

Review Essay

Studying Men and Women in Historical and Contemporary China

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This essay examines four recent works that study men and women in contemporary and historical China. Despite their variety of approaches and subject matter, all four strive to demonstrate that gender is plural and fluid and intersects with class and race. They also show how scholars of China continue to explore the dynamics of cross-cultural relations and the use and development of cross-cultural theory.

This essay discusses the following works. Xiaoping Cong. *Marriage, Law and Gender in Revolutionary China, 1940–1960*. Cambridge Studies in the History of the People's Republic of China. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 327 pp. \$99. 99 (cloth). | Kam Louie, ed. *Changing Chinese Masculinities: From Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men*. Transnational Asian Masculinities Series. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016. 250 pp. \$65. 00 (cloth). | Eva Kit Wah Man. *Bodies in China: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Gender, and Politics*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2016; repr. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017. 257 pp. \$52. 00 (cloth). | Nicolas Schillinger. *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. 417 pp. \$110. 00 (cloth).

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The four books under review demonstrate clearly the continuing “usefulness” of gender as a category of analysis.¹ In their breadth of subject matter and historical periods, stretching from Confucian-era philosophy to contemporary father-son relationships via the creation of the New Armies in the late Qing and legal reform in the border regions of the 1940s, they demonstrate the range of areas of study that benefit from attention to gender. They also serve as a reminder of the plurality of gender, demassifying the categories of Chinese men and women into a plethora of different experiences and discourses. Indeed, gender studies in China opens the door on such a range of periods, themes, questions, and disciplinary approaches that even to discuss only four books in a short review essay poses something of a challenge. In this essay, I will discuss each work in turn while drawing out a few of the most prominent similarities and differences in relation to the authors’ approaches to gender. Taken together, despite varying intentions and approaches, these studies reveal shared findings about Chinese masculinities and femininities; these echoes can reveal recurring issues and points of concern across and beyond China studies.

¹ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75; Gail Hershatter and Wang Zheng, “Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1410–21.

<A> *Changing Chinese Masculinities*

Until relatively recently, and mirroring a trend in the global field, gender studies in China have focused on the female experience to the extent that “gender” has often been taken as a synonym for the experiences and representations of women.² Meanwhile, scholars who have turned to masculinities studies have found that the field as a whole has typically limited its focus to Western discourses and practices (Connell 1998; Louie 2002).³ However, over the past 15 years, and particularly so over the past 5 years, academic interest in Chinese masculinities has begun to grow at a rapid rate.⁴ This is in large part thanks to

² The same might be said for two of the books under review here—*Bodies in China: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Gender, and Politics* and *Marriage, Law and Gender in Revolutionary China*—which both focus almost exclusively on women’s experiences and discourses. Otherwise, see: Victorian Robinson and Diane Richardson, eds., *Introducing Gender and Women’s Studies* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 58; Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3; Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2; Harriet Evans and Julia C. Strauss, “Gender, Agency and Social Change,” *China Quarterly* 204 (2016): 825; Kam Louie, “Asian Masculinity Studies in the West: From Minority Status to Soft Power,” *Asia Pacific Perspectives* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 1.

³ R.W Connell, “Masculinities and Globalization,” *Men and Masculinities* 1 (1998): 3-23; Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*.

⁴ See, for example, Kam Louie, *Chinese Masculinities in a Globalizing World* (London: Routledge, 2015); Louie, “Asian Masculinity Studies in the West”; Geng

the work of Kam Louie and the other scholars who have now contributed to the volume *Changing Chinese Masculinities: From Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men*.

