

12-1-2018

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Recommended Citation

Chao, Emily Ph.D. (2018) "Wang, Xiyong. Gender, Dating, and Violence in Urban China. New York: Routledge, 2017.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 10: No. 1, Article 33.
DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1465
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol10/iss1/33>

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Wang, Xiying. *Gender, Dating, and Violence in Urban China*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

In this vivid and ambitious book, *Gender, Dating, and Violence in Urban China*, Xiying Wang provides the reader with glimpses of dating encounters in Beijing which seek to illuminate the ways in which the state, market, and neo-liberal discourses of individualism create opportunities for individual agency, while re-infusing patriarchal values that shape interpersonal dynamics in China. The most engaging elements of this book are the accounts of dating encounters that are paired with periodically incisive commentary.

Chapter 2 outlines an approach to gender-based violence that is “intersectional,” drawing on critical legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw and sociologist Patricia Hill Collins’ approach which locates “race, class and gender” in a “matrix of domination.” Inspired by Crenshaw, Wang seeks to embed gender violence in particular historical transformations since 1949, particularly questioning how the state and a market economy have shaped constructions of gender in China. Wang attempts to complexify feminist presumptions that depict women as victims and men as perpetrators of oppression, and to critique scholarship that simplistically attributes gender asymmetry to China’s Confucian legacy.

In Chapter 3, “Dating Landscape, Power Struggles and Love Geography,” Wang draws from her informants’ (largely college students, young educated professionals and a smaller number of workers) dating testimonials, particularly focusing on conflict and dating violence. As one of Wang’s male informants explains, men must acquire in their lives four big things signified by the noun suffix “zi”: “*chezi* (car), *fangzi* (house), *piaozi* (money), and *mazi* (women).” For Wang, the quote suggests how women are perceived as commodified. Wang illustrates how desirable dating partners are situated in a gendered hierarchy of value based on appearance, class, education, age, material assets and residence status. Wang’s study points to the significance of residence permits, and by implication state policy, in creating a stratified dating landscape which ultimately shapes interpersonal dating dynamics.

Local perceptions of residential status transgression are revealed by societal characterizations of the “peacock girl and phoenix boy,” an “arrogant” girl with Beijing residence and a “long-suffering” though upwardly mobile rural boy. In Wang’s study, conflict and violence are common in “peacock girl and phoenix boy” couples. Wang persuasively identifies violence as entwined with the inadequacies of men’s material conditions. At a historical moment when the market economy constructs the masculine ideal in terms of a man’s ability to make money and provide material comfort, phoenix boys perceive criticism of their material shortcomings as attacks on their masculinity, prompting them to assert dominance through violence towards their female partners.

Gender hierarchy is also at stake in Older Uncle-Lolita Complex (*dashu kong-luoli kong*) relationships, a dating phenomenon in which younger women date older men for financial security and to be “spoiled,” and older men seeking prestige, female submission and control prefer relationships with younger women. Androcentric assumptions persist in these relationships and in depictions of older men of material means as “golden bachelors,” whereas well-educated women in their late twenties are stigmatized as “leftover women.”

Wang’s discussion of courtship among the floating population (rural migrants) based on a handful of informants primarily relies on other scholars’ more substantial research on this topic. The weakest part of the book, addressing interracial dating, appears to be based on only three informants who engaged in interracial relationships and focuses on the comments of a single informant. No men or non-Chinese were interviewed. It is curious that the author twice

acknowledges the shortcomings of this section, perhaps retaining it for the sake of identifying her approach as “intersectional” after Crenshaw’s theory in which race is a key axis of analysis.

In Chapter 4, “Sassy Girl and Tender Boy,” the author’s research is based on querying informants about the popular Korean film, *My Sassy Girl*. Wang finds that women identify with being “sassy,” i.e. publicly aggressive and in some cases violent toward their partners, while men appear to be tender and indulgent of their girlfriends’ public rebukes. Wang explains women’s behavior in terms of their presumptions of gender equality, having been raised under the One-Child Policy. How this policy shapes men’s behavior is oddly unexplored. Wang asserts that women’s sassy dating behavior demonstrates emergent female agency, thereby refuting feminist scholarship depicting women as victims. At the same time, the “tenderness” of young boys, who may lack the material success or achievements equated with dominant, market-informed constructions of masculinity, provide young men with an alternative means of “winning women’s hearts.”

Chapter 5 continues the exploration of dating violence through the examination of “virginity loss,” “sexual coercion” and the “sexual revolution.” Wang’s research reveals that male coercion is pervasive in initiating sexual relations during dating. Her informants, particularly young women under 20, all describe these first sexual encounters as coerced and either “unpleasant” or “disappointing.”

Virginity is largely fetishized as a hallmark of female virtue and for men is frequently a precondition for female desirability; part of a double standard in which only women are stigmatized after ending sexual relationships. Wang observes that women voice traditional discourses of female purity and virtue to avoid initiating sex in a relationship or unwanted sex, while men seeking to initiate sex rhetorically invoke modernity and demand sex as evidence of women’s affection or commitment. Wang concludes that “virginity loss” represents a threshold after which women may alter their views and equate being sexually active with individual autonomy and modernity.

Chapter 6 combines insights from Chapters 4 and 5 to explain the dynamics of gender violence among dating couples in Beijing. Wang asserts that the public appearance of female aggression and male passivity is only one aspect of relationships in which privately, sexual relations are characterized by male coercion and female submission. Wang reasons that putative sassiness expresses women’s intolerance both of gender inequality and their boyfriends’ “sexist attitudes.” For Wang, women’s views of gender equality were forged in a milieu of parental support for urban daughters as the sole children of the One-Child Family Policy. Wang astutely observes that her informants are the first generation of One-Child Policy daughters to come of dating age.

Wang characterizes the sexual revolution as “unfinished” because while women construct their identities as modern for having achieved success in work and careers, gender parity does not extend to the domain of sex. A number of women reported minor to severe male violence in sexual relationships. Publicly aggressive female behavior and off-stage male violence and sexual coercion comprise what Wang identifies as “gender-asymmetric modes of mutual violence” common in Beijing dating relationships. In *Gender, Dating, And Violence in Urban China*, Wang discusses a substantial amount of important literature on topics not ultimately woven into her own analysis. Oddly the book does not engage with the broader literature on marriage, particularly given what the author identifies as the emphasis placed on residence permits (*hukou*) and parental approval, which are ultimately relevant to marriage rather than dating alone.

Three of the book’s chapters were initially published as coauthored articles, traces of which remain in the alternating use of “we” and “I.” Nonetheless, the book provides readers

unfamiliar with the literature on gender theory and social change in China with a useful introduction to this topic. Wang's own research provides an eye-opening account of the views and experiences of young people engaged in relationships. Wang's notable contribution is her pathbreaking analysis of the context and patterns underlying cycles of violence that characterize conflict and dating in contemporary Beijing. This book will be of interest to sociologists and anthropologists and should be required reading for social workers and scholars of gender and violence in contemporary China.

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