

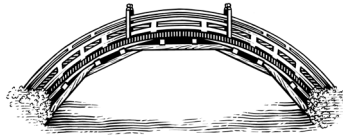
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Kristen E. Looney's

*Mobilizing for Development:
The Modernization of Rural East Asia*

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Jessica C. Teets

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Updating the East Asian Development Model: The Role of Farmers' Associations and Campaigns in Rural Modernization

Jessica C. Teets

The developmental state literature emerged when scholars realized that certain states were playing an important role in development but did not meet the definition of “predatory” used by the dominant economic theories at the time. Extant arguments mostly focus on a technocratic state engaged in urban industrial planning, with rural development as the inevitable result of industrialization (i.e., the Lewis turning point). Kristen Looney’s book *Mobilizing for Development: The Modernization of Rural East Asia* attempts to fill this gap by contending that it is important to examine rural policies because the barriers to rural development are largely political. The preference for industry (urban bias) translates into a policy environment that systemically discriminates against agriculture (p. 1). The result is growth without development—industrial growth and urban expansion occurring alongside rural stagnation and poverty (p. 2). Conversely, rural development policies promise a more egalitarian distribution of wealth (p. 3).

Although Looney agrees with the finding of developmental state literature that initial conditions carry weight, such as Japanese colonial institutions and investments, land reform, and a strong state capacity, she argues that these only have partial explanatory power and do not fully account for variation across countries, over time, or along different dimensions of rural development (p. 15). Looney contends that most of the existing arguments leave out the role of farmers’ organizations that she finds to be key to rural development, and that the East Asian model of rural development was less technocratic than previously imagined due to the extensive use of rural modernization campaigns.

Thus, her corrective to the literature is to argue that the interaction between rural institutions and state campaigns most accurately explains outcomes in East Asia. Through a comparison of the initial model in Japan to the experiences of Taiwan, South Korea, and China, Looney argues that campaigns are more likely to succeed when the overarching goal is development rather than extraction, when the center can control local

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authorities, and when the campaign is carried out in partnership with rural citizens. Rural participation mostly occurs in the form of farmers' organizations, and these are successful when they exhibit the right balance of linkage and autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the village community (p. 6). This important role is due to the ability of farmers' organizations to provide an institutionalized way of transferring resources and to push back against negligent or overzealous officials during campaigns (p. 60).

One important contribution to developmental state literature is Looney's discussion of campaigns. Many scholars see these as purely epiphenomenal—basically as a sign of state capacity. However, in Chinese history, we observe the important role that campaigns can play in breaking through institutional barriers to affect change, such as in the case of vested interests. More broadly, when studying institutional change, scholars often look to “punctuated equilibrium” as windows for rapid and discontinuous change, and campaigns are strategies for creating these moments where change is possible. In the context of rural development, Looney argues that campaigns allow the state to circumvent institutional constraints on change by reordering existing power structures or creating alternative ones (p. 28). Thus, campaigns and institutions are two different modes of politics, with campaigns delivering “greater change to more places in a shorter period of time” (p. 83).

However, for campaigns to be successful, they must have strong oversight from central bureaucracies and feedback from farmers' organizations, which coalesce into what Looney calls “implementing coalitions.” She finds that Taiwan's implementing coalition was strong, South Korea's was moderately strong, and China's was weak, and that this correlates with rural development outcomes. In both South Korea and China, the campaigns set unrealistic goals and created a highly politicized environment, and weak farmers' organizations resulted in some mobilization of farmers but garnered little to no farmer participation. Local officials faced extreme top-down pressure to deliver results, leading to either false or excessive compliance, and limited the space for popular feedback (p. 10). This makes campaign-style governance a high-risk, high-reward strategy in that “campaigns are inherently risky and work only under a narrow set of conditions” (p. 116).

One limitation of the research design is the difficulty of making comparisons across cases and time. For example, although the cases in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan do seem to be campaigns, the New Socialist Countryside policy in China is not normally considered as such.


Looney acknowledges this by stating that “in everything but name, it had all the markings of a state-sponsored campaign” (p. 140). Most researchers consider this to be a policy initiative, such as western development, that is similar to a campaign in that it increases investment and local officials’ attention (through points on annual cadre evaluations). However, the New Socialist Countryside policy differs from campaigns such as poverty alleviation in the span of time and the lack of work-team mobilization. Although the research design might not change the book’s overall findings about the ineffectiveness of Chinese campaigns, it does create some uncertainty about whether the author is comparing apples to apples.

