

collectivism required in learning activities such as teamwork and the individualized ways of assessment (pp. 94–99 and chapter seven), and between the over-emphasis on school credentials in career promotion and the value of informal and non-formal learning in shopfloor experiences (pp. 155–160). The prevalence of these discourses reveals how adult education is entrenched in the social structure (e.g. the socialist market economy and the urban–rural divide). Regrettably, Jia situates his findings in comparison with Western studies on adult education. The omission of Chinese scholarship creates a mirage that these discourses are distinctive to China’s adult education, and perhaps leads the author to suggest some misguided and infeasible measures to revamp Yuanmeng Plans.

Furthermore, Jia reiterates the theoretical framework of assemblage developed by Deleuze and Guattari throughout the book. He conceives adult education as an assemblage in which active agents, rules, resources, events and power come into play, and he also suggests that it is possible for workers to navigate through assemblages. This thesis leads to grand and sweeping conclusions about the adult education of rural migrants and leaves the various mechanisms uninvestigated. Presumably, the use of the concept of assemblage leads to the insufficient presentation of thick descriptions in the book. There are some riddles waiting to be unraveled. What is the hidden curriculum in Yuanmeng Plans that affects interactions between teachers and rural migrants? How do teachers who venerate individuality and personal success make sense of the teaching processes? What are the trajectories of social mobility for Yuanmeng students? As well as the model students and workers that the author came across in an industrial park, it is necessary to listen to the silenced voices of ordinary students.

Most striking in Jia’s analysis is that continuing education in the Chinese context strengthens the stratifications within the group of rural migrant workers (see p. 27). This finding confirms the cliché in the field of sociology of education, reminding us that schooling is not a level playing field and education is not an equalizer to compensate for “deficiencies” originating from students’ ascribed status.

It is a pity that Jia spends little time analysing the socioeconomic status of the rural migrants and ignores stratifications along lines of gender and ethnicity. This means it is still difficult to gauge to what extent Yuanmeng Plans intensify stratifications. As the author suggests, education colludes with larger society by shaping discourses and related practices to reproduce the status quo. At the same time, when envisioning the future of rural migrants in China and their adult education, other social forces such as the incorporation of digital technologies within formal education may also bring about transformations and obstacles. As researchers and educational practitioners, we should be aware of the upcoming challenges because these forces are implicated in the (re)production of social hierarchies in which the dynamics between power and education have placed rural migrants at a disadvantage.

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## Violent Intimacy: Family Harmony, State Stability, and Intimate Partner Violence in Post-Socialist China

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Ke Li

City University of New York, New York, USA  
Email: [kli@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:kli@jjay.cuny.edu)

Tiantian Zheng’s new book, *Violent Intimacy: Family Harmony, State Stability, and Intimate Partner Violence in Post-Socialist China*, is a scathing indictment of a society that has time and

again failed to curb gender-based violence. This failure has a magnitude bordering on the unimaginable. Approximately 35.7 per cent of Chinese women in the reform era have endured intimate partner violence – an estimate recognized by the country’s highest court, the Supreme People’s Court, in 2008. Today, that percentage easily translates into millions of female victims. How could this happen in a country that has long enshrined gender equality in state laws and policies?

To answer the question, an “individual-factor approach” – one that pins the blame on individual traits such as education, socioeconomic status, conjugal conflicts, substance use and history of abuse in childhood – would not suffice, Zheng argues. Instead, we must consider “the role of history, structural inequalities, and the cultural system of power hierarchy” in the (re)production of violence against women (p. 13). And a critical gaze is needed to untangle the nexus between a patriarchal state and the family – an overarching argument that sets the tone for the book. In recent years, as Chinese women increasingly have an official discourse of “family harmony” ladled down their throats by state authorities, many find themselves being charged with onerous responsibilities, upholding traditional gender roles as dutiful wives and virtuous mothers, promoting nationalist sentiments at home and maintaining neighbourly solidarity, to name a few examples. In this context, safeguarding women’s rights and advancing gender equality all too often take a backseat within and outside officialdom.

