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Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain: The Story of a Secret Brotherhood in Rural China, 1939–1949 by Di Wang
(review)

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understanding. Third, the religious sites have been chosen to guarantee comprehensiveness and representativeness, with reference to different religions at different locations in different time periods. Also, the research targets of different religious locations are analyzed not only individually, but also connectively insofar as to show interwoven networks.

To conclude this review, I would like to mention that this book may still have room for further improvement. For instance, the definition of sacredness as used in this book is kind of arbitrary, which concerns a wide range of spiritual and even non-spiritual events. In addition, the theoretical implications can be further explored and refined, that is, if the cases shown in this book highlight the vague distinction between the sacred and the secular for Chinese religiosity, what cautions should be practiced in future comparative religious studies? What instruments might be conceived in large-scale studies that go beyond Shanghai? How can we evaluate other field research? These questions deserve more discussion.

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Di Wang. *Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain: The Story of a Secret Brotherhood in Rural China, 1939-1949*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018. xiv, 259 pp. Hardcover \$90.00, ISBN 978-1-5036-0483-4. Paperback \$29.95, ISBN 978-1-5036-0530-5.

Every once in a blue moon, this reviewer finishes a book and thinks: “Now *this* is the kind of book I aspire to write.” Di Wang’s *Violence and Order on the Chengdu Plain* is one of those rare books. This multivalent story is told through the prism of “a secret society with a long history that operated throughout Sichuan” called the Paoge, sometimes known as the Sworn Brotherhood Society (*gelaohui*) (p. 2). Full of pathos and interwoven with complex narratives, *Violence and Order* is rich in anthropological and sociological data collected in the 1930s and 1940s, and complete with entertaining and humanizing historical anecdotes. In this book, Wang meticulously interlaces a history of insiders and outsiders, state-society relations, rural governance, and everyday life in the Sichuan countryside.

The book is at once a history of a Paoge branch in Hope Township (*wangzhen*) outside of Chengdu and at the same time an inquiry into the history of sociology and anthropology as academic disciplines in China in the 1930s and 1940s. Wang calls this “history in two voices,” where he recounts the story of Lei Mingyuan, the patriarch of a Paoge Family, and of Shen Baoyuan, a naïve, female undergraduate student from Beijing who conducted sociological research on the family during the Second Sino-Japanese War (p. xii). Wang’s own voice offers “a third layer of interpretation,” which provides insights into life in and around the Chengdu Plain, and an analysis of state-society relations during the same period (p. xiii).

The Paoge had long been a part of the social fabric of Sichuan, but are often remembered for their secrecy and anti-Manchu agitation in the late imperial period. A turning point for the Paoge was the 1911 Republican Revolution, as they “played the important role of allies to the revolutionaries,” and “their activities went from underground to public” (p. 37). This lasted through to the establishment of the People’s Republic, when they were essentially eradicated by the new Communist state.

The book is divided into four parts, plus a short introduction, five appendices, and a character list. The most curious appendix is the last one, which serves as a commentary on the production of texts and using myths as historical sources. This section might have served readers better in the introduction, rather than hidden away after the translation of Chinese poems and texts, as Wang raises important questions about his sources and their pedigree here. For instance, he notes that although the “book is a study devoted to the lower classes and to marginalized people,” the majority of his sources are “shaped by elites” who recorded them (p. 192).

After locating the reader in rural Sichuan, the first chapter begins with a public execution. Without divulging too much, the protagonist Lei Mingyuan kills his daughter after she runs off with her supposed-lover in a face-saving public murder. Although murder was a capital crime in China at the time, Lei never faced any legal consequences (p. 31). For Wang, the fact the Lei escaped conviction, let alone prosecution, “illustrates the social conditions in China at the time” (p. 31). In this instance, the Paoge exerted more influence over the local community, and, as the “head of a social organization” Lei “could arbitrarily execute his family member” without recourse from national laws (p. 31). Chapter 2 addresses this issue by considering the extent to which the Paoge were able to “influence Sichuan politics and local order” (p. 34) and concludes that the “dramatic expansion” of the Paoge “in the first half of the twentieth century was closely linked with the formation of the modern state and the process of China’s modernization” (p. 45).