An important implication is that campaigns might achieve goals more quickly but face the danger of officials reverting to “normal” politics as soon as a campaign ends. Campaigns struggle to create sustainable change without subsequent institutionalization, grassroots support, and monitoring by central policymakers. Another implication is that campaigns seek to disrupt traditional power dynamics but are often either co-opted by local powerholders who are threatened by the reforms or are overtly politicized, triggering unintended consequences. Although Looney does not directly address the sustainability of political change produced by campaigns, she does address the political effects by arguing that the use of campaigns must be coupled with rural participation. However, as her research shows, the ability of farmers’ organizations to play this role is rare in most developmental states. Only Taiwan achieved rural participation, in part because the incoming administration did not have as many ties to the landed elite as the governments in the other cases. Especially in authoritarian contexts, this model would challenge conceptions of a hierarchy of political power and the dangers of empowering civic associations, making Taiwan’s success less likely to be replicated.

A second contribution to the developmental state literature is Looney’s use of an interactive or evolutionary argument. In the case of rural development, she argues that the interaction of specific campaign attributes and types of farmers’ organizations is necessary to deliver rural development outcomes. Evolutionary arguments offer better explanations of outcomes but are challenging to adequately support. For example, in an evolutionary argument there must be evidence to support that both farmers’ organizations and campaigns are working as argued to create these outcomes and also that it is these specific interactions that cause the outcome of interest. It is not enough that both are important. The author must supply evidence of the interaction of specific combinations leading to

these outcomes—in short, the causal argument is not only about variables being present but about specific types and interactions.

Despite taking on such a challenging research design, Looney offers convincing evidence about the membership of farmers' associations and rural participation in campaigns in each country. However, the argument that farmers' organizations prevented campaign excesses or helped design better policies was not as clearly supported. It would have been helpful to see a clear case where the campaigns were moving in one direction, and then see the countervailing action taken by the farmers' organizations. Without process tracing, it is hard to establish causality. Additionally, the other two attributes of the campaigns—namely developmental goals and central control—were also challenging to assess due to less variation in that they were present in all three cases but weakest in China.

Overall, the evidence highlights the importance of meaningful rural participation (not simply mobilization) in campaigns, as well as the necessity for farmers' associations to be composed of farmers with direct access to policymakers (balancing linkage and autonomy). Looney's findings are an important reminder of the vital role played by grassroots participation. As I also find in my research on consultative authoritarianism, citizen participation in the policymaking process is even more important in information-poor authoritarian regimes. Therefore, I recommend that scholars interested in developmental states incorporate Looney's contributions to the literature—namely that the developmental state uses informal politics and thus “is not as rational or as efficacious as the original prototype” (p. 157)—and adopt her focus on adapting the concept of “embedded autonomy” to study the necessary balance between linkage and autonomy. Future research should also examine whether Xi Jinping's preference for campaign-style governance and top-level design might align more with the technocratic developmental state model. Despite this shift, Looney's research suggests that so long as China does not empower farmers' organizations to play a governance role, Xi is unlikely to perform much better in rural development than his predecessors. 

A New Angle on the Developmental State

Thomas B. Gold

When I started studying development in the mid-1970s, dependency and world systems theories were replacing modernization theory as the dominant paradigm. Based primarily on cases from Latin America, these theories focused on explaining failures of development largely as a result of relations with multinational corporations (mostly from the United States) that drained their natural resources, established enclaves with export-oriented industries, exploited workers, and installed puppet regimes that greenlighted this structure. I had lived in Taiwan in the early 1970s, and what I had seen just did not seem to fit this paradigm.

When it came time to do my dissertation, I decided to go back to Taiwan to test a somewhat different, less dogmatic theory labeled “dependent development,” as proposed by Brazilian sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso and American Peter Evans. They acknowledged that the situation in a handful of countries in Latin America was not totally bleak: some development—conceived primarily as industrialization and some improvement in the quality of life—was possible within this dependent structure, but it was distorted because of all-powerful multinationals, weak local entrepreneurs, and a crippled state.

My fieldwork showed that in Taiwan the economy was dependent on trade, and that multinationals indeed played an important role linking it to the global economy, but the state, while supported by the United States, was hardly weak in the face of multinationals or local capital. In fact, the state played a dominant role in the economy through indicative plans, state-owned enterprises, the banking system, tax incentives, and, lest we forget, martial law that prevented workers from striking. The state also proactively brokered relations between local capital and foreign investors so that rather than an enclave, they became deeply embedded in the economy while cultivating domestic entrepreneurs. Importantly, the state had carried out a land reform in the early 1950s that made land available to formerly landless and tenant farmers, while also investing in infrastructure that made it possible for farmers to become part-time workers in nearby factories and entrepreneurs themselves. Through compulsory education, public health,

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and family planning, the standard of living rose dramatically and a new middle class took shape.

As it turned out, my work on Taiwan became part of a new “school” of scholars working primarily on East Asia who argued that these societies were led by states committed to development with the capacity to manage their own economies, support domestic entrepreneurs, and shape the role of foreign capital to the benefit of their societies. Thanks to Kristen Looney’s book *Mobilizing for Development: The Modernization of East Asia*, I realize that the developmental state model has a gaping lacuna—namely, a neglect of the role of the state in rural development. We were overly focused on the industrial side of the economy. *Mea culpa*.

