

Paul J. Bailey. *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 208 pp. £60.00 cloth, ISBN 9780230577763; £19.99 paper, ISBN 9780230577770.

Drawing on a massive amount of scholarship (more than 500 items) mostly published in the past three decades, Paul Bailey has produced an impressive synthesis that demonstrates the richness, diversity, and as well as the limitations of the expanding scholarly production on women and gender in China. Similar in scope to Gail Hershatler's massive survey of the state of the field, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), Bailey adopts a different approach in this book with a different goal. Rather than mapping out the academic field of women and gender in modern China, Bailey constructs the first historical narrative of women and gender in twentieth-century China based on scholarship from diverse disciplines. This history of women and gender follows the conventional periodization of the history of twentieth-century China, conveying Bailey's intention to incorporate a history of women and gender in the mainstream historiography. The book certainly supports his thesis, "The experiences of Chinese women, in addition to changing gender discourses and practices, constitute an absolutely crucial and significant aspect of this history, an acquaintance with which is essential for an understanding of China's modernization process itself during the twentieth century." (p. 1-2).

With a lucid style, Bailey succeeds in producing an accessible history that combines structural analyses with vivid details of many fascinating historical figures and events. His close attention to historical actors results in a conscientious inclusion of individuals whose agencies made differences in China's social, economic, cultural, and political transformations in the first half of the twentieth century. That the compilation of a constellation of women historical actors is possible testifies to the tremendous accomplishments of scholarship on women of the pre-People's Republic of China (PRC) eras during the past few decades. As a historian I am delighted to see the inclusion of a large number of diverse women in the historical narrative, albeit as a teacher I am at my wits' end to see how daunting it is for American undergraduates to encounter a rapid succession of Chinese names.

Bailey's clearly stated agenda is to "problematis[e] this conventional image of Chinese women in the twentieth century as the helpless and victimized sufferers of 'feudal' and 'reactionary' forces before the communist revolution of 1949 and then afterwards simply the recipients of emancipation and freedom bestowed on them by the omnipotent (and male-dominated) CCI." (p. 1) To this end, he devotes the first chapter to women in pre-twentieth-century China. In this excellent summary of scholarship on the subject, Bailey presents a sweeping coverage of a vast range of research that deploys diverse analytical lenses. Highlighting agencies of women from diverse classes and localities, the chapter examines intersections of gender, class, ethnicity, age, kinship hierarchy and geographic locations in women's

domestic, economic, occupational, marital, ritual, intellectual, and religious practices. The role of the imperial state and male scholars in the production of gender discourses and in the maintenance or challenge of gender norms is also scrutinized. Skillfully weaving a multi-faceted narrative, with the availability of rich and revisionist scholarship on women in pre-modern China, Bailey succeeds in deconstructing a conventional image of Chinese women as helpless victims of "feudal" society already in Chapter 1.

The abundance of research on women in the first half of the twentieth century further enables Bailey to give the space of four chapters to a multi-dimensional narrative of transformations in gender practices and norms as well as contending gender discourses in those tumultuous decades. Opening Chapter Two with Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907) a "revolutionary martyr," Bailey casts spotlights on the experiences and activism of a constellation of historical actors, including Western missionary women, the Chinese male elite as well as Chinese women with diverse social and political positions, against a historical stage permeated by dazzlingly shifting settings. Presenting a women-centered chronological narrative from the 1894-5 Sino-Japanese War to the founding of the PRC, Chapters 2 to 5 are organized by topical categories that convey the wide scope of available scholarship. Discussions of imperialism, colonialism, orientalism, Confucianism, nationalism, feminism, anarchism, communism, and heterosexism as well as wars and revolutions are woven into the examination of the experiences of diverse groups of women during the five decades. Women revolutionaries (nationalist and communist), missionaries, Christians, feminists, students, professionals, writers, factory workers, rural peasants, prostitutes, movie stars, and "modern girls" all appear on the colorful and dynamic historical stage, powerfully substantiating Bailey's thesis that women constituted an absolutely crucial part of the history of China's modernization. While Bailey also examines how in the male elite's literary and visual representation women became a trope to express their desires and anxieties, up to this point his emphasis on women's own agency as historical actors is consistently demonstrated with available scholarship.

However, the chapters on the period of PRC show a striking shift in emphasis. In the two chapters on the socialist period (Chapters 6 and 7), the frequency of the appearance of Mao's name is higher than that of the combination of all the individual women mentioned in passing. Without their distinctive voices, nameless women come off as passive objects of Mao's social experiments. Rather than accentuating women's expressions of agencies, Bailey focuses on a hegemonic actor, the CCP, which dominates the narrative of the socialist period. Although Bailey incorporates some more recent scholarship on the Mao era that attempts to open up new lines of inquiries, the conceptual framework for his narrative of this period is conventional, in the sense that it expresses old assumptions of an "omnipotent" and monolithic "party-state" as well as a preoccupation with the effects of party policies.

For instance, his discussion of the 1950 Marriage Law relies heavily on scholarship produced in the early 1980s when Western scholars did not have access to

archives, and biographies and autobiographies of those who involved in drafting the law, because much of this material had not yet been published. Thus the Marriage Law in Bailey's book continues to be presented as a product of the "party-state" (which assumes a seamless male identity), while now readily available Chinese sources and scholarship since the late 1980s have demonstrated that the gender identity of its drafters is female. The Marriage Law was drafted by the Committee of Women-Work constituted of feminists in the CCP and led by Deng Yingchao 鄧穎超 (1904-92); it was the first law that the Committee was assigned to draft by the Party Central upon the founding of the PRC.¹ If gender really matters in our conceptualization, we certainly need to investigate gendered processes of policy and law-making in the PRC, rather than conveniently attributing everything to the workings of a monolithic "party-state." To say the least, such a framework erases feminist contentions within and beyond the Party. To probe further, doesn't this kind of intellectual laziness actually reveal an assumption of the "omnipotent" party-state whose all-mighty power supposedly renders any expressions of women's agency impossible?

