BOOK REVIEW
Julia C. Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

James Lin, University of Washington, Seattle

How do newly established states consolidate power and generate capacity to govern effectively? This is the core question that Julia Strauss answers in her comparative study of the early PRC and ROC from 1949 to 1954, focusing on Sunan (蘇南, Southern Jiangsu) and Taiwan. *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and Performance* is a carefully researched and substantial book that delves into details of statebuilding.

In PRC historiography, the 1950s have received significant attention in recent years. Scholars have showcased the influence of socialism and Maoism on public health, statistics, ethnic classification, and scientific agriculture, just to name a few.[1] The 50s are a particularly compelling decade to study because it is when the ideologies and aspirations of Communist revolution are transformed into state institutions and policies that in turn reshaped Chinese society. Strauss makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this period by focusing on the formation of the PRC bureaucracy, the representation and implementation of counterrevolutionary campaigns, and land reform.

Similarly, the historiography of the ROC period on Taiwan explores its authoritarian rule and ROC colonial institutions of education, culture, and violence. For example, historians of Taiwan have focused on the effects of trauma and memory on segments of Taiwan society, how the Guomindang (GMD) state engendered shifts in social identity, and how militarization and the Cold War structured control of local society.[2] Strauss' focus on terror continues a turn toward studying the White Terror and martial law period (roughly 1947-1987), especially as Taiwan undergoes transitional justice and a historical reckoning of this period today.

State Formation in China and Taiwan is not just a comparative study of new facets of the PRC and ROC. Strauss is by training a political scientist, and her questions emerge at the intersection of several theoretical currents. By focusing on institutions, Strauss builds on an intellectual agenda that began with her first book, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940*.[3] That book examined how the early Republic of China managed to establish several strong state agencies despite the Guomindang regime as a whole being relatively weak. In *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, Strauss combines an interest in historical institutionalism derived from Max Weber with "a Gramscian sensitivity to the impact of cultures and practices" (4). Specifically, how does the state communicate new norms through representation, punishment, and performance to society? This explains the attention to campaign, mobilization, and terror, which demonstrate how the state performed the norms through which they defined their legitimacy and identity. The result is a closeup and nuanced look at how authoritarian states function.

Though focused on institutions and institution building, Strauss remains deeply rooted in historical methods and conversations. This book is, according to Strauss' acknowledgement, the culmination of fifteen years of writing and archival research in both Sunan and Taiwan (ix). Sources include the well explored Shanghai Municipal Archives, which Strauss utilized extensively, but also more obscure archives in the case of Taiwan, such as Taiwan Historica (國史館台灣文獻館) and Kaohsiung County Archives. Archival research complements historical newspapers and interviews of those who experienced campaigns in both Sunan and Taiwan.

Chapter One begins by asking how do states build bureaucracies that are both loyal to the regime and effectively carry out the regime's policies? This is a question with a long Weberian genealogy, revisited by sociologists and political scientists of the state in the decades since. One potential pitfall of studying the state is collapsing the state into a monolithic actor. Focusing on bureaucracies serves as an important corrective to this. Recent books such as Sigrid Schmalzer's *Red Revolution, Green Revolution* have illustrated that state agents complicate narratives of state "seeing."[4] If perhaps unglamorous, bureaucrats are important because they constitute the human agents behind the functioning of most state apparatuses. Policies from the top are interpreted and carried out into rules and norms through the actions of human bureaucrats. It thus makes sense for Strauss to argue for their importance: if a state's bureaucracy is disloyal and incompetent, how would the state expect to carry out its regime goals and policies?

For the early PRC, adherence to socialist principles demanded that representatives of the regime revolutionize Chinese society. At the same time, tax collection, resettling refugees, and getting people employed were critical for basic state functioning, yet sometimes at odds with carrying out a

revolutionary agenda (45). In examining how the PRC recruited bureaucrats in Shanghai, Strauss shows that the CCP preferred young, educated individuals, usually graduates of universities and technical schools, for both their pliability in accepting revolutionary ideology *as well as* their technical competency. When the regime needed to integrate "oldsters" from the previous GMD regime with experience necessary to keep the state running, it encountered skepticism over CCP policies and feelings of superiority over lower class workers. The regime retrained these holdovers "with complicated personal histories (历史复杂)" so that they would internalize the regime's values as their own. Strauss argues throughout her book that instilling regime norms into the bureaucracy was integral to the larger process of state building for both the PRC and ROC.