Part 2 delves into the customs, rituals, and rites associated with the secret society. Modern sociologist Shen Baoyuan might have seen some of these

performances as relics of a traditional past, but Wang's descriptions of the secret codes, handshakes and language, local god-worshipping rituals, and rite ceremonies conducted by the Paoge are the most intriguing parts of the book. By shedding light on these encoded practices, Wang gives us a window into the daily lives of Paoge members while highlighting that the secrecy surrounding them "reflects its function as an effective network for the marginalized" (p. 71). All of these codes were meant to maintain social order, and it was strict adherence to rules which "became a foundation for the Paoge's internal stability" (p. 78).

In part 3, Wang delves into the Shen Baoyuan's report on the politics surrounding the Paoge in the county under study, exploring the relationship between landlords and tenant farmers through the lens of Paoge members. As Shen came to terms with her own privilege and cosmopolitanism, she expresses both her communist-leaning sympathies and develops compassion for the family she is sent to investigate. Wang claims that the roots of rural social activism in China lay in young women and men like Shen who went to the countryside as students to collect ethnographic data (Introduction). Although some of her "theories and methods were still relatively immature," Wang still recognizes the immense "merits" in "the data concerning everyday lives" in Sichuan (p. 164).

The section tracks the demise of Lei's family fortune from relatively wealthy landlords through to their eventual demise owing to Lei's increasing dependence on opium and his flair for extravagance. In essence, Lei's "power and status" within the Paoge organization was "linked with economic foundation," and when he lost all his money and land, his prestige suffered as well (p. 125). In part, the section brings into questions the stark division between tenants and landlords laid out by the communists to show that, on the ground, these categories were much more fluid. The section also highlights the symbiotic relationship between cities like Chengdu and the countryside that surrounded them. In the book, people, goods, and ideas flow freely between the two areas, and the "fate of the country was closely tied with cities like Chengdu" (p. 112).

In the final section, Wang discusses the "tragic fate" of many Paoge members who could not come to terms with the new CCP government (p. 145). In this regard, Wang's study provides "some detail at how the PLA entered . . . rural townships and market towns" (p. 149). As the new state consolidated power, they began to erase threats to their own power in ways that the imperial powers and the Chinese Nationalists had never been able to do. Of course, remnants of the Paoge remained, and these are embedded in the language, cultural, and social life of Sichuanese people. In some ways, Wang argues, the Black Societies (*heishihui*) which have emerged in the post-Mao era are relics of a Paoge past (p. 173) and carry on their functions.

One thing that struck this reviewer was the absence of the war in the daily lives of people living in rural Sichuan. The book takes place during the Second-Sino Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) that came after it. Shen Baoyuan was in Sichuan because Yenching University in Beijing was forced to close and move as the Japanese occupied large swaths of northern and eastern China. Yet, the war is conspicuously absent from the daily level of her subjects of inquiry. This is perhaps a testament to the variations of wartime experiences had by people living in the countryside in the interior as opposed to people living in coastal and northern regions which were under Japanese occupation.

As Wang tells us in the introduction, he was given Shen Baoyuan's thesis by a friend over ten years before he returned to the project about the Paoge in earnest. In this way, the book serves as a nice reminder that revisiting unused archival materials accumulated over the years can open new doors for inquiry, and that sometimes, having a decade of distance from a source provides the opportunity to produce something truly memorable. This book should be enjoyed as a collective whole, but individual sections or chapters could be assigned for upper-level undergraduates and graduate level courses.

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David Der-wei Wang, editor. *A New Literary History of Modern China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. xxvii, 1001 pp. Hardcover \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-674-96791-5.

The publication of *A New Literary History of Modern China*, the end product of a three-year project (2014–2017) led by its editor David Der-wei Wang (王德威), is a monumental event in the development of the study of modern Chinese literature—an ever-growing discipline in contemporary Anglophone academia, the bilingual nature of which dictates that acts of comparison and uses of translation are a given. Indeed, the vibrancy of the discipline can be affirmed by a number of important edited volumes published by renowned university presses in recent years, and together they demonstrate the collective