Of course, “developmental state” is an ideal type in the Weberian sense, and Looney’s intensive fieldwork in Taiwan, South Korea, and China illustrates how and why each state embarked on a somewhat different path with regard to the countryside. Each state undertook land reform, which was primarily for political and social, rather than economic, reasons. In Taiwan and South Korea, with U.S. support, this proceeded without violence, but China’s land reform involved the physical liquidation of millions of landlords and “rich” peasants. Looney oddly ignores this fact and its possible consequences, focusing instead on the post-Mao reform era of decollectivization. Certainly a major motivation for land reform in Taiwan and South Korea was to prevent or preempt the sort of rural revolution that overthrew the Kuomintang in China.

Looney’s main argument revolves around the interaction of two variables: institutions created by the state to organize peasants and promote agricultural development, and mobilization to achieve particular, primarily developmental, goals. She notes that this combines bureaucratic-legal authority with charismatic authority. Institutions helped with postwar recovery and development, but at a later stage, when the rural areas had been neglected in favor of urban-based industrialization, campaigns redirected attention to the agricultural sector. We normally associate mobilization with the Chinese Communist Party’s numerous campaigns to attack enemies or support projects, so bringing state-led campaigns in Taiwan and South Korea into the story is a fresh and important insight. Successful campaigns required both bureaucratic and popular mobilization, and they interacted differently in each case, which explains the different outcomes whose stories comprise the main part of the book. In most of the developing world the state extracted resources from the countryside, making the effort to increase production and improve the lives of farmers stand out. Crucial to success,


the author found, was the ability of the central government to monitor and control local officials—to make sure they implemented policies—and to bring farmers into associations that empowered them to participate in policy implementation. Two other critical variables come into play here: how these organizations were linked to the state, and how much autonomy they enjoyed.

Although none of the states eliminated an urban bias, their commitment to rural modernization was notable. After a literature review and chapter on theory, the author devotes a chapter to each case study. For Taiwan and South Korea, she examines the 1950s to 1970s, the period of rapid industrial takeoff. For China, it is the reform era beginning in 1980. I had trouble with the inclusion of China as a comparative case with the others. Size matters, to be sure, but the violence of land reform, the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, the mess of the Cultural Revolution, and the initiation of reform largely from below—that is, not initiated by the state—are elements that make China unique with issues of a different order of magnitude. While Looney does not claim that China is a “developmental state” like the others, she justifies including it because some of its rural policies are similar to those of Taiwan and South Korea, and, in fact, China studied their experiences. Even then, she concludes that China’s rural development record, including agricultural production, living standards, and village environment, was the least successful of the three cases, with Taiwan performing best. I did not find that the book gave me a new understanding of China or its rural achievements; in fact, the situation there might be even worse than thought. Although Xi Jinping recently boasted about eliminating extreme poverty in China, a new book argues that the countryside lags far behind the cities by almost all measures, with possibly dire consequences.¹

By contrast, I did learn a great deal from Looney about Taiwan and South Korea. I was not aware of the role of Taiwan’s Farmers’ Association in lobbying the government to change rural policy and getting the state to launch the Community Development Campaign in the 1970s, focused on transforming the rural environment. The associations were linked to the state but also enjoyed enough autonomy from it to pull off the campaign successfully. South Korea’s geography did not bless it with the same conditions for agriculture that Taiwan enjoyed, plus the government was much more determined to industrialize, especially heavy industry.

¹ Scott Rozelle and Natalie Hell, *Invisible China: How the Urban-Rural Divide Threatens China’s Rise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

This meant largely neglecting the rural sector. Popular unrest and U.S. pressure led the Park Chung-hee government to create the New Village Movement, a campaign to redress some of the inequalities. However, while linkage with the state was rather strong, the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation did not enjoy enough autonomy to push for the interests of the rural populace.

There is ongoing debate over whether the developmental state really made much difference, and even if it did, why it has not been able to reignite the economies of Taiwan and Japan, in particular. I think the circumstances of postwar East Asia and the traumas experienced by the states created a unique environment that they used to their advantage. *Mobilizing for Development* helps us understand the shortcomings, but also how states continued to learn from them, in particular regarding rural areas. A major challenge now is competition from other states that learned from the East Asian experience. 

What Accounts for Rural Development in East Asia?

Lynette H. Ong

What accounts for the impressive rural development seen in East Asia, particularly Taiwan, South Korea, and China? Starting from a low base, rural development in these countries in the past half-century has lifted millions out of poverty, improved income distribution and the living standards of many rural households, and released surplus labor that has fueled rapid industrial growth. And yet we know and understand very little about what makes rural development in these countries relatively more successful than in other developing countries. Kristen Looney's *Mobilizing for Development: The Modernization of Rural East Asia* fills this important gap in the literature.

