

against misogyny and the traditionalism of the isolated areas in the Far East where the regime's authority was weak and the state was unable to help them to reassert their position. Industries did not welcome female volunteers, who were poorly paid, much less than men; there was inadequate housing and social services; and the distribution of goods was corrupt and under the control of dishonest local party bosses. The major disillusionment came when the women realized that they could not exploit their privileged position as representatives of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, as their status was not recognized by the locals.

In her conclusion, Shulman argues that the Khetagurovite story underscores the differences between Soviet empire-building and that of the Western European powers. These differences include the primary motivation of Soviet women, who sought to partake in the unfolding epic of Soviet conquests in the harsh but supposedly bountiful natural world of the Far East but not to function as guardians of racial boundaries (p. 222). She also suggests that while the frontier epitomized promises fulfilled for some women in Soviet society, the Stalinist frontier exaggerated some of the most difficult aspects of the Soviet system for women and their children (p. 225).

Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire is an excellent piece of scholarship, contributing to the development of the history of Soviet women and Soviet society in general. Shulman demonstrates an impressive ability to elevate the argument to a new cognitive level and shows the complex diversity of women's lives under Stalinism. It is beautifully written and gives an exciting glimpse of the private lives of those women who decided to try to build a new society. But one major reservation is the author's tendency to simplify the motives of both the state and the women themselves; Shulman constantly uses the argument of the lack of women and their difficult material situation as a reason for both the failure of the Khetagurovite campaign and of attempts to resettle the Far East. Women certainly exploited opportunities to adjust to the situation, but their choices were not as voluntary as they would have liked, and sexual and gender politics forced them into certain patterns of passive resistance that women could and should have exploited to their advantage. The rich material presented in the book shows extreme anxieties about independent women being present in the masculine space of settlement society, and those anxieties were traditionally connected with female bodies and sexuality, that, once uncontrollable, were more likely to disrupt than to create a society.

This book is definitely an event in the contemporary historiography of Stalinism, and can be warmly recommended not only to academic readers but also to the wider public.

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EYFERTH, JACOB. *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots. The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920–2000*. Harvard University Press. 335 pp. Ill. \$45.00; £33.95; € 40.50; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000441

This study explores a branch of rural craft production that continues to survive in the villages of Jiajiang County in central Sichuan Province into the twenty-first century. Research for this study was done in many months of field studies in Jiajiang papermaking villages during the years 1996–1998, 2001, and 2004.

The work is structured in two sections. The first part deals with the technical procedures and the socio-economic institutions involved in papermaking. The other part describes and analyses local socio-economic processes. The perspective of family history winds through both parts, but is presented in particular in the last chapter which discusses problems of lineage solidarity and the preservation of the family tradition of paper production.

Focusing on the urban–rural divide of present day Chinese society, the author points out that in the later twentieth-century modernization process, there was a strong tendency to consider all people living in the countryside as peasants, even if they had a full-time non-agricultural occupation. The Jiajiang papermakers are a case in point. They mainly operate in household-based workshops, but according to statistics of the early 1950s, about one-fifth of the 5,000 workshops also engaged both male and a small number of female hired workers. At that time, about 14,000 people were working in the industry.

In the first part of the book, the author develops his concepts of skill and de-skilling. The steps of traditional production from harvesting the raw material, bamboo, to the delivery of the finished paper to wholesalers and retailers are described in detail, focusing also on the gender and age perspectives of division of labour.

Skill, in this author's view, is located not in the individual minds and bodies of the participants, but at the interface between the skilled person and his or her surroundings. It is socially defined, not only as “practical knowledge” or “knowledgeable practice” (p. 1), but also relates to the knowledge as how to organize work teams, the allocation of tasks by gender and generation, and the cooperation with kin and neighbours. In a general sense, “skills are social relationships” (p. 44). They are not evenly shared, but are rather a reflection of power in the relationships of gender, generations, and classes.

One of the main concerns of this study is the process of de-skilling. Referring to James C. Scott's thesis, the author states that in the “global South”, de-skilling occurs within “subaltern” groups (peasant farmers, small artisans, indigenous peoples) rather than within the factory proletariat. According to this argument, the agents of de-skilling were not capitalists, but technocrats or colonial administrators, in sum, agents of the modernizing state, who did not pursue profit motives, but strived for a world liberated from material want. Transposed to China, similar de-skilling attempts started in the 1920s. As in other proto-industrial settings worldwide, Western-, Russian-, and Japanese-educated administrators and engineers tried to reduce, and finally set an end to, traditional handicrafts – which they thought of as antiquated and inefficient. If rural handicraft industries were seen as declining, then it made sense according to Chinese policy not to attribute a special status to rural craft production, but to change tax demands from cash or craft products to grain. The first initiative of this kind of “peasantization” in the twentieth century occurred in the famine years of 1936–1937, in the years 1940–1941 during the Sino-Japanese War, and from the 1950s onward: especially between 1963 and 1977. Thus, this policy straddles the Nationalist and the Socialist regimes of China.

