

remarks that he makes in passing in the text, and, in one case, by an entire chapter (ch. 6, “Domestic Partnerships in Iberia”). This awareness, however, did not get translated into the bold generalizations, particularly the one about Northern Europe, that are a principal feature of the book.

doi:10.1017/S0738248023000238

Yue Du, *State and Family in China: Filial Piety and Its Modern Reform*

**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 312.
Hardcover £ 75.00 (ISBN: 9781108838351).
doi:10.1017/9781108974479**

Qiliang He

Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Hong Kong
Email: qhe@hksyu.edu

Yue Du’s well-researched and insightful book, *State and Family in China: Filial Piety and Its Modern Reform*, bridges two disparate scholarly traditions: the Qing dynasty’s (1644–1911) administrative rules underpinned by Confucian morality and “foreign-inspired reforms and revolutions” that led to China’s transition from an empire to a party-state. (6) In this book, the author reconsiders *xiao* or filial piety, a time-honored Confucian virtue, in the Qing’s legal system and its modern fate since the opening decades of the twentieth century. The author singles out filial piety, a defining feature of familial relations in imperial China, as the focal point of her research, because she notes that “[p]arent-child relations” underwent the “most dramatic changes in China’s empire-to-nation transformation.” (6) Du argues that the law in imperial China supported, without reservations, parental authority over minor as well as adult children, but the Republic of China (1912–1949) endeavored “to transform filial sons into citizens whose ultimate loyalty lay with the nation-state.” (247) Ironically, while the Nationalist Party or Guomindang (GMD) disavowed filial piety’s role as the cornerstone of the family, it still needed to resort to this very idea to erect the modern state’s absolute authority over its citizens.

To highlight the political and ideological ramifications of filial piety in pre-modern and modern China, this book thus features two main parts. Part I underscores the centrality of the principle of filiality in the Qing’s codified law and legal practices. The first chapter cogently shows that publicly punishing or executing unfilial sons and daughters was the Qing government’s

“didactic show” to fulfill “the goal of teaching subjects.” (40–42) The second chapter begins with a dialog with Philip Huang, who suggested that “women’s choices were restricted to either consenting or resisting decisions made for them and violence done to them” in late imperial China. By contrast, Du points out that scholars have underestimated “a widowed mother’s control over household property before the household was formally divided.” (65) In other words, the issue of women in the Qing was both gendered and generational. Hence, the author elaborates on the notion of “generational” to further explain the duality of women’s standing in Qing law in Chapter 3. In Du’s words, the “generational” order prioritized “parents over children primarily, and men over women secondarily.” (110) It is my belief that the most important scholarly contribution Du makes is her ability to complicate women’s role in the Qing’s legal system without a stereotypical interpretation of gender relations in premodern China.

Part II of the book turns attention to Republican times. The fourth chapter reviews the decades-long legal reform or modernization in China between the closing years of the Qing and the late 1920s. Such an effort finally bore fruit as the 1929–30 Civil Code promulgated by the GMD confirmed that the parents had only limited control over their children by ruling that it was the state, rather than parents, who possessed the “children’s future productive and reproductive labor.” (158) Such “complete realignment of parent-child relations in the Republic,” according to the author, was a manifestation of a sweeping structural change in concepts of gender and family in post-May Fourth times, especially in Chinese cities. (166) Chapter 5 further highlights the state initiative to make the new citizenry at the cost of the parents: citizens were given a new definition as “rights-bearing individuals who were freed from the ‘feudal grasp’ of their own parents, so that they could best shoulder duties toward the state.” (201) Chapter 6 shows the GMD’s intention to apply the notion of filiality to the mythologization of Sun Yat-sen’s status as the Republic’s founding father. The author thus addresses an inherent contradiction in the GMD’s state-building effort. On the one hand, parent-child relations continued to be politically relevant to legitimate the GMD’s “political tutelage.” (240) On the other, the GMD’s promotion of “the notion of rebellion against all authorities” (223) could backfire if the young generation was motivated to resist the party-state, the “ultimate parent.” (215)

The study of filial piety in varying historical contexts provides a lens through which the author is able to examine the transition between premodern and modern China. The author persuasively shows that both the Qing and Republican regimes penetrated the private sphere of the family to exert authority over the general population even though they interpreted filiality differently. More importantly, this book provides a new perspective to better understand womanhood in Qing and Republican times by inserting a new variable, generation. The author’s arguments are well supported by a wide range of archival sources unearthed across China. Thus, this newest study contributes to enriching the existing scholarship on family-state relations in China, including Susan Glosser’s 2003 *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915–1953*.

This said, this book leaves the reader wanting to learn more about the vernacularization of state initiatives at the grassroots level. It seems that the author is more successful in describing “resourceful” local people’s manipulation of Qing law to serve their interests (89) than the Republican citizens’ creative use of the new Civil Code. In addition, at points in the book the narrative flow is disrupted by repetition. Despite such minor concerns, this book is a must-read work for anyone who is interested in modern Chinese history, family–state relations, gender, and China’s changing political cultures in the past several centuries.

doi:10.1017/S0738248023000251

Radha Kumar, *Police Matters: The Everyday State and Caste Politics in South India, 1900–1975*

**Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021.
Pp. 241. \$19.95 paperback (ISBN 9781501761065).**

Partha Pratim Shil

Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA

Email: pshil@stanford.edu

Radha Kumar’s *Police Matters* is a study of everyday rural policing and the historical co-constitution of caste power and police power in twentieth-century south India. Through a study of three southern districts in the colonial province of Madras Presidency—Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram—Kumar seeks to depart from the existing scholarship on the colonial police which, in the author’s view, has framed it as an institution with sparse presence in the Indian countryside. In contrast, Kumar argues that the colonial police, particularly in south India, was engaged in acts of “routine policing in rural spaces” (2) and was deeply entangled in everyday rural life and politics. The purview of colonial police included more than mere coercion to ensure the functioning of the colonial economy. It was equally engaged in epistemic interventions that transformed rural society, and made it legible to the state, especially through the prism of caste. Kumar crisply puts it thus: “Outnumbered in the vast spaces of the countryside, the Madras police drew on, and reproduced knowledges of caste toward optimizing their resources, so that trading and farming communities received protection, while laboring and so-called criminal communities were monitored” (23).

Kumar also demonstrates how caste groups, as they competed for social mobility, drew the colonial police into rural social conflicts as a resource.