The existing literature has largely focused on two key explanations. The first, the developmental state model, was pioneered by Chalmers Johnson, Alice Amsden, Robert Wade, Rick Doner, and Stephan Haggard, among others, and has attributed successful development in these countries to industrial policy and governments "picking winners."¹ However, as Looney rightly argues, the developmental state model has been inadequate in explaining why and how rural development took place. The second explanation, land reforms, which were undertaken by Taiwan, South Korea, and China in the early phases of development, improved the "initial conditions" of rural development, such as making land distribution more equitable across the board, and have been examined by scholars such as Chris Bramall and Julia Strauss.²

Looney argues that the answer behind the effective rural development in these East Asian countries lies in their successful rollout of "rural campaigns." The concept of campaigns (*yundong* in Chinese) is not new, but this is one of the first book-length manuscripts that puts it at the center

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¹ Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and Stephan Haggard, *Developmental States: Elements in the Politics of Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

² Chris Bramall, "Chinese Land Reform in Long-Run Perspective and in the Wider East Asian Context," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4, no. 1-2 (2004): 107-41.

of academic inquiry. What exactly is a “campaign”? Looney writes: “State campaigns are policies that demand high levels of mobilization to achieve dramatic change.... While the extent of popular mobilization varies based on campaign targets, bureaucratic mobilization is a central feature of all campaigns” (p. 27). She also draws parallels with movement regimes, such as communism in the Soviet Union and fascism in Europe, and then elaborates, “Through campaigns, the state can circumvent institutional constraints to change by reordering existing power structures or creating alternative ones. Depending on campaign objectives, these structures may include extra-institutional actors, such as social activists, grassroots organizations, and interest or pressure groups” (p. 28).

These descriptions suggest that campaigns straddle social movements and institutions. In fact, Looney argues that a campaign is neither a movement nor an institution. However, this begs the question of whether it is a distinct category of its own. To what extent can we call a campaign a state-mobilized social movement (i.e., the state draws on popular mobilization to support its policies)? As well, since government bureaucracies are usually involved in rural campaigns, to what extent can we call it “bureaucratic mobilization,” that is, the use of mobilizational forces by the bureaucracy to achieve its objectives? Are campaigns permanent or impermanent institutions? How does the state initiate or end a campaign?

The book states that “rural modernization campaigns are more likely to work, that is produce policy compliance and positive outcomes, when the state’s goal is rural development rather than extraction, when the central government can control local authorities, and when the campaign is carried out in partnership with rural citizens” (p. 33). Her core argument raises a number of questions. The first regards the time frame of comparison. Looney selected 1950s–70s Taiwan and South Korea, a period that preceded their high-speed growth era of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the time period for China under examination is the 1980s–2000s, the period when rural development took off and drove GDP growth. Would 1950s–60s China under Maoist rule make for a more comparable frame of comparison? Rural campaigns during Maoist times were more extractive (e.g., the Great Leap Forward) than those in the Deng era. Does the selection of the time period predispose Looney to certain observations, that is, selection based on the dependent variable?

Second, how did these authoritarian states engage citizen partnership in these campaigns? How does the engagement of citizens differ among the three countries? In communist China, farmers’ organizations exist

only in name; the real prerogative often lies with local leaders. Also, how did state-peasant collaboration change after Taiwan and South Korea transitioned into democracies?

Third, why are campaigns more successful when they are aimed at development rather than extraction? What are the characteristics of developmental campaigns that differentiate them from extractive campaigns? Does this issue have any relation to farmers' participation? How does this relative success speak to the concept of "campaigns" in general?

Separately, I wonder to what extent we can isolate land reforms and rural campaigns as two distinct explanatory variables for rural development. Land reforms that preceded these campaigns might have been crucial in laying the necessary foundations for the successful implementation of campaigns. In the absence of such reforms, land resources would have been concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy peasants at the expense of poor peasants or the masses, which impedes participation in farmers' organizations. Thus, would land reform have been a necessary precondition for successful rural campaigns?

As well, I found some tensions between the mass mobilization aspect of "campaigns" and the bureaucratic mobilization dimension. To be sure, these tensions have existed in earlier literature written by Elizabeth Perry and others.³ Resolving or probing further into these tensions matters for the book's contribution to the developmental state literature, which presumes some degree of collaboration between the state and society. The question has always been how and to what extent, as Peter Evans' concept of "embedded autonomy" has made clear.⁴

These issues aside, *Mobilizing for Development* fills a major and persistent gap in East Asian development literature. As Looney has rightly pointed out, the existing literature has neglected and been inadequate in providing satisfactory accounts for successful rural development in East Asia, which has implications for these states' outstanding growth performance compared to other developing countries. For that reason, *Mobilizing for Development* ought to be—and will be—widely read by students of development and East Asia as well as practitioners for a long time. ◆

³ Elizabeth J. Perry, "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: Constructing a 'New Socialist Countryside,'" in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30–61.

