understanding.

Luke Habberstad's engaging new book *Forming the Early Chinese Court* is a very welcome departure from this predominant yet problematic paradigm in the study of the Han. The topic of the study is the "early Chinese court." The period concerned is the Han empire (207 BCE–220 CE), specifically the late Western Han (*circa* first century BCE). The word "Forming" in the title is key to the approach of this study. Habberstad is interested in how the court was *formed* in early China. He does not describe the early Chinese court as a fully formed thing, either historically realized or culturally determined. Instead, he focuses on the historical formation of the court as an outcome of the debates and negotiations between various power holders of the empire with different, sometimes competing, ethical and political leanings (or what the author calls their "normative understanding" of the world) from one moment to the next (10). In other words, Habberstad approaches the "court" not as a thing (or more precisely, a Weberian ideal-type) but as a complex set of evolving relations. The result is an adventurous account of the history of the Han that brings to light