

Call for Submissions

PoLAR Political and Legal Anthropology Review's open access website, PoLAR Online

Emergent Conversations Series

Affective Legality in China

This Emergent Conversation, part of PoLAR's Digital Editorial Fellowship program, seeks to curate a comparative ethnographic conversation around affective legality and the interpenetration of law and emotion in contemporary China. It explores how legal institutions, professional practices, and everyday encounters with the law are suffused with emotion and affect, shaping governance, legitimacy, and social transformation.

China's legal sphere is not only governed by statutes and rules, but is also haunted by affect, ethics, and aesthetics inherited from its past, from Confucian sentiments and socialist fervor to nation-building narratives that "conjure and release emotions" (Osanloo 2020). State institutions actively mobilize emotion through law: from codified moral injunctions in legislation to theatrical courtroom performances, the state leverages legal frameworks to invoke sympathy, collective identity, and morality in service of authority (Abrams and Keren 2010). The emotional dimensions of state power are developed by professional legal practice. Legal officials and practitioners are expected to embody virtues of integrity, benevolence, and righteous passion, blurring the line between personal feeling and institutional duty. And everyday legal encounters involve intense emotional labor. Ethnographic accounts highlight the complex affective work performed by judges, mediators, teachers, doctors, social workers, grassroots officials, and lawyers, work not only aimed at resolving disputes or delivering services, but at maintaining the legitimacy of institutions and social orders (Yan 2021).

In sum, this series invites analysis of phenomena in law and emotion such as moral governance campaigns and their emotional foundation (Zhou and Donahoe 2023), the affective atmospheres of courtrooms (Bens 2018), the performance of virtue and duty by legal professionals, the intimate ethics of care in law's shadow, and the emotional dynamics of grassroots (Wang 2023). Contributors are encouraged to draw on rich ethnographic fieldwork and lived experience to illuminate how law and emotion co-produce social reality in China.

We welcome contributions (short essays of 2000–3000 words) that explore questions such as:

- How does law act as a medium for governing emotion and shaping citizens' affective orientations?
- How do individuals invoke, internalize, or resist the affective demands of law in everyday life?
- What processes cultivate, channel, or suppress specific emotions, such as anger, empathy, shame, pride, or fear, within legal proceedings and bureaucratic practices?
- How is emotional labor distributed among lawyers, judges, officials and other roles, and what does this reveal about Chinese power and the nature of law?

We encourage submissions that are grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, rich case studies, and lived realities. Analytical reflections, first-person narratives, and comparative insights are all welcome, as long as they shed light on how law and emotion intersect in practice. Contributions may focus on Mainland China or Chinese communities abroad; they may examine historical precedents or contemporary developments. Above all, we seek pieces that probe the affective life of law in China in a way that speaks to broader anthropological, legal, and political

questions.

Submission Guidelines:

- Short Essays: Submit a short essay of 2000–3000 words. Submissions should be accessible in style while grounded in research.
- Formatting: Please follow [PoLAR's Author Guidelines](#) for citation style and formatting.
- How to Submit: Send inquiries and submissions to Hongyun Yu, PoLAR Digital Editorial Fellow, at hongyun.yu@rice.edu

Works Cited

Abrams, Kathryn, and Hila Keren. 2010. "Who's Afraid of Law and the Emotions?" *Minnesota Law Review* 94(6): 1997–2074. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24926/265535.1417>]

Bens, Jonas. 2018. "The courtroom as an affective arrangement: Analysing atmospheres in courtroom ethnography." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 50(3): 336–355. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2018.1550313>]

Osanloo, Arzoo. 2020. *Forgiveness Work: Mercy, Law, and Victims' Rights in Iran*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvthhcsf>]

Wang, Stephanie Yingyi. 2023. "Labor Precarity of Chinese Feminist and LGBT NGO Activism—a Social Reproduction Perspective." *Feminist Formations* 35(2): 54–77. [DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ff.2023.a907921>]

Yan, Yunxiang. 2021. "The Politics of Moral Crisis in Contemporary China." *The China Journal* 85: 96–120. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/711563>]

Zhou, Yong, and Brian Donahoe. 2023. "Law and anthropology in China: a roundtable discussion at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology." *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 55(3): 453–463. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/27706869.2023.2273068>]