The paucity and limits of English scholarship on women in the Mao era is illuminated by Bailey's book: There is a lopsided treatment of the first and second half of the twentieth century. Readers can observe a curious phenomenon in Bailey's history of women and gender in twentieth century China: Women's strong agency and tremendous creativity in engendering multi-dimensional transformations amply demonstrated in the first half of the twentieth century seem abruptly to vanish once the CCP becomes the state power holder. The sudden disappearance of Chinese women's agency in this historical narrative is due in part to methodological limitations in scholarship that relies on the official publications of the "party-state," rather than an exploration of the possibilities to find methods to present women's life stories and to convey women's diverse voices. But it is also symptomatic of a deeper issue, that is, the historical context in which our own knowledge production is situated. The abundant research on pre-1949 China is

¹) The euphoria as well as debates among feminist drafters of this Marriage Law is vividly discussed in these books: Jin Feng 金鳳, *Deng Yingchao zhuan* 鄧穎超傳 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), vol. 2, 457-61; Luo Qiong 羅瓊 and Duan Yongqiang 段永強, *Luo Qiong fangtan lu* 羅瓊訪談錄 (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 2000), 119-121; Huang Chuanhui 黃傳會, *Tianxia hunyin: gongheguo sanbu hunyinfä jishi* 天下婚姻：共和國三部婚姻法紀事 (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2004), 33-54. Also an important historical document is included in an anthology: Deng Yingchao, "Guanyu Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo hunyinfä de baogao-1950 nian 5 yue 14 ri zai Zhangjiakou kuoda ganbu huiyi shang de jiangyan" 關於中華人民共和國婚姻法的報告—1950年5月14日在張家口擴大幹部會議上的講演, in Zhongguo funü guanli ganbu xueyuanbian, ed., *Zhongguo funü yundong wenxian ziliao huibian* 中國婦女運動文獻資料匯編 (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 1988), 49-54. See too Luo Qiong, "Xinzhongguo diyibu hunyinfä qicao qianhou" 新中國第一部婚姻法起草前後, in Luo Qiong, *Kangzhen, jiefang, pingdeng- Luo Qiong wenji* 抗爭解放平等—羅瓊文集 (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 2007), 427-28.

more or less in line with Bailey's agenda, that is, to deconstruct either an orientalist or a CCP master narrative in which women were characterized as helpless victims of the "backward feudal society." Not accidentally, most deconstructionist scholarship has appeared in the post-socialist period in the critique of the failures of Maoist socialist revolution which is a dominant intellectual trend in and outside China. Correlating the "historical turn" to the periods of pre-socialism is a near "desertion" of the socialist period by feminist scholars, an academic reality that conditions Bailey's limited narrative of this period. Thus, while the life experiences of diverse women in that era of drastic social, economic, cultural and political transformations were almost inaccessible to the English speaking world in those three decades, they are largely untapped by most researchers in and outside China in the post-socialist period. In the meantime, there has emerged a new hegemonic discourse produced by post-socialist academics and the media domestically and globally which take as their mission to denounce not only Mao but also the entire socialist revolution. In this anti-socialist hegemonic discourse, again, women in socialist China could only be victims, or puppets, or tools of a manipulative dictatorship. The CCP's master narrative of women as victims of the old feudal society has long been deconstructed, though its gendered rhetorical scheme is inherited by anti-socialist discursive producers.

Interestingly, Bailey seems unaware of the implications of discursive ruptures and contentions between the socialist and post-socialist periods, although he clearly marks the reverse of socialist accomplishments in multiple areas relating to gender equality in the post-socialist period in Chapter 8. Gender has been a crucial site where battles for a socialist revolution and for dismantling socialist revolution have all been intensely fought by diverse historical actors. In an era when a socialist revolution has long been undone in China and knowledge of socialism for the young generation is predominantly constituted by the anti-socialist master narrative, it may be imperative for historians to shift their attention to the lives of women and gender contentions in the socialist period with a conscious conceptual framework that resists the hegemonic discourse of the twenty-first century. The limited scholarship on Chinese women during the second half of the twentieth century illustrated in Bailey's book, hopefully, may serve as a stimulus for those scholars in search of new knowledge of these intensely contested historical times.²

²) A few factual errors in the original scholarship in the book should be noted here. First, the All-China Women's Federation was never disbanded (p. 121, 131). Like other government offices during the Cultural Revolution, it just stopped its functioning while cadres and staff became engaged in political studies or condemnation sessions, or later went to work in rural "cadre schools" but continued to be on the payroll of the Women's Federation. Second, Deng Yingchao had never participated in the work-study movement in France (p. 75). From 1920-25 she was a school teacher in Beijing and Tianjin. See Jin Feng, *Deng Yingchao zhuan*, and Deng's brief biography on the official website: http://www.china.com.cn/aboutchina/zhuanti/dyc/node_7060204.htm. Third, Deng Yingchao became

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a member of the Politburo only after Zhou Enlai's 周恩來 death in 1975 (p. 148), contrary to Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-91). Zhou in his life long tenure as the Premier rejected suggestions from party officials to nominate his qualified wife to high positions in the government. See Zhao Wei 趙煒, *Xihuating suiyue* 西花廳歲月 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2004), 326-30. The highest position Deng Yingchao held was Deputy Chair of the All-China Women's Federation before Zhou's death. This case of suppressing his wife's promotion was cited in the CCP publication as an illustration of Zhou Enlai's high ethical standard as well as Deng Yingchao's virtue of self-effacing.

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