Through such examples, Strauss provides a mid-level window into how states function through their bureaucracies and how the PRC and ROC communicated their values. Throughout Chapter 1 is the question of how the state finds and trains "good men." Yet each time I read "good men," I wondered whether gender played a role in the selection and construction of cadres, virtue, and talent? My presumption is that men predominated the ranks of the bureaucracy. Were there women among the bureaucratic ranks? If so, where and in what types of bureaucracy? If not, does their exclusion tell us something about how the state perceived of bureaucratic norms through gendered lenses?

Chapters Two and Three explore a key theme of her book, state enacted terror and campaigns. For Strauss, terror is not just an effect of authoritarian rule, but rather a core means of state building for the PRC and ROC. Exercising terror expands the coercive capacity of the state, eliminates power rivals, and most importantly, serves as a form of public pedagogy "to instruct society into core regime norms" (78). In the PRC, terror campaigns were part of a larger Maoist approach that focused on mass mobilization and directed publicly at perceived sources of subversion to the state agenda.

By contrast, in the ROC, the White Terror was largely conducted in secret. Associating open campaigns with the practices of an illegitimate Communist regime, the ROC state instead chose to arrest, prosecute, and execute its perceived enemies from the shadows. Yet Strauss argues that terror carried out discreetly does not erode its performative value. The prosecutions of these cases followed a precise and orderly legal logic within the ROC legal apparatus, even if they were hidden from view and their judgements delivered to the satisfaction of the state. Strauss calls this ROC dedication to a nominal legal procedure a "fetishization of law and procedure" purposefully constructed as a foil to the chaotic counterrevolutionary campaigns across the Strait (140). This fetish reinforced norms for the state itself too, including the bureaucrats who were involved in these legal procedures. After sentencing, when names of executed individuals were usually posted at Taipei main rail station, the state was in effect demonstrating its power and monopoly over violence.

Chapters Four and Five close by examining land reform. According to Strauss, land reform and terror both allowed the regime to convey values and norms to the public. However, whereas terror focused on correction and demonstrating the coercive power of the state (the stick), land reform served as the carrot. Through land reform campaigns, the state could showcase its "fairer and more rational platforms for national development" through "material and moral incentives" (169).

Land reform is certainly not absent in the PRC historiography. William Hinton's firsthand account of land reform in Zhangzhuangcun (张庄村) in his 1966 book *Fanshen* conveyed the importance of land reform for the socialist project through fundamentally reordering class and social relations in rural China. [5] More recently, Brian DeMare's detailed and thoroughly researched *Land Wars* offers perspectives of land reform from below. Strauss also brings to our attention how land reform campaigns were carried out on the ground. She cites, for example, "photographs of landlord extravagance, examples of unfair contracts between landlord and tenant, and the tools of torture that landlords resorted to as a means of keeping tenants in their place" (210) that were presented in a 1951 exhibition in the People's Department Store in Suzhou. These types of public presentation were designed to instruct Chinese society in Maoist thought, including how landlord exploitation needed to be corrected. On the more well-known public struggle sessions, Strauss argues that these served not just to eliminate enemies of the state, but also as a "heuristic device for educating the participants in the audience about the new regime's norms and rhetoric" (231). Struggle sessions provided real, violent terms through which the state emphasized its steadfast dedication to social transformation.

