

BOOK REVIEWS

## One and All: The Logic of Chinese Sovereignty

Pang Laikwan. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024. 276 pp. \$28.00 (pbk). ISBN 9781503638815

Maria Adele Carrai

NYU Shanghai, Shanghai, China  
Email: [mac1041@nyu.edu](mailto:mac1041@nyu.edu)

*One and All: The Logic of Chinese Sovereignty*, by Pang Laikwan, explores the philosophical and historical underpinnings of China's domestic sovereignty. The author intricately weaves together a narrative using diverse material and sources ranging from historical material and paintings to philosophy and literature. The book is an ambitious endeavour to unpack the logic of China's sovereignty from its imperial roots to the present-day cyber and economic sovereignty.

The work begins with a discussion of China's assertion of sovereign power during the recent pandemic and uses this contemporary event as a springboard to delve into its historical and philosophical contexts. Part one sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the continuous struggle for a cohesive national identity and the often-tumultuous path towards modern sovereignty. It explores the legacies of the traditional "mandate of heaven," *tianxia*, that legitimized imperial sovereignty (chapter one), the essential role of the myth of unity (chapter two), and the idea of revolution at the heart of China's sovereignty (p. 83), which various regimes have both revered and feared (chapter three).

Part two delves into the more recent evolution of internal sovereignty, focusing initially on the Republican period (chapter four), then the socialist period (chapter five) and the 21st century (chapter six). Pang first explores the attempts at conceptualization of popular sovereignty and the "people" by figures like Sun Yat-sen, providing critical insights into how early Republican scholars reconciled notions of people's power with the realities of modern China. Some such scholars, including Zhang Dongsun, Hu Shi and Lu Xun, expressed reservations about the ability and maturity of Chinese people to be the foundation of popular sovereignty (chapter four). Pang then discusses how in the socialist period, intellectuals helped the state propaganda's aestheticization of the land in *guohua* paintings and contributed to the conceptualization of territorial sovereignty (chapter five). Chapter six transitions into the 21st century, examining the emergence of economic and cyber sovereignty. It analyses how these forms of sovereignty illustrate the increasing centralization of power under Xi Jinping, possibly resisted by the ordinary Chinese people, often metaphorically called "garlic chives" (*jiucaï*). While their investments and work are destined to be "eaten" by the establishment, they still have an agency so that, if self-aware, they can reclaim their lives and break away from the sovereign's harvesting (pp. 181–82).

The book concludes with a thought-provoking discussion on the implications of sovereignty in a globalized world, arguing that the unpredictability, systematic breakdown and disobedience found in modern Chinese history is a global phenomenon. In a world where sovereignty is ostensibly in the name of the people, states often behave aggressively toward one another, usually at the expense of those they claim to represent. Pang advocates for a more porous and communicative form of sovereignty, akin to true democracy, which not only rejuvenates but also ensures the survival of human lives. It calls for a sovereignty that "instead of being overwhelmed by the fear of death ... should try to affirm life and the changes it brings" (p. 185), moving away from the anxiety about the fall of the state and instability this would create.

The book captures the many facets of China's domestic sovereignty logic – a narrative of control and centralization of the “one,” but also one of resilience and potential transformation thanks to the “all.” The “all” are the people, that are “never one,” they are a plurality contrast the one sovereign power that wants to objectify them. Pang sees the people's plurality and capacity for change not as a threat but as the very foundation of a more inclusive and dynamic interpretation of sovereignty. In the book, she historicizes the internal logic of sovereignty to debunk myths that have sanctified and ossified this concept as unchangeable and sacred. Once stripped of religious justifications by modernity, the legitimacy of sovereignty rests on the people – an often-illusory concept since they are largely excluded from real decision-making, offering only a veneer of unity and certainty. As it turns out, sovereign entities frequently operate in ways that do not genuinely represent their people, exerting hegemonic control and monopolizing what should be a pluralistic collective power. Pang posits that the true regenerative power of sovereignty might be realized not through imposed unity or enforced stability but through democratic processes or even cyclical renewal (p. 52), echoing the Chinese imperial history that allowed for rejuvenation and continuity through dynastic transitions. The text argues that democracy could potentially disrupt the cycle of revolution and sovereign imposition, fostering a more resilient and constructive polity where the people are subjects of their collective destiny rather than objects of sovereign control (p. 105).

*One and All* makes a significant contribution to the field of Chinese studies and can serve as a valuable resource in disciplines such as sociology, law and political science. Its interdisciplinary approach provides a rich tapestry of insights that can enhance understanding of China's complex socio-political landscape. The book is particularly suitable for scholars and students interested in the evolution of sovereignty concepts, and it may also appeal to a broader audience seeking to understand the interplay between historical forces and contemporary political realities in China. While the book occasionally suffers from a lack of detailed referencing and could benefit from a deeper exploration of certain key concepts such as “*fatong*” and “*zhuquan*” (p. 5), which are introduced but not adequately unpacked, its overarching narrative provides a compelling and accessible exploration of the logic of Chinese internal sovereignty. The book encourages readers to rethink sovereignty not as a static or monolithic entity but as a dynamic and contested domain, shaped by historical forces and contemporary challenges alike.

doi:10.1017/S0305741024000791

## Directed Digital Dissidence in Autocracies: How China Wins Online

Jason Gainous, Rongbin Han, Andrew W. MacDonald and Kevin M. Wagner.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 184 pp. £30.00 (pbk). ISBN  
9780197680391

Christian Göbel

University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria  
Email: [christian.goebel@univie.ac.at](mailto:christian.goebel@univie.ac.at)

*Directed Digital Dissidence in Autocracies* makes two bold claims: first, that authoritarian rulers can potentially channel citizens' dissent towards local officials, while simultaneously bolstering the image of the central government. The second claim contends that the Chinese party-state has excelled in this strategy to such an extent that it is winning the “information war” (p. 12) against detractors who might tarnish the reputation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by criticizing the Party or its leaders.