⁴ Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Rethinking Campaigns, Bureaucracy, and Rural Development in East Asia and Beyond

Julia C. Strauss

Kristen Looney's *Mobilizing for Development: The Modernization of Rural East Asia* is a wonderful book that engages simultaneously on at least three fronts. It chooses an important but overlooked phenomenon that intersects with sub-literatures concerned with the East Asian developmental state, rural development, and campaigns. Adding to this already significant set of ambitions, Looney engages in what one might call three and a half comparisons: Taiwan, South Korea, and China, with Japan being the extra half. Japan is never fully elaborated as a case study, but, as Looney recognizes, the country looms large in the background for both Taiwan and South Korea, and therefore at one remove for China as well. And if all this were not enough, *Mobilizing for Development* also ranges across two asynchronous time periods: the 1950s to 1970s, but focusing on the 1970s, for Taiwan and South Korea; and the 1980s to the 2000s for China, centering heavily on the Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao years of 2003–13.

The sub-literatures incorporated, the time periods traversed, and the difficulties of working on and in such different places as Taiwan, Korea, and China with both historical and contemporary materials, to mention nothing of the obvious importance of the questions addressed, all make *Mobilizing for Development* an exemplary piece of comparative case study and historical sociological research. It makes me, for one, want to stand up and salute this achievement, right before assigning the book to every postgraduate class I have ever taught or have yet to teach in Chinese politics or comparative development and handing it out as a “how to do it” model to every prospective PhD student contemplating comparative and historical research.

Looney's particular gift for this research lies in her consistent ability to steer between the Scylla of unnecessary detail and the Charybdis of undue violence to her case study material. What emerges is a clear and convincing argument that is well supported by evidence. Given that literature on the East Asian developmental state consistently overlooks the rural sector after land reform, her focus on the countryside reveals a pattern

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equally overlooked: that the East Asian developmental states implemented campaigns rather than straight-up technocracies to bring development to rural areas. After this significant corrective to this literature, Looney then lays out the very different ways in which campaigns of rural development played out in these three locales with a spectrum of results ranging from highly effective (Taiwan) to mixed (South Korea) to ineffective (China). In analyzing the factors behind these different campaign outcomes, the book argues—to my mind, quite convincingly—that the effectiveness of rural development campaigns was in turn a function of whether intermediary rural organizations, particularly farmers’ organizations, were linked to higher levels of the state while being simultaneously autonomous from the state. High levels of farmer participation and financial and managerial independence in turn gave these organizations a certain degree of voice and influence over rural policy (p. 39). Measured against these two variables, farmers’ organizations in Taiwan possessed both; South Korea’s had linkages to higher levels of the state, but not autonomy from it; and those in China had neither linkages nor autonomy.

The book’s argument is so neat, the questions raised so compelling, and the execution of the comparative and empirical work so exemplary that it seems almost churlish to query some of its analytical premises. But reviews being what they are, some degree of quibble is *de rigueur*. Mine is less a quibble than a sense that, fantastic as this monograph is, there are a number of important conceptual opportunities lost. This is particularly true with respect to the notion of “campaign” and how campaigns in turn relate to institutions, most notably the bureaucratic institutions of the state. But to simply define a state campaign as “policies that demand high levels of mobilization to achieve dramatic change” (p. 27) and rural modernization campaigns as “policies that aim to transform the countryside through bureaucratic and popular mobilization” (p. 29) is to define them as blunt analytical constructs. Because campaigns are by definition “extraordinary” mobilizations of resources (human, ideational, and material) compared to regular bureaucratic routines, rules, and precedents, there will always be tension between the extraordinary effort of a campaign and the regular bureaucracy, even—perhaps particularly—when it is exactly the same people implementing the campaign or the bureaucratic rule. Because the bureaucratic institutions of the state are always the first to be mobilized (inasmuch as without the relevant parts of the state bureaucracy strongly committed to the goals and execution of the campaign, the campaign would inevitably peter out),

the individuals in the bureaucracy who implement the campaign must at some level be (1) institutionally powerful enough to access extraordinary resources to get the campaign off the ground, (2) committed to the goals (and the methods of campaign implementation), and (3) able to generate commitments from the rank-and-file implementers.