In the ROC, land reform also enabled state performance of GMD regime values. Ostensibly drawing upon Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People (三民主義), land reform in Taiwan was portrayed as benefitting all levels of society, from tenant farmers to landlords. Land reform was a moral duty of the GMD state. GMD land reform policy was once again explicitly contrasted with Communist land reform, which was depicted as immoral and violent. Yet, ROC implementation of land reform did not necessarily reflect its moral portrayal. Land reform campaigns were subject to the same authoritarian gaze as any other aspect of the ROC on Taiwan, quelling any public attempts at criticism or resistance. During the first wave of land reform, the '375' rent reduction that placed a ceiling on rent prices, "the coercive arm of the GMD state in Taiwan wasted no time in vigorously suppressing those who were not quiescent in the state's version of '375' rent reduction" (221). It is noteworthy that rent reduction met limited success, as Strauss states no evidence of widespread rent reduction was actually achieved. GMD officials attempted to improve compliance with the law by sending officials into the countryside to investigate and report on the progress of rent reduction. But these encountered social resistance, from evasion to lease cancelations. It was this resistance, Strauss argues, that led to the more muscle-bound final phase of ROC land reform, Land to the Tiller, which later became the hallmark of ROC land reform. Land to the Tiller exemplified the grand state

intervention into the rural countryside and the consolidation of the GMD state capacity to enact widespread social change.

Strauss' analysis of land reform is an important corrective to the larger scholarship on land reform. In Taiwan, historians recently have attempted to comb through local records, including the Taiwan Land Bureau (台灣省政府地政局) records that Strauss also utilizes, to demonstrate that land reform was far from benevolent, and in fact often amounted to authoritarian state exploitation.[6] In popular accounts of East Asian land reform, such as *How Asia Works*, there are still fundamental misunderstandings of how land reform was carried out and its effects on society and economic growth.[7] It remains salient to read critical accounts based on archival documents like *State Formation in China and Taiwan* to understand how state motives drove land reform, and that on the ground implementation reflected specific state centric needs.

So how different were the PRC and ROC regimes? Comparative histories are rarely published these days. There is good reason for this. Historians tend to emphasize contingency and context, which complicate comparisons. Yet, there is undeniably a number of similarities across the Taiwan Strait that are worth exploring further. For Strauss, it appears these are inherent in how states in general consolidate power and build institutions. Indeed, there is a more universal claim regarding how states perform their regime values. After reading her book, I agree on the importance of studying norms and performance to better understand state behavior. I do wonder, however, whether other common factors, such as both the PRC and ROC being authoritarian states, should be weighed more heavily? In enacting terror especially, we see "muscle bound" tendencies that James Scott attributes to the high modernist state. Would we see similar outcomes in non-authoritarian states?

In the book's conclusion, Strauss offers her final thoughts on comparison. She hones in on "modalities"—bureaucracy (regularity, predictability, rules based, precedent driven) and the campaign (extraordinary, rapid, goal driven). And through these modalities, Strauss argues the most important difference between the PRC and ROC regimes was the former's attachment to the campaign modality, which necessitated a distrust and thus aversion to institutionalization. In contrast, the latter had no such attachment and focused on re-institutionalizing society with the GMD at the center. I found this a compelling argument. Balancing a revolutionary line and the need to govern is a theme of recent PRC histories. As Sigrid Schmalzer has shown, Maoist ideology and the mass line were able to coexist and even offer mutual benefits at times for state scientific agriculture. Arunabh Ghosh has shown socialist ideas of statistics often complicated state needs to understand society and formulate effective policy.[8] This tension is present in Strauss' book as well, and constitutes an important contribution of her research. In Taiwan's case, institutionalization of the ROC remains one of the most consequential effects of ROC colonial rule on Taiwan today, as the deeply entrenched norms instilled by the GMD continue to resist efforts at localization and a postcolonial reckoning of Taiwan's modern identity, even three decades after the end of martial law.

---

[1] Mary Augusta Brazelton, *Mass Vaccination: Citizens' Bodies and State Power in Modern China* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Arunabh Ghosh, *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020); Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (University of California Press, 2010); Sigrid Schmalzer, *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[2] Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, *The Great Exodus from China: Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Modern Taiwan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Evan N. Dawley, *Becoming Taiwanese: Ethnogenesis in a Colonial City, 1880s to 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019); Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[3] Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[4] This is best exemplified by Chapter 5, "Seeing Like a State Agent" in Schmalzer, *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China*, which builds upon and complicates the more conflationary view of the state taken by James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1999).