Yet age-old technical skills and their social embedding do not die out within the planned time-frames of ambitious governments, and rural craftspeople have their own personal agenda in these processes. The author makes a rough outline of the expansive phase of the industry in the 1920s to 1940s. He considers these developments in accordance with Albert Feuerwerker's early findings: in spite of generally pessimistic views by government representatives about the rural handicraft industries, these were quite economically viable during the years of the Republic. This was especially so during the

late Republican era, when due to the war, the capital was moved to Chongqing in Sichuan province. Besides logistical aspects, no Japanese paper was imported, and large mechanized paper mills did not exist. These factors brought a great boost to manual papermaking in Jiajiang, where an estimated 60,000 people, or one-third of the county's population, were involved in this industry.

While property relations were left untouched during the Republican era, under the first few decades of the PRC, party directives aimed at collectivization and tried to transform the rural artisans more systematically into peasants. Owners of larger workshops, who usually possessed tracts of bamboo land, were classified as "landlords": the most harshly attacked class in the land reforms since the early 1950s. At first, wage labourers were designated as "workers", and rural trade unions were established. Shortly afterwards, the government realized that entitling all rural workers to the benefits of industrial workers would incur enormous costs. Once private trade in paper was forbidden and it officially became a state monopoly, the state would also be responsible for supplying the workers with grain. This would have far exceeded the capacity of the developing planned economy which aimed at establishing an urban heavy industrial sector. Therefore, at least part of the artisan workforce was registered as farmers and had to supply a set quota of grain to the state.

In the course of the forced mechanization and industrialization efforts of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), many rural artisans were assigned to state factories. When these were dissolved, most of them were not reassigned back to their handicraft cooperatives, but to agricultural work units, which led to a rapid decline of the workforce and output in the traditional papermaking branch.

An upswing occurred from 1977 onwards. It was connected to the reinstallation of limited property rights for individual households, the growing demand for handmade paper – for art and calligraphy, fire crackers, and religious purposes in the form of spirit money for the deceased – and the increasing freedom to trade. Since the 1990s, papermaking has expanded in output, but lost its dominant position in the county's industrial development to township and village enterprises in other industries, notably ceramics and building materials. In the years of collectivization, skills that had been preserved in household workshops became fragmented and had to be reacquired. As the handmade paper industry had all but died out in the years up to 1977, households would often cooperate to learn the skills that they lacked from their neighbours – who often were also kin – but cease cooperation when they had learned enough to produce on their own.

Turning to the field of family history, the author explains that in 1993, members of one of the oldest families of papermakers erected a commemorative stele to strengthen agnatic family and lineage cohesion. They did so in awareness of the crisis in generational relationships, for instance the increasingly current phenomenon that older and younger generations split up their households. Moreover, the author suggests that even without mentioning politics, the stele asserts the family tradition of papermaking in a timeframe of 1,000 years or 40 generations, thus far transcending political systems that might, temporarily, force families out of their ancestral trade.

This well-written book is invaluable for the information it yields on concrete events in recent Chinese socio-economic history, and for its field work research into the relevant experiences of eye witnesses. An earlier version has already become a reference for Chinese historians of the local history of Jiajiang and its papermaking tradition. Moreover, this study will be cherished by labour historians sensitive to gender issues, since it

spells out perspectives on male and female labour that are still not self-evident in this type of research.

The book is not meant as the history of a particular handicraft branch; thus, the reader should not expect extensive comparisons with papermaking in other regions of China or East Asia. Taking a long-range perspective, historians of the Ming and Qing dynasties may differ with the idea that state extraction was typically “modern”. Populations were also registered according to occupations in particular periods of late imperial China. Both the Ming and the Qing governments demanded *corvée* or military service in particular situations, sometimes without considering actual occupations or means of livelihood of the concerned people. Phases of harsher control by activist administrators, as in the initial years of the Ming and the Qing dynasties, alternated with periods when local conditions could not be changed by faraway central governments. An argument for the continuity of such waves of more *dirigiste* and more liberal policies can be made for twentieth-century Sichuan as well.

As for the staying power of the Jiajiang papermakers in the most recent years, it would be useful to have more information on the competing sector of fully mechanized printing factories elsewhere in Sichuan.

The author’s definitions of skill and his application of the de-skilling thesis to China are original and will be welcomed by social historians in making global comparisons. De-skilling in the Chinese context is frequently discussed in connection with migrant workers with agricultural rather than craft skills. Migrants indeed are often perceived of as “unskilled” although they may command a wide range of production skills, but not the skills “to translate technical skill into social status and material rewards” (p. 230). However, as is stated in the conclusion, rural de-skilling (in the orthodox sense of the word) remained incomplete – and this can be demonstrated in the case of Jiajiang papermakers who seized the opportunity to reacquire traditional technical skills and found innovative ways into mechanization and an upgrade of productivity.

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