When we turn to the next marker of a campaign, namely a “high degree of popular mobilization,” the analytical issues are compounded. My read of many of the details of the “successful” Taiwan case is that the existence of well-functioning farmers’ associations actually channeled popular participation, rendering it indirect and consultative. How “popular” does popular participation have to be to qualify for campaign status? This inherent tension in the modality of policy implementation—as well as the tensions between bureaucratic and popular mobilization—have been well explored in the research on campaigns in Maoist China. While some of Looney’s details hint at the importance of activists and political will behind these campaigns, it is surprising to see these elements so missing from the analytical takeaway. Might some of the successes experienced by Taiwan be as much a function of the ways in which the agents of the state implementing the campaign managed to break down campaign goals into bureaucratic and technocratic bites that could be implemented and readily measured (e.g., laying down roads and bringing electricity and clean water to remote villages) rather than those that required behavioral changes from farmers? Certainly South Korea’s Saemaul campaign, checkered though its results were, did much better and generated more support when its achievements were evaluated for the “hardware” in which much less farmer participation was required (e.g., delivering supplies and replacing thatched roofs with tiled ones) than when it required changes in the everyday behavior of farmers (e.g., insisting that a new variety of high-yield rice be planted that no one liked)? Might genuinely popular (mass) mobilization actually interfere with successful campaigns because they are such blunt instruments that are good at tearing things down but much less adept at building things up?


Looney’s focus on campaigns for rural development and the degree of linkage and autonomy of farmers’ organizations as the critical variable in success or failure makes a great deal of sense for her chosen case studies. However, the phenomenon of rural development campaigns—both the ones that failed and those that were successful—is hardly one that is restricted to East Asia after World War II. I suspect that in many of these cases, the role

of intermediary farmers' organizations is significantly more nuanced than the book presents.

The late imperial Chinese state had a strong preference for working through intermediary organizations, "entrusting" them with many of the functions that we consider within the purview of the state. This was nothing new, and might well be one of the truly significant differences between the two variants of the Leninist party-state that found themselves on opposite sides of the Taiwan Strait in 1949–50. The Kuomintang needed to distinguish its version of revolution from the one ongoing on the mainland. In the early 1950s, it set out to revive or create from scratch any number of intermediary organizations through which it could work in both city and countryside at exactly the same time that the People's Republic of China set about destroying exactly those kinds of extant intermediary organizations. These were regime features, not bugs. The same technocrats who ran the Sino-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction so successfully in Taiwan came from the mainland and/or moved on to South Vietnam—both locations where their particular blend of campaign and technocracy for rural development ended in tears. At the risk of betraying my ignorance about South Asia, I would be willing to bet that the successful rural development programs in Kerala in the 1970s relied on many of the same campaign techniques and intermediary organizations that the book specifies for Taiwan in particular. And if we go far back into what is now the veritable prehistory of development and organization theory, the entirety of the early years of the Tennessee Valley Authority project, described by Philip Selznick's classic *TVA and the Grass Roots*, cannot be characterized as anything other than a campaign for rural development.¹ But Selznick is clear that it was exactly the well-to-do who dominated intermediary farmers' organizations who were Janus-faced: they were active partners in rural electrification (the technocratic and bureaucratic elements of the campaign) while actively deflecting and even dismantling the progressive and pro-poor elements of community development that were equally part of the campaign.

Whether in East Asia or elsewhere, there are likely a number of ways in which campaigns for rural development can succeed, and many more ways they can fail. But if the focus on intermediary rural organizations could expand beyond whether they are linked to the state or autonomous

¹ See Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

from it to include consideration of their leaders, their ethos, and how their material and ideational interests do or do not align with those of the campaign implementers, then the audience for Looney's superb book might move well beyond the East Asianists who will undoubtedly take an interest in it. 

Author's Response: China's Rural Development in Comparative Perspective

Kristen E. Looney

I want to thank *Asia Policy* for inviting me to participate in this roundtable and the reviewers for their deep engagement with *Mobilizing for Development*. I wrote this book to address what Thomas Gold rightly describes as a “gaping lacuna” in the literature on East Asia’s political economy. The developmental state paradigm, first proposed by Chalmers Johnson nearly four decades ago, has successfully weathered various criticisms and even experienced something of a resurgence in recent years, as interest in industrial policy, alternatives to neoliberalism, and the so-called China model has grown.¹ Yet, despite the theory’s success at explaining state-guided industrialization in East Asia, the story of the region’s rural transformation has largely been neglected by scholars.

The main contribution of my book is to push back against conventional explanations for rural development—namely, initial conditions, land reform, technocratic planning, and trickle-down industrialization—and to highlight the important role of rural organizations and state campaigns in the region. The book’s core argument is not just that these things mattered but that they worked differently in different political-institutional contexts, producing a range of outcomes both across and within the cases examined. In this essay, I would like to address the reviewers’ observations regarding case selection, the conceptual framework, and the argument.