[5] William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).

[6] See, for example, 徐世榮 (Hsu Shih-Jung, *土地正義：從土地改革到土地徵收 [Land Justice: From Land Reform to Land Expropriation]* (新北市 (New Taipei City): 遠足文化, 2016); 廖彥豪 (Liao Yen-Hao) and 瞿宛文 (Chu Wan-Wen), "為何土地改革的意涵爭議多？ [The Significance of Taiwan's Postwar Land Reform]," 台灣社會研究季刊, no. 100 (September 2015): 257–60; 廖彥豪 (Liao Yen-Hao) and 瞿宛文 (Chu Wan-Wen), "兼顧地主的土地改革：台灣實施耕者有其田的歷史過程 [A Middle-of-the-Road Land Reform: How Taiwan Implemented 'Land-to-the-Tillers' Program]," no. 98 (March 1, 2015): 69–45.

[7] Author Joe Studwell for example simplistically claims that "a democratic approach has been essential" for land reform as carried out in China as evidenced by "elected village committees whose functioning was in stark contrast to the authoritarianism we associate with China today." For Taiwan and Japan, he writes "the representative – usually elected – land reform committees employed in Japan and Taiwan were vital to their unprecedented success." Joe Studwell, *How Asia Works* (Grove Press, 2014), 50. Strauss shows that state values and

norms permeated decisions regarding how land reform was carried out. Studwell further asserts problematically that land was redistributed "on an equal basis," which "incentivized their labor and the surplus they generated towards maximizing production" and thus conflates incentivization for investment with the aggregate agricultural economic growth of the region. Studwell, 60.

[8] Schmalzer, *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China*; Ghosh, *Making It Count*.

Response

Julia C. Strauss, SOAS University of London

I would like to thank James for an extraordinarily thorough and generous review. Because working "inside" one's material for over a decade necessarily entails a loss of perspective, it is only when one sees how others respond to it that one can really know whether the arguments made have come across as intended, and if James' review is any guide to how others have read *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, then I can rest easy, as he has done a far better job of summarizing the book than I could ever hope to do myself. For this reason, I will not repeat the content of the book, but will instead lay out some of the backstory to the monograph, before engaging with the questions about how gender played into the selection cadres, and what kinds of other common factors the PRC and ROC/Taiwan might have shared to make for such strong similarities.

As products of a neo-liberal age that valorizes hard work and serial accomplishment, we all have a stake in publicly minimizing difficulties and eliding failures. Or, as a then mid-career established historian told me several decades ago, "No one wants to see you struggling to get the rabbit up your sleeve, they just want to see the rabbit!". These "rabbit struggles" are typically only spoken of in private, amongst trusted friends behind closed doors, or are perhaps whispered about in one's absence. But it is unrealistic, as well as unfair, to the legions of graduate students, postdocs, and young colleagues who are all wrestling with their own rabbits amid shrinking job markets, peripatetic lives, and increasing workloads to simply be presented with a senior scholar's flash of rabbit without also getting some sense of the struggle, uncertainty, and blind alleys that are typically, if not inevitably, part of the process of producing a monograph.

Working in comparative history, or in my case, in the kind of comparative politics that requires one also to be one's own historian, is *hard* as well as *uncertain*. Even with the incredible privilege of generous funding for the better part of a year and a half for intensive data collection, and the great good fortune to be collecting in exactly the period when archives in the PRC were at their most open in the mid-2000s, it was difficult. It was virtually impossible to get comparable depth of sources for the relevant case studies on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. In ways I could never have anticipated, the materials from the People's Republic were at that point infinitely easier to access and use than those from Taiwan. The PRC then still had a master history for the early 1950s, an archival regime that was moving in the direction of greater openness, a clutch of terrific Chinese scholars working on the period, and of course reams of documents that were detailed and frank in their descriptions of government policy and actual implementation. In Taiwan, few of these conditions obtained. Contestation over the 1950s meant that most Taiwanese historians shied away from this period. Although increasingly open, most archives had catalogued and/or preserved little from the 1950s. And most of the ROC/Taiwan documents that had been generated in the first place lacked the detailed reports that were so characteristic of the early People's Republic.