For all the new attention in recent years, several questions are worth investigating further and new ones are to be asked in the wake of continued economic change, social shifts, and globalization; this volume seeks to address many of them. Besides referring again to what he calls a “major lacuna” (1) in masculinities studies—the neglect of East Asian masculinities in the field at large—Louie asks: Is there an “indigenous” Chinese masculinity? (2). The phrasing of this question is something of a red herring, in that it holds within it a number of assumptions that Louie and other scholars of Chinese masculinity have consistently striven to unpick:⁵ that it is possible to speak of a single, static, and “real” masculinity in the first place and indeed that there is a single, unchanging “China.” Louie observes that “China’s connections with the world are ... intricate” (2) and therefore failure to understand Chinese masculinity

Song and Derek Hird, *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Brett Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); John Osburg, *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality among China’s New Rich* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Martin Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); Zhong Xueping, *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁵ Song and Hird, *Men and Masculinities*, 2.

means failure to understand the West, too. To this, presumably, one might also add that it is increasingly difficult to discern a pure or untouched “Chinese” masculinity in the first place. Nonetheless, Louie argues that “pressing concerns in the contemporary world need to be framed in a historical context, and a context that is Chinese” (4). The central argument of the volume is therefore that “inside the new clothing that is worn by the Chinese man today, we can still find the historical Chinese man” (4).

As such, the volume is divided into two sections: “Late Imperial Chinese Masculinity” and “Chinese Masculinity Today.” The chapters were authored by prominent scholars of gender in Chinese culture. They consider experiences of men across the centuries in terms of familial, marital, and sexual relationships; in the workplace; in relation to the nation; in terms of concepts of beauty; and in cinematic, literary, and pictorial representations. The plural use of “masculinities” in the title is crucial, as these studies emphasize the multiplicity of discourses and experience in China—from literati to entrepreneurs to the postsocialist working class—and the ways in which, whatever the historical period, gender intersects with race, class, and age. The range of chapters are such that it is not possible to discuss each here, but despite the variety in subject matter and methodologies the chapters connect very well, often helpfully referring to other contributions in the volume for points of reference and comparison. Only one of the chapters in the volume, a fascinating survey of polygamy from the late imperial era to the present day by Harriet Zurndorfer, spans both the time periods, but all chapters share an interest in exploring the dynamic between change and continuity and the relationship between local cultural context and the effects of outside forces. In the first half of the volume,

we are reminded that “late imperial China” was a time of social and economic upheaval as well as a time of shifting gender discourses: for example, in Mark Stevenson’s chapter on the rise of the mercantile class, in Martin Huang’s study of the changing status of the literati via a discussion of Shen Fu (沈复 1763–1825?), in Cuncun Wu’s study of the changing status of male prostitutes, and in Binbin Yang’s account of the changing fortunes of a Manchu official in the late nineteenth century. In the second section, scholars relate the study of masculinity to some of the major talking points in the study of China today while demonstrating the strands of continuity between the present and the late imperial past covered in section 1. These chapters include a discussion of the link between nationalism and perceptions of manhood (Geng Song), the continued importance of homosocial bonding and *jianghu* (江湖 rivers and lakes) mythology in the business world (John Osburg), and the gender politics—including the lingering patriarchal values—of the new wealthy urban class (Derek Hird). With regard to the shared theme of a local Chinese masculinity, the final chapter, by Heung-wah Wong and Hoi-yan Yau, discussing men of Taiwan and Hong Kong, is a vital reminder of the different definitions of the term “Chinese.” In noting that “different contexts produce different Chinese masculinities,” they leave us with an important question that acts as a follow-up to Louie’s in the introduction: “Can we say that there is a form of manhood that is applicable to *all* Chinese societies?” (240).

The dynamic of change and continuity is explored on a theoretical level, too. Most of the contributors continue to use the *wen/wu* (文武 cultural attainment/martial prowess) paradigm, first formulated by Kam Louie and

Louise Edwards in 1994,⁶ which has proven to be the most influential framework for addressing the subject of Chinese men from a local context. However, these chapters also argue for the need to develop it further: for example, Sheldon Lu, in his survey of postsocialist cinematic representations of the working class, points to the addition of influences from “the pan-Chinese world, East Asia, and other places” (184). Xuan Li and William Jankowiak also argue for a view of masculinity—here in the form of the Chinese father—as increasingly “hybridized” (188) since the advent of modernity, suggesting that the *wen/wu* typology should be viewed as something more complex than a two-dimensional set of norms.⁷ Other scholars have explored other frameworks for analysis, including Louise Edwards, who, despite pointing out its flaws for an analysis of masculinity⁸, brings back the yin-yang cosmology as a useful theoretical frame when considering gendered traits that can appear in any sex—here, beauty and decoration in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (90–112).

