

be described as kin-initiated transactions and outright kidnapping, a practice that seems to have grown in importance during the early twentieth century.

This is an excellent, thoughtful book. I am happy to recommend it not only to historians of China but also to scholars beyond China studies who seek to understand changing labor regimes. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China provides a fascinating example of an economy in which labor was extracted by means of a complex mix of family obligation, coercion, and paid employment. Written with attention to personal detail, the book enables readers to appreciate the lives both of the trafficked and the traffickers. *Sold People* not only provides sophisticated analyses; it is also a pleasure to read.

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The Chinese Mafia: Organized Crime, Corruption, and Extra-Legal Protection, by Peng Wang. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. vii+248 pp. £70.00 (cloth).

In March 2017, a criminal case called “kill the mother-insulter” (辱母杀人案) went viral on Chinese media. The 22-year-old offender, Yu Huan, received a life sentence for killing a debt collector and injuring three others when his mother, an entrepreneur who had failed to pay a loan shark, was illegally detained and sexually humiliated in front of Yu by 11 debt collectors but received no help from the police. Many citizens questioned the rationale of the heavy sentence, while others criticized the ineffective police work. The case incidentally provided a glimpse into China’s booming loan-shark industry and criminal organizations that specialize in debt collection. The past four decades have witnessed the evolution of Chinese organized crime from street gangsters to criminal organizations that participate in violence mainly for profit, as described in fact-based fiction such as *Old Days in the Northeast—Two Decades of the Black Societies* (东北往事—黑道风云20年). What is less known, both in the mass media and academia, is the emergence of a new type of organized crime—a Chinese mafia that goes beyond participating in traditional illegal activities such as gambling, organizing prostitution, and drug trafficking to also specializing in selling protection. Peng Wang’s book is the first in English to explore the rise of extralegal protection in China.

The book uses not only published materials but also fieldwork information collected in two Chinese cities, Chongqing and Qufu. Wang should be highly commended for this bold project. Doing empirical research on crime, and in particular on organized crime involving the government, is extremely difficult in China and, for that matter, worldwide.

The book first examines the emergence, structure, methods used, and types of illegal services provided by the so-called underground police organizations (地下出警队), which are invited by individuals, entrepreneurs, and even local governments to muscle in on dispute resolution, debt collection, or fighting off “nail households.” The book particularly examines the widespread practice adopted by Chinese hospitals to hire illegal security organizations to deal with disturbances instigated by patients or their family members or gangsters. While the direct use of violence is always an option, to reduce the likelihood of a police crackdown these security forces most often resort to soft violence such as harassment, humiliation, threats, stalking, and coercive threats to achieve their goals.

Inspired by the demand-supply thesis proposed in two influential books about organized crime, *The Sicilian Mafia—the Business of Private Protection* by Diego Gambetta (1993) and *The Russian Mafia—Private Protection in a New Market Economy* by Federico Varese (2001), Wang argues that China’s booming market economy fosters a high demand for private coercion or protection from coercion to enforce or defend against illegal market transactions or disputes arising from legal transactions that the state is unable to protect. The coercion and protection are supplied by organized criminals mainly composed of rural-to-urban migrant workers and urban laid-off workers. While both *The Sicilian Mafia* and *The Russian Mafia* focus on the extralegal protection offered by organized criminals—the “black mafia”—Wang introduces the term “red mafia” to include corrupt government officials who form a criminal network based on *guanxi* to provide protection. In particular, the book provides a fascinating analysis on how *guanxi* facilitates the buying and selling of positions by the police and the People’s Liberation Army.

Following in Gambetta and Varese’s footsteps, Wang argues that while the demand for extralegal protection derives from an inability of the legal system to provide impartial, efficient, and sufficient protection for private property owners, the embeddedness of *guanxi* networks in law enforcement makes China’s legal system weak and unjust in the first place (96). In this regard, the book proposes a “socio-economic theory of mafia” in a Chinese context by emphasizing the negative effect of *guanxi* in the rise of extralegal protection.

While the effort to develop new theory should be applauded, it remains at best an unaccomplished task. First, there are insufficient links between the empirical data analysis and Wang’s theoretical argument for the rise of the Chinese mafia. For instance, Wang examines the role of *guanxi* in obtaining extralegal protection, facilitating corrupt transactions, and building the political-criminal nexus in chapters 4–6, respectively. However, the examination of how *guanxi* facilitates the buying and selling of extralegal protection cannot address the question of why there is a need for extralegal protection. Second, there is an internal contradiction in the efforts to theoretically integrate Gambetta’s economic theory for the emergence of the mafia and Mark S. Granovetter’s theory that individual behavior

is embedded in a social context. The unit of analysis for the former is at the aggregate level while the latter is at the individual level. The integration of theories from different levels proves to be challenging if not impossible.

The Chinese Mafia is developed from Wang's PhD thesis, and some traces of this can still be sensed. For instance, the book is heavily influenced and sometimes overwhelmed by references to Gambetta's and Varese's work (Gambetta and Varese appear in the book 87 and 47 times respectively). Some non-China specialists may find the introduction of the history of Chinese secret societies, the Shanghai Green Gang in particular, interesting and informative, but it remains loosely connected with the analysis and central argument of the book.

Nonetheless, Wang's book should be warmly welcomed, given the rise of a security state and the conservative turn of the Chinese authoritarian regime in recent years. The crackdown on human rights lawyers, the tightened media control, and declining academic freedom all make the current campaign against corruption, and by extension the Chinese mafia, far less effective in the long run, as the book convincingly argues.

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The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China,
by Kate Merkel-Hess. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. xiii+241 pp.
US\$40.00 (cloth), US\$40.00 (eBook).

The Republican era was relatively brief, and it is overshadowed by the subsequent success of the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949. "Warlords," "militarism," and "political disorder" are keywords for the period. However, as Kate Merkel-Hess demonstrates in *The Rural Modern*, this was also a period in which a different future for China was being imagined by some policy makers, intellectuals, and ordinary people. This was a vision of "rural modernization" in a China-centered way, a route to modernization that flowed from reforms in rural China and that some foresaw as a better future for all of China.

Merkel-Hess's focus is on rural society—a sensible choice in that the great bulk of China in the 1920s and 1930s was in fact rural and agricultural. As Merkel-Hess reminds us, China only became a majority-urban population in 2011 (5). The idea of "rural modernism" is intriguing, since prevailing European ideas conflated modernization with urbanization—including the Marxist theories of revolution and change that guided the political thinking of the Chinese Communist Party before it was forced to switch to a rural strategy. The rural reconstruction approach reflects the thinking of some non-Communist Chinese intellectuals during