Once the sources had been collected, I was more than slightly chagrined to learn that a very large subset of them did not lead to what I had reasonably anticipated would be the case. Here there were two interrelated problems. 1) where sources were numerous, they addressed issues that turned out to not be core to the argument being built and 2) topics that *were* closely related to the argument often had but scanty (or no) documentation that I could access. My original instinct had been to focus on three different spheres of statebuilding in the young PRC/Sunan and the ROC/Taiwan, from most coercive (terror), to a combination of carrot and stick (land reform) to mostly carrot with concealed stick (rice supply to urban areas). It took several years *after* the collecting was done to realize that the case study for which the data was most plentiful (rice supply) simply could not be integrated – either analytically or descriptively - with the materials for terror and land reform, which laid out a much more straightforward trajectory of bureaucratization, campaign mobilization, and performance. The ways in which campaigns of terror and land reform were performed in Sunan and Taiwan were, of course, cases of contrast. But they were cases of differences within a recognizable category (apples and pears), rather than between utterly dissimilar categories (apples and semi-conductor chips). After months, I gave up trying. And the boxes of materials on rice supply are still on a shelf, awaiting the serious treatment that they deserve.

In his review, James asks two very important questions: 1) were the bureaucrats, or the "good men" on whom the state relied to implement its policies, necessarily *men?* and 2) were the similarities that I see in two regimes that styled themselves so differently simply part of what consolidating states anywhere do, or whether there are other factors (like authoritarianism) that should be weighted more heavily? The first of these questions speaks directly to the questions of sources and what they do and do not support by way of argument. Part of the locution "good men" might be simply my (mis?)translation of such terms as *ren* (person), *renyuan* (personnel), *zhiyuan* (one in a post), *ganbu* (cadre), and *gongwuyuan* (public servant). None of these terms (and all were in circulation in the early 1950s on both sides of the Taiwan Strait) is gender specific. At the same time, it is clear that outside the gendered sphere of "woman work" through the All China Women's Federation (and its subordinate branches) in the PRC, and Song Meiling's nearly contemporaneous establishment of the (Anti-Communist) Chinese Women's League, the vast majority of the