Cases

While there are many China experts in the field of comparative politics, China is actually rarely studied from a cross-national comparative perspective. This is perhaps because so much about the country is exceptional—its size, diversity, economic system, and political regime, to name just a few dimensions. It is therefore only natural that readers

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¹ Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

would question whether the cases and time periods featured in my work are sensible. The rationale for comparing Taiwan and South Korea during the 1950s to 1970s and China during the 1980s to 2000s is twofold. First, those decades were the most important for industrial takeoff and rural development. China's level of development and economic performance in the 1980s were also similar to Taiwan's and South Korea's in the 1950s, and indeed much of China's success during the early reform era under Deng Xiaoping was about playing catch-up from the Maoist period (1949–76).² Second, the 1970s in Taiwan and South Korea and the 2000s in China marked the beginning of agricultural adjustment in those countries—when government policy changed from squeezing the rural sector to protecting it. Moreover, it is quite interesting that in all three cases agricultural adjustment initially took the form of a campaign.

Extending the analysis forward for Taiwan and South Korea, as Lynette Ong's review suggested, would have painted a very different picture of the countryside: a highly subsidized and much shrunken agricultural sector undergoing difficult structural reforms. While potentially interesting, the heyday for Taiwanese and South Korean rural development occurred before the 1980s, not after, and the democratization of those countries would have further complicated the comparison with China. Extending the analysis backward for China, as both Ong and Gold suggested, would similarly have made the three cases less comparable. China's economy under Mao Zedong was mostly stagnant, and collective institutions such as rural people's communes made China very different from its neighbors. It is precisely because land reform in the early 1950s was followed by collectivization that China's later, post-1978 experiences with de-collectivization and other policies are more analogous to what happened elsewhere in the region.³ And since the book addresses two big questions about rural development—what explains East Asia's success compared to other regions, and what explains different levels of success among East Asian countries—it was essential to study the most crucial (and comparable) periods of rural development in these countries. That calculus mattered more for case selection than the fact that China under reform has been characterized by some

² Martin Ravallion, "Poverty in 1950: A Counterfactual Perspective," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper, January 2021 \approx <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28370>. Notably, this paper argues that Taiwan and South Korea provide a relevant counterfactual against which China's Mao-era failures and reform-era successes can be evaluated.

³ Several scholars have described China's de-collectivization as a "second land reform." See, for example, Y.Y. Kueh, "The Economics of the 'Second Land Reform' in China," *China Quarterly* 101 (1985): 122–31.

(but not all) scholars as a developmental state or that China has learned from its neighbors' rural policies.

Concepts

The reviewers raised several questions about what constitutes a campaign. Jessica Teets asserted that China's New Socialist Countryside was a policy initiative instead of a campaign. Julia Strauss found the book's definition of campaigns to be overly simplistic, such that it obscured some of the nuances and tensions surrounding bureaucratic and popular mobilization. Ong also wondered about the nature of campaigns and how to categorize them.

Addressing these points in turn, I am not the only person who has described the New Socialist Countryside as a campaign.⁴ As I detail in the book, although China's central leaders did not call it a campaign (they were careful to avoid that term due to its Maoist connotations), local officials nevertheless understood and implemented it that way. In Ganzhou Prefecture, Jiangxi Province, where I conducted fieldwork, no less than 39,000 officials were organized into cadre work teams and sent to the villages to oversee campaign implementation. "Peasant councils" with five to fifteen members were also formed in over 24,000 villages to spur popular mobilization, which took the form of villager cash and labor contributions for infrastructure projects. This one local example aside, the campaign everywhere entailed setting core tasks, intensifying propaganda, organizing work teams, and appealing to the masses for support (even if in practice local participation was hollow). The New Socialist Countryside was an extraordinary and temporary mobilization of public and private resources to achieve breakthroughs in rural development, and in many ways it set a precedent for Xi Jinping's poverty alleviation drive.

In trying to describe campaigns, I kept coming back to a definition that I thought would convey the meaning succinctly to an audience who had maybe never encountered or thought deeply about campaigns. Still, I can understand how "policies that demand high levels of mobilization to achieve dramatic change" (p. 27) would be unsatisfying to some readers. Admittedly, Strauss, in her own writings, has done a better job of documenting the many

⁴ Elizabeth J. Perry "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside,'" in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, ed. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30–61. See also Julia Chuang, "China's Rural Land Politics: Bureaucratic Absorption and the Muting of Rightful Resistance," *China Quarterly* 219 (2014): 649–69.

meanings and features of campaigns and how they intersect with and differ from bureaucracy.⁵ I agree that campaigns straddle formal and informal politics, as well as bureaucratic and popular forms of participation, and that these things can sometimes come into conflict with each other. One of the points I emphasize about China is that post-Mao campaigns have mostly left the masses out. This is to the benefit of local officials bent on speedy implementation but to the detriment, at least in this case, of many villagers whose homes and communities were remade without their input. In the other cases, where popular participation was greater, campaigns more closely resembled what Ong called a “state-mobilized social movement,” and I adopt similar language in a recent edited volume.⁶ Lastly, while there are certainly technocratic aspects of campaigns, I still think it is appropriate to put technocratic planning, institutions, and industrial policy, which are commonly associated with the developmental state, in a different basket from rural modernization campaigns.