The main message, then, is one of plurality and dynamism combined with continuity and the importance of considering local context. Within this detailed look at multiple forms of masculinity, some blank spots inevitably remain. There is very little mention of contemporary rural masculinities, for example, and little, too, of ethnic difference. For this reader, the most obvious gap in the volume

⁶ Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*,” *East ASIAN History* 8 (1994): 135-148.

⁷ Elsewhere, Louie has also developed a more globalized view of *wen/wu*.

See Louie, *Chinese Masculinities in a Globalizing World*.

⁸ Louie and Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity”.

becomes apparent in the time stamps of the two sections: between “Late Imperial” and “Today” very little is said about Mao-era masculinity, barring some fleeting mentions in the introduction and in one or two chapters, all of which serve as a way of beginning discussion of postsocialist manhood (8, 146, 162, 174, 188). This reflects a field in which focus has been almost entirely on masculine ideals and experiences before 1949 and after 1976; but, as a gap, it is all the more striking when we compare studies of Chinese women and femininity, which have long been concerned with the impact of the Communist revolution.⁹ In her discussion in this volume of “Male-Love” in Ming literature, Cuncun Wu makes the important point that, for all of the “vestiges of the past still in existence in our time,” we must be wary of assuming “much in the way of real continuity” (88). In particular, she notes the “centuries of Western homophobia” to which China has been exposed have acted as a force for change; but several decades of Maoism have surely also played a role in the shaping of contemporary Chinese masculinity and therefore this period is also deserving of more detailed analysis. In all, however, this volume is a highly valuable contribution to Chinese gender studies, opening up several areas of

⁹ Some exceptions to this include a relatively brief discussion in Bret Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, chapters by David Ownby and by Elizabeth J. Perry and Nara Dillon in Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, and a recent article by Yvon Y. Wang, “Heroes, Hooligans and Knights-Errant: Masculinities and Popular Media in the Early People’s Republic of China,” *Nan Nü* 19, no. 2 (2017): 316–56.

contemporary and historical China that bear looking at from the perspective of masculine experience and discourse. It will also naturally be of great interest to those students of masculinities who wish to consider forms of manhood outside of the Global North.

<A>*The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China*

As I have suggested, a major topic of discussion in Chinese masculinities studies since its inception has been how to delineate its own particular “Chineseness,” especially in the face of earlier Orientalist stereotypes of Asian men and the neglect of East Asia in masculinities studies as a whole. If Louie’s volume, while exploring the plurality and dynamism of Chinese masculinities, ultimately emphasizes the continuity of localized Chinese manhood, Nicolas Schillinger’s monograph places more focus on change and in particular change that was prompted by interactions between China and the rest of the world. In the process of depicting this, the study illustrates how the consideration of gender can shed new light on a period of history. Late Qing and early Republican martial history has been dismissed as a period of stagnation and failure, but Schillinger demonstrates that, in terms of army reform and changing constructions of masculinity, it was in fact an era that had “tremendous, lasting effects” (327). Drawing on sources such as drill manuals, military journals, military regulations, and textbooks, Schillinger argues that the restructuring of the army after the shock of defeat in the First Sino-Japanese war in 1895 led to the construction of new ideals and performances of masculinity that, through a “gradual internalization” (19), spread beyond the army to larger parts of the Chinese population. Just as military reform was the result of cross-cultural appropriation

and adaptation—largely from Germany, often via Japan—new concepts of masculinity, too, were developed through contact with and appropriation from other nations.