state agents in both early 1950s China and early 1950s Taiwan were male. Women could be importantly politically, especially if (as in the People's Republic of China) they were, like Deng Yingchao and Wang Guangmei, old revolutionaries who were married to high status male leaders in the Chinese Communist Party. Similarly in the ROC/Taiwan, Song Meiling (Mme Chiang Kai-shek) was an important political figure in GMD circles. But women in both the young PRC and ROC/Taiwan often appear to have been tracked into separate and relatively low status gendered positions. For example, in 1956 there were 1481 *ganbu* in the Jiangsu provincial level Women's Federation, all but six of whom were female. Happily, the Jiangsu Women's Federation also collected statistics on the number of female cadres serving in *all* provincial level units, where the picture was much more mixed. These numbers stipulate that female cadres stood at 14.55% (38,470 of 264,455) of the total, and at 13.08% (1287 of 9837) for cadres at the level of section chief and above. Thus, even though 85%+ of cadres were male, 13-odd% of females serving in positions at section chief or higher was still a surprisingly high percentage that put it far ahead of most states in the early to mid-1950s. However, the story rapidly becomes much less progressive at the local interface of government and the people. In Jiangsu, both absolute numbers and percentages of female *ganbu* dropped dramatically in rural areas. Of 5556 village party secretaries only 67 (1.21%) were female; and in large villages, there were no female party secretaries at all. In rural Jiangsu to be a female cadre almost by definition meant "woman work" in the local branches of the All China Federation of Women.[1] Much more research needs to be done – likely with oral histories - to ascertain the degree to which a seemingly relatively large number of female cadres at the provincial level were in genuine positions of leadership, or whether they were tokens who were quietly sidelined and/or given gendered briefs. From the documentary record that is presently available, there is simply no way to tell. The currently available documents for Taiwan in the early 1950s are less comprehensive, but we do have figures for the Taiwan Provincial Grain Bureau, which had 196 staff in post at the end of 1950. 23 (11.73%), were female. These individuals were, however, concentrated in low status positions: general workers (*guyuan)* [11], clerks and assistant clerks (*banshi yuan/ gu banshi yuan)* [7], and somewhat more surprisingly in the research department [5]. But not a single female had even a regular *weiren* (basic section level – the lowest level of "commissioned officer") status to lead to a regular track in the state bureaucracy. And certainly none reached the level of section or division chief.[2] In both Sunan and Taiwan, women worked in state bureaucracies, although certainly not in large numbers relative to their male counterparts. Given the commitments to gender equality that the socialist People's Republic possessed, it isn't particularly surprising that it promoted female cadres in the early to mid-1950s in ways that the socially conservative ROC/ Taiwan did not. But what this representation meant for the revolutionary PRC is not at all clear. My best and deeply provisional guess is that in the PRC the face of the party-state was largely male, overwhelmingly so at local and central levels of government, with a smattering of females in some provincial bureaucracies, quite possibly concentrated in such female heavy sectors as the arts, education, and public hygiene. In Taiwan, there were proportionally fewer females, and those that existed were likely all but invisible: office workers, low level support staff, and a clutch of (likely young and unmarried) educated women working in a back office as researchers. In a world of stringently enforced word limits for publication, what is left out is precisely the kind of material above – with sources that hint at a range of different possibilities on a very important question that are insufficient for clear conclusions.

James' second question – were the similarities between the PRC in Sunan and the ROC in Taiwan simply what states anywhere just *do,* or are there other factors that should be weighed more heavily? Of course, much depends on the weighting. Certainly, there were some core agendas shared by the PRC and ROC that are fairly universal: establishing internal control over one's territory, ensuring a loyal military, identifying and removing those defined as subversive. Others are very common: commitments to what James Scott calls "high modernist" faith in science and development. But there were other ways in which the PRC and ROC/Taiwan were indeed much more like each other than with either other authoritarian states or democratic ones. The sources of these likenesses were a combination of earlier 20th century history, a relentlessly militarized formative environment, and a late imperial set of normative legacies about how to rule. Because of their mutually entangled pre-1949 history as recipients of Soviet aid and advice, the PRC and ROC/Taiwan shared identical political structures: both were Leninist single party-states for which the boundaries between party and state were at best blurred. The transition from hot civil war to hot regional insecurity to deep Cold War made it plausible, if not imperative, to continue with very heavy degrees of militarization. But the influence of the late imperial period in shaping a shared set of pre-sets and priorities is undeniable. Quite unlike most states at similar stages of development– be they authoritarian or democratic – like their late imperial forbears, the leaders of the PRC and the ROC/Taiwan presumed that it was the state's business to ensure basic subsistence and a modicum of social justice for its citizens, that citizens were naturally amenable to proper models of instruction from the state, and that any form of associational activity not at least indirectly overseen by the state was to be actively discouraged if not quashed outright. In 1949-1950 the two Chinese governments on opposite sides of the Taiwan Straits had much more in common than either was willing or able to recognize, but the institutional, policy, and symbolic choices made by each in enacting these pre-sets did vary in ways that were hugely consequential, setting up a trajectory of divergence that accelerated over the course of the 1950s.

[1] Jiangsu Provincial Archive, Funü Lianhehui, 41-2 "Quansheng 1956 nian funü ganbu dizi biao" and "Daxiang ganbu tongji biao", both dated December 31, 1956.

[2] Taiwan Provincial Archives. Liangshi Jü. 39/67/497. "Benjü zhiyuan lü, [1939 nian]"