Among the six substantive chapters, the third stands out in terms of both its length and depth. With a penetrating analysis, Zheng shows in detail how China’s criminal justice system fails to hold male abusers accountable, leaving hundreds of thousands of female victims in hopeless struggles. A series of empirical findings lend support to this claim. To begin with, since Xi Jinping’s rise to the pinnacle of state power in 2012, “family harmony” has been elevated to a new height of importance. As “harmony” trumps rights protection, judges often impose light sentences – six months to a few years – on husbands who physically, sexually or psychologically abused their wives. Out of desperation, wives resorting to violence to fend for themselves, however, face much harsher consequences, ranging from a decade behind bars to the death penalty. In other words, intimate partner violence leads to notable gender disparity in criminal sentencing.

Second, the promulgation of the first anti-domestic violence law, in 2015, was a step in the right direction, but has fallen short of expectations on multiple fronts. The law, for example, has introduced written warning notes, personal safety protection orders and compulsory reporting as new measures intended to protect women from victimization at home. Surely well-meaning, these measures, nonetheless, prove inadequate. The letter of the 2015 law lacks specificity, courts lack resources for implementation, and too many police officers lack political will, legal knowledge and social awareness of women’s sufferings as victims, Zheng points out. Consequently, rather than taking punitive legal actions, judges and police heavily rely on mediation, especially oral education of abusers, in their handling of domestic violence cases. Finally, when victims approach the court system to request divorce, judges rarely side with them. The dominant pattern in court rulings usually involves one of two outcomes: those on the bench either turn down victims’ petitions for divorce or reward abusers by granting them child custody and conjugal property.

While chapter three squarely focuses on the criminal justice system, the other five chapters guide readers to explore the history of intimate partner violence in China (chapter one), popular perceptions of worthy versus unworthy victims (chapter two), male rationalization of gender-based violence (chapter four), women’s everyday resistance (chapter five), and social activism geared toward lawmaking and policymaking (chapter six). In short, taking readers on a journey, this book presents a comprehensive examination of violence in intimate relationships.

To fully appreciate this book, readers need a keen sense of how the author managed to amass large chunks of data from diverse sources. Between 2014 and 2021, Zheng conducted fieldwork

in Dalian, a city in northeastern China. There, she conducted interviews with 50 men, from all walks of life; she also held interviews, online chats, face-to-face and telephone conversations with 50 women. Additionally, interviews with government officials, police officers, judges, lawyers and feminist activists were carried out to scrutinize official as well as non-official responses to gender-based violence. Placing first-hand, ethnographic data side by side with secondary sources, including media coverage and scholarly publications, Zheng mobilized multiple data sources to build her claims and arguments. These efforts in turn allow readers to view intimate partner violence from the perspectives of victims, perpetrators, law enforcement agents and feminist activists, an accomplishment that should not go unnoticed.

A final remark. There is much to admire when it comes to the author's analysis of systemic atrocities against women. That said, at various places in the book, Zheng invokes binary categories – say, the Chinese versus the Western, the traditional versus the feminist, the rule of law versus the capricious rule of humans – in a very uncritical, unreflective way as if they were merely givens, with a *sui generis* existence. Small wonder that, in this book, “patriarchal traditions” simply linger on in post-socialist China, and that historical continuities effortlessly eclipse discontinuities in the Chinese official justice system. In treating these categories as givens, this book obscures a crucial reality: what we consider as *Chinese law* today is actually a conglomeration of ideas, practices, principles and institutional arrangements – appropriated from diverse origins, including Western liberal democracies. Put differently, this book could have benefited from a more thorough break from an essentialist view of culture and history.

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## Re-enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China

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Man Guo

Harbin Institute of Technology Shenzhen Campus, Shenzhen, China  
Email: [guoman@hit.edu.cn](mailto:guoman@hit.edu.cn)

The central theoretical concept of Mayfair Yang's book pertains to the “ritual economy” in Wenzhou, China. The book is very well organized and provides a clear exposition of the principal theoretical concept of ritual and some highly pertinent ethnographic cases from Wenzhou of lineages, their halls and their ritual activities. Part one describes the Wenzhou model of rural development in China; part two addresses religious diversity and syncretism in Wenzhou; part three describes the religious civil society and ritual economy.

In *Re-enchanting Modernity*, Yang formulates a close study of the vitality of ritual-social lives in urbanizing China. Yang draws on ritual theory to rethink how religion and social-economic lives are intertwined, and specifically how the ritual economy works in contemporary China. The empirical cases are very well chosen and comprehensively presented. Yang is clearly well versed in the anthropology study of Chinese religions and is skillful in navigating the conceptual issues in this field.