The Body in Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China first discusses changes to military discipline that occurred after 1895: the introduction of new drills, calisthenics, hygiene education, and barracks discipline. In his analysis of new military uniform, rituals, and etiquette—all largely German inspired—Schillinger goes on to argue that reforms spread beyond the army and into the political culture and the general populace via fashion, photography, journals, and newspapers. In this period new military academies, through war games and manuals military journals, inculcated members of the elite with such values as professionalism, self-sacrifice, and martial spirit, drawing both on “contemporary European elements” (188) and on legendary martial arts heroes and *haohani* (好汉 “good fellow”). In the final two chapters of the study, Schillinger moves beyond army institutions and explores how concepts of this new form of military masculinity spread to wider society through the notion of the “citizen soldier” (军国民 *junguomin*), which created an ideal that associated masculinity with health, strength, and discipline. This was also promoted in new schools through textbooks, readers, and military-style drills.

Schillinger’s work, in a field that has tended to focus more on disciplining the female body, builds up a compelling account of how the male body was targeted by the state with the belief that its regulation could advance the nation toward modernity. He employs the concept of governmentality, but his

theoretical approach to gender is similar to that of many chapters in *Changing Chinese Masculinities*: he draws upon the paradigm of *wen/wu* but stresses the need to view it as a flexible matrix that allows for multiple, coexisting forms of masculinity. In his reference to specific points of international contact, the establishment of schools and academies, and the importance of print, the study also reveals some of the mechanisms by which new ideas of gender are constructed and become widely accepted. If at times it is not apparent how certain military reforms reflected a changing concept of masculinity as a whole, rather than simply the figure of the soldier—such as in his early discussion of training and first aid in the new barracks—the link between martial reform and generalized concepts of “natural” or “correct” manhood becomes clearer as Schillinger describes the promotion of the concept of the citizen soldier and military education in new schools. At other moments, however, it is harder to establish the full extent of the “take up” of the new construction of manhood. As Schillinger points out, we cannot know whether the concept of *pro patria mori* ever translated directly into physical sacrifice. More than this, we have less of a sense of resistance developed in the face of this new ideal of manhood beyond the reformers, amongst the rank and file. This study potentially opens the window to further questions about how this construction of masculinity, which appears to have been developed in a “top-down” fashion, was experienced and embodied by men as agents.

<A>*Marriage, Law and Gender in Revolutionary China, 1940–1960*

From martial to marital reform: Xiaoping Cong’s study explores Chinese Communist Party (CCP) marriage legislation and its implications for the

relationship between women and the state between 1940 and 1960. In doing so, Cong's work is rather more revealing in terms of how top-down prescriptions on gender and marriage might be resisted and manipulated, and how such policies might relate to broader issues of gender oppression and agency. In focusing on the impact of the Communist revolution on women and the issue of agency, Cong returns to a question that has, in various guises, prompted intermittent debate among historians: Was the revolution good or bad for women?¹⁰ She does this through the prism of one famous legal dispute, *Feng v. Zhang*, which took place in the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region (SGNBR) in 1943 and in which a young woman, Feng Peng'er (封捧儿 1924-2015), resisted a marriage arranged by her father and was eventually granted the right to choose her own husband.

The case serves as a prompt for Cong to make a wide-ranging interdisciplinary study that covers three elements: the social and historical context of marriage reform in the SGNBR in the 1940s; the legal development of the marriage reforms and subsequent Marriage Law of 1950; and the cultural afterlife of the case, which was adapted into multiple operas, ballads, and films over the ensuing decades. The case of *Feng v. Zhang*—in terms of its immediate

¹⁰ Elizabeth Croll, *The Politics of Marriage in Contemporary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Neil Daimant, "Re-examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative, and Rural Family Change," *China Quarterly* 161 (2000): 171–98; Gail Hershatter, "State of the Field: Women in China's Long Twentieth Century," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 4 (2004): 991–1065.

legal dispute and its subsequent reiterations through newspaper reports and cultural performances—proves to be a fine example of how local socioeconomic conditions and traditions combined with the plan for marriage reform advanced by the CCP to create a highly complex and adaptable situation, in which various reforms were instituted, resisted, and revised over time and in which attitudes toward, and experiences of, women were also constantly shifting.