Argument

I am pleased that the reviewers judged the book’s main findings to be (mostly) convincing. In assessing the strength of the argument, they focused primarily on how farmers’ organizations contributed to rural development both before and during campaigns. The systematic comparison of rural institutions in Taiwan, South Korea, and China—and the very idea that developmental states are not all the same—is one of the big takeaways of the book. I demonstrate that differences in the quality and structure of farmers’ organizations, and specifically their degree of linkage and autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the village community, had a significant impact on development outcomes. In addition to production-related organizations, I examine temporary village-level organizations that were created for the purpose of campaign mobilization.

Teets wished there had been more evidence of farmers playing a corrective role during campaigns, acting to rein in campaign excesses. Perhaps a more fine-grained, within-case analysis of Taiwan, supported by local-level archival materials would have yielded such evidence, but based on the more aggregated source materials that I collected, it seems

⁵ Julia C. Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶ See my chapter on Taiwan and works by other scholars in Grzegorz Ekiert, Elizabeth J. Perry, and Yan Xiaojun, eds., *Ruling by Other Means: State-Mobilized Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

that Taiwan's Community Development Campaign worked consistently in a positive direction. And though Teets's concerns about causation are valid, as explained in the book's introduction, my analytical approach is more focused on hypothesis elaboration, as opposed to hypothesis testing or rigorous causal inference. From my perspective, the importance of participation in Taiwan—and the mechanisms or qualities of farmers' organizations that make them more or less effective in general—is still evident from the data presented, and also driven home by the cross-national comparison with (and counterfactual examples of) South Korea and China.

I really enjoyed Strauss's observation that the claims I make about success and failure regarding farmers' organizations and campaigns are probably accurate for the cases examined but also more complex than I let on, and that they would likely need to be adjusted if the study were expanded to a wider range of cases. I agree that in evaluating the effectiveness of intermediary organizations more broadly, attention to linkage and autonomy may not be enough, and that more details on their leaders, ethos, interests, and bureaucratic alliances would be helpful. I am also grateful to Strauss for suggesting other cases that might be interesting for further research.

Besides participation, I argue that in order for campaigns to be successful, they must have developmental goals and local implementing officials who are subject to central controls. These conditions were present in all three cases but to varying degrees, with China having more ambiguous goals and weaker central controls. As for Ong's question about developmental versus extractive campaigns, the biggest difference between the campaigns analyzed in my book and China's Great Leap Forward is that the latter was a massive exercise in extraction. The goal of South Korea's New Village Movement, for example, was not to create a rural surplus for the sake of supporting industrialization. Instead, it was about promoting rural development as an end in itself, in addition to bolstering the political legitimacy of the Park Chung-hee regime. The same is true for the other cases, except in China, where many people believed that the New Socialist Countryside could also speed up urbanization and boost domestic consumption. The debate about what China's campaign ultimately aimed to accomplish—enabled by mixed signals from the central government—expanded local officials' discretionary authority and provided an opening for them to carry things to extremes. Unfortunately, this often meant the forced demolition and reconstruction of entire

villages and continued rural resource extraction through land grabs, a pattern that has continued under Xi.

Since the reviewers are all China experts, I want to conclude by summarizing how I think *Mobilizing for Development* contributes to our knowledge of China and to studies of development generally. First, the book reveals that China's campaign politics are not just a legacy of the Mao era but rather are tied to a long tradition of mobilization campaigns that have shaped East Asia's development trajectory for more than a century (dating back at least to Japan's Local Improvement Movement of 1900–1918). Chinese scholars and officials, moreover, self-consciously associate their country with a larger East Asian model that includes technocratic and mobilizational approaches to politics and policy. Second, as Teets noted in her review, so long as Chinese farmers are weakly organized, achieving rural development that is broad-based and pro-smallholder is likely to remain an elusive goal. And given how Chinese farmers' organizations have been forced to compete with capitalist agribusiness, it is not even clear that the government is committed to that goal. Third, rural development in China today largely means moving people into apartment-style housing, and my research explains how this problematic change came about. This focus on the rural built environment and how campaigns can alter it, positively and negatively, sets my work apart from many other studies, while also confirming that China's situation is indeed, as Gold put it, "worse than thought." Finally, the book also shows that not all campaigns are like the Great Leap Forward. Campaigns are a risky development strategy but should not be written off as doomed exercises in social control. That view is unhelpful for understanding their prominence in East Asia, or elsewhere, and the tangible and sometimes positive impact that they can have on development. 