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Professor He forcefully criticises one failure of the process, well-known but uncorrected: the Criminal Procedure Law provides that the three institutions that administer the criminal process—police, procuracy, and courts—should work independently of each other. In practice, however, these three cooperate closely. For example, prosecutors treat arrest warrants as a mere formality because they wish “to maintain harmony with the investigators” (p. 50). In addition, difficult cases are referred to Party political-legal work committees at each level of government that place excessive emphasis on coordination of efforts among the three agencies involved rather than on their independent review.

Professor He condemns the one-sidedness of criminal proceedings in which “evidence of guilt is admitted without question, regardless of its truth or falsity” (p. 69). In practice, he writes, most cases of torture and forced confessions “go unpunished due to lack of evidence” (p. 44).

Because of the emphasis on obtaining confessions and maintaining a high rate of case closure, arrests precede collection of evidence. By the time a court must issue a decision, it is only “a figure-head.” As a result, courtroom trials, in Professor He’s words, “are now a mere formality” (p. 117).

His analysis ventures further as he points to the “mentalities” of the officials involved, citing their “military mind-set and traditions” (p. 14). In the concluding chapters he summarises his outspoken views on nothing less than changing those mentalities in order to increase procedural justice throughout the system.

Research demonstrates that new rules adopted for exclusion of confessions or statements based on illegally obtained evidence, physical evidence, or statements of a witness or victim have not been satisfactorily applied—exposing a critical “gap between the law on paper and the law in action” (p. 155). He adds that the Criminal Procedure Law fails to establish a defendant’s rights to silence despite a provision that “no one shall be compelled to prove his or her guilt” (p. 157). Professor He’s book is timely: an opinion on a “Trial-Centred Criminal Procedure System” has recently been issued by the highest-level authorities of the courts and prosecutors along with the Ministries of Public Security, National Security, and Justice. Among the stated goals is the need to base guilty verdicts on evidence that establishes a crime beyond “reasonable doubt” and that has been lawfully gathered. Evidence gathered through “extortion of confessions” must be excluded. The rules are too extensive to be discussed in detail here, but at the core is the call to “complete systems safeguarding the rights of parties, defenders, and other litigation participants.”

Centring the criminal process on the trial, one of the key reforms urged by Professor He, is likewise an aim of the new rules, which, if well- implemented, would move toward strengthening procedural justice in the criminal process.

In a vigorous “Postscript,” Professor He cites with approval the communiqué of the Party Central Committee in October 2014, calling for advancing the rule of law in China. He ventures beyond that formulaic language, arguing that there is a basic need to develop the “habit” of rule by law, which is currently weak. Government officials must become role models for the public, but “many officials continue to think that power stands above the law” (p. 208).

Also, laws are often overlooked because of the influence of guanxi. Law in “real life” is needed, “and the place it holds in the eyes of the people” (p. 208). The author ends his book at this point, doubtless because it is impossible today to predict when the tight authoritarianism of government under the current leadership might be loosened. In the meantime, Professor He's