In the first two parts of this study, Cong points to the need to consider local conditions when considering the significance of CCP attempts at marriage reform, detailing several instances in which a CCP decision to ban a certain marriage practice, such as kidnapping or betrothal gifts (彩礼 *caili*), could occasionally remove a source of women's agency in this region. At the same time, *Feng v. Zhang* and later reforms are also an example of the high level of accommodation and negotiation between state and local inhabitants of the SGNBR, thus suggesting that local women (and not just men) were able to voice their desires and influence the path that marriage reform eventually took. In this way, Cong reveals the nuanced nature of agency and the complex gendered experiences of marriage and its reform; the case of Feng Peng'er is neither the story of a downtrodden victim of patriarchal custom nor the story of a shining example of a "textbook communist heroine" (69). *Marriage, Law and Gender* therefore follows in the footsteps of those studies that complicate the idea of

“victim” or “agent” when it comes to Chinese women’s history,¹¹ identifying moments of agency in what previously had been painted as entirely repressive eras. It echoes, also, studies on gender and agency outside of Chinese history that demonstrate the need to think beyond a fixed binary of resistance versus domination¹² and to recognize that “women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist or protest—sometimes all at the same time.”¹³

The question of women’s agency in relation to the revolutionary state and the legal process is complicated further by Cong’s discussion of *ziyou* (自由 freedom) and *zizhu* (自主 self-determination) and, to a lesser extent, *ziyuan* (自愿 self-willingness). She traces the origins of these terms—all used at different points in the legal and cultural discussions of marriage—and reflects on how the creation of neologies and their travel across China might reveal power imbalances between urban, educated elites and rural, illiterate populations. She suggests that *ziyou* bore a Western-focused, metropolitan bias, open to misinterpretation in the SGNBR, while *zizhu*, with a longer linguistic history and

¹¹ Hershatter and Zheng, “Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” 1407; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹² Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 174–76.

¹³ MacLeod 1992, cited in Laura M. Ahearn, “Language and Agency,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 116.

less open to a misreading, allowed for power “for the actor to accomplish certain goals” (13). Cong’s use of this framework, carefully picking up the moments in which one term saw heavier use than the others, is an effective way to further demonstrate the layers of and the discrepancies between the “idealistic presentation and the social reality of marriage reform” (252).

Reforms are given one more layer of meaning—and complexity—in Cong’s final analysis of the different ways in which *Feng v. Zhang* was depicted over ensuing decades in opera, ballad, and film. In her discussions of its various iterations, Cong explores further the relationship between the state and the local populace. The different representations of Feng—now fictionalized as Liu Qiao’er (刘巧儿)—and other characters reveal the shifting ways in which the case was interpreted and utilized and therefore the multiple discourses that existed surrounding marriage reform, women and the terms of *zizhu* and *ziyou*, which continued to fluctuate. Particularly interesting is Cong’s analysis of the fictional mother figures in the operas and films, which serves as a reminder of the importance of female-female relationships in the construction of womanhood.

At times Cong’s commitment to nuance and her interdisciplinary approach, not to mention her reference to a number of other cases besides that of *Feng v. Zhang*, lead to a mass of detail that can be difficult to follow. Women are sometimes shown to be oppressed, either by traditional patriarchal cultures and networks or by the imposition of new legislation that is unsuited to their cultural context or, in other instances, as empowered, having utilized those same traditional cultures and new reforms. The experiences of women in the SGNBR also differed according to age and class. While Cong ultimately lands on the side

of “empowerment” for the women in the SGNBR as “active agents” (66), this is not a linear story of repression developing into agency but is instead a narrative that is by its nature very difficult to track. One could argue that this is precisely the way in which the question of gender and agency should be approached; such a topic, as Ortner, citing Clifford Geertz, put it, demands a commitment to “thickness,”¹⁴ that is, an understanding that is based on richness, texture, and detail rather than an attempt to refine or make elegant a chronology.

<A>*Bodies in China*

Eva Kit Wah Man’s volume, *Bodies in China: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Gender, and Politics*, is a collection of papers written over the past two decades and is an example of the immensely diverse ways in which gender might be approached; of all the works discussed in this review essay, this is arguably the most wide-ranging and ambitious. Overall, Man aims to “discuss new conceptual models” from feminist scholars in answer to Cartesian mechanistic models and also “seeks to address the meaningful revelations that come about via comparative study and case studies” (ix). The book is divided into three sections. The first provides a discussion of how the Western philosophical tradition and Confucian and Daoist philosophies have approached body and mind. Man suggests that Mencius’s philosophies of mind and body via the idea of yin-yang as complementary (and not opposing) forces might allow for a “radical rethinking” of the connection between body and reason (xiv). She then turns to a comparison between Heide Göttner-Abendroth’s matriarchal aesthetics and those of

¹⁴ Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem,” 174.

Confucian (and Neo-Confucian) and Daoist philosophies, delineating several points of similarity. Finally, Ma compares Western and Chinese theories of the body through a discussion of Western and Chinese portrait painting; in it, Man explores again the mind-body dichotomies of Western philosophy and contrasts this with Confucian theories. In all, Man strives to demonstrate how a comparative approach to philosophy and in particular attention to Chinese philosophy can help target one of the thorniest issues in Western feminist critical thinking.

In the second section, Man considers what she refers to as “traditional and contemporary Chinese exemplary studies” (xviii), focusing largely on representations of women in traditional and contemporary Chinese cultural products: *The Book of Songs*, women’s embroidery, discourses of kissing from the Han dynasty to the present day, the body art of contemporary artist He Chengyao (何成瑶 1964–), and a comparative study of work on landscape aesthetics by Arnold Berleant (1932–) and by Neo-Confucian scholar Tang Junyi (唐君毅 1909–1978). In the third and final section, Man turns to changing perceptions or ideals of femininity and womanhood from imperial to contemporary China, first examining changing ideas of feminine beauty in China from imperial times up to the 2008 Olympics; she then turns to a discussion of the first use of psychoanalysis in China and its implications for gender studies in the country. Next, Man considers women’s fashion in Hong Kong and its correlation to the social and political tensions of the 1960s. Finally, she discusses prostitution in Hong Kong in terms of emotion and sexual exchange, placed against the context of late Qing discourses of sex work.

As should be evident from the above summary, Man is dedicated to a form of critical analysis that embraces an immensely broad temporal comparison, with many chapters ranging across at least 2,000 years, and to cross-cultural comparison, largely between contemporary Western discourse and traditional Chinese philosophy (with some reference also to contemporary Chinese theorists). All of this is conducted in an interdisciplinary mode that ranges from Mencius to poststructuralist feminist philosophy to Freudian analysis. It is therefore an illustration of the vast number of ways in which attention to gender illuminates Chinese studies and for the ways in which Chinese philosophies and theories can also be used for gender studies beyond the region. In touching on her extensive interests, Man's collection might also guide readers to areas of study that have previously had relatively little attention. Indeed, many of the subjects for discussion prove to be of such promise for her stated aim of discussing gender and aesthetics in a comparative mode that they deserve far more than a short chapter-length treatment and open up a number of future possible points of discussion for scholars and students alike. Other topics have been the subject of previous scholarly attention, however, and at times close engagement with previous studies appears to have been sacrificed for a broad conceptual and temporal sweep. For example, her chapter on psychoanalysis and Pan Guangdan 潘光旦 (1898-1967) might be read alongside Haiyan Lee's work on the same topic,¹⁵ and her broader exploration of a feminist Chinese philosophy might be fruitfully read alongside a number of other studies that

¹⁵ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006): 190–217.

approach the same question of the body-mind dichotomy, the reassessment of yin-yang paradigms, and the possibility of a feminist Confucian philosophy.¹⁶ Another side effect of the broad survey is that Man does not always elaborate on certain statements, which would cause some frustration to a student wanting to follow a particular line of enquiry. To take two examples, in her discussion of contemporary feminist theories of the body, Man states that “feminists turn to phenomenological reflection on the body... [and] Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body is their favourite” (8) without revealing to which feminists she is referring, and she refers to “Chinese critiques” of the “double function” of female bodies in the 1990s (148) without making clear who made these critiques and of what they consisted. Nonetheless, this study deals most directly with the challenge of comparison and opens up an important discussion about how scholars of gender, aesthetics, and philosophy might fruitfully combine Western and Chinese frameworks.

¹⁶ Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Sin-Yee Chan, “The Confucian Conception of Gender in the Twenty-First Century,” in Daniel A. Bell and Hahm Chaibong, eds., *Confucianism for the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 312–33. This topic is also discussed in a later volume: Ann A. Pang-White, ed., *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<A>Conclusion

The four works under discussion show what Thomas Laqueur has described as “the mighty resonance of gender in Chinese culture.”¹⁷ All of them focus on history, society, or aesthetics from a gendered viewpoint and in so doing remind us that gender brings “new insight into Chinese society through its connection with other dimensions of social and cultural practice.”¹⁸ Their approaches are, of course, varied, with some studies focusing on discourses and ideals of gender and others on the lived experiences of men and women, and their variety of methodologies and theoretical frameworks are reflective of the vibrancy of gender studies as a whole.

But their shared findings and intentions are revealing. Several of the books and essays under review are concerned with the problem of patriarchy and women’s agency in an unequal environment—most obviously Man’s and Cong’s studies, but also various chapters in Louie’s edited volume (in particular, Derek Hird’s discussion of white-collar workers). “Crisis” and “anxiety” are terms that appear with a striking frequency, be it in the sense of changing identities and a loss of privilege (see Martin Huang, Binbin Yang, and Sheldon Lu in *Changing Chinese Masculinities*) or a broader anxiety that the way in which gender is performed is closely linked to a perceived national crisis (as discussed by Geng Song in *Changing Chinese Masculinities*, by Schillinger, and by Cong). Use of gender as a category of analysis can also cut across previously established chronologies and periodizations; indeed, in the process of considering

¹⁷ Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, xi.

¹⁸ Evans and Strauss, “Gender, Agency and Social Change,” 826.

continuities and change in gender, these works also traverse and trouble several traditional periodic boundaries.

More broadly, in their attention to masculinities and femininities in terms of representation and as lived experience, these studies all continue to attempt to consider gender away from Eurocentric notions of “real” men or women. In line with a general trend in gender studies, they strive to produce a plural, nuanced, and dynamic understanding of gender that is rooted in local history and intersected by such factors as class, race, and age.¹⁹ At the same time, they grapple with the question of how to approach this “local” gender in view of China’s interaction with other nations and cultures; in so doing, they also explore how the study of China relates to theories that have a non-Chinese origin. As such, these four studies are also examples of scholarly explorations of cross-cultural relations and the use and development of cross-cultural theory. In encouraging an emphasis on local difference, plurality, change over time and influences from outside the country, the study of gender has the potential to question simplistic readings of national and cultural identity. The negotiation in these four volumes between continuity and change and among “local,” “traditional,” “foreign,” “Chinese,” and so forth reminds us again of the drawbacks of considering any of these categories in simple, static terms.

<A>Notes on Contributor

¹⁹ James W. Messerschmidt, Patricia Yancey Martin, Michael A. Messner, and Raewyn Connell, *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 7.

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