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examining how economic history (cocoon marketing and filature production) interacts with political history (elite power and collaboration with the state) and social history (evolving cultural repertoire and engendered family–family production) in Wuxi, the study has provided a very interesting account of the 'total history' of the local silk district. Readers who are interested in studying Chinese economic development, local elites, gender and peasant-family production will find this book indispensable.

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Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665* (1999), xiv + 355 (University of California Press, Berkeley, $45.00, paperback $17.95).

Although seven hundred years of 'gender in China's medical history' may seem straightforward, what, you may justifiably ask, does 'a flourishing yin' mean? Inspired by the title of one of the most important gynaecological texts of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), translated literally as *To Benefit Yin* (Jiyin gangmu), Furth introduces us to the richly metaphoric yin realm of the feminine, the sexual and the reproductive from the beginning of the Song dynasties (960–1278) to the end of the Ming. In addition to writing the first account in English of the largely uncharted territory of Chinese texts on gynaecology and obstetrics, Furth integrates relevant religious, astrological, alchemical, fictional and other related sources into a multi-layered history of the Chinese medical body.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first introduces her concept of an androgynous 'Yellow Emperor's body', which she has constructed from the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor*, the classical foundation of Chinese medicine synthesized in the first century BCE. The second and third chapters begin a thousand years later during the Song dynasties, focusing first on the emergence and development of gynaecology (*fuke*) and then on the meanings of gestation and birth in obstetrical (*chanke*) literature. In the central chapters four through six, Furth argues that transformations in conceptions of the female body, gender relations and gynaecological medicine during the Ming dynasty were direct consequences of Mongol rule under the Yuan dynasty (1278–1368). Chapters seven and eight shift their centre from the prescriptive medical texts of physicians to the clinical narratives of the medical case records of a male literati and a female physician of the late Ming. In the final chapter, Furth describes the three paths that led her initially towards her subject: 1) the history of gynaecology and obstetrics in the literate Chinese medical tradition; 2) the analysis of gender ideology in Chinese medicine; and 3) epistemological issues underlying the history of the body in western scholarship. The Chinese case offers an alternative construction of bodily androgyny, sexuality and reproduction that forces one to realize the extent to which Euro-American conceptions of the same subjects are culturally constructed and historically situated.

In the introductory chapter, Furth begins with her second path on gender ideology. She argues that the 'Yellow Emperor's body' represents an androgynous ideal for both men and women in contrast to the one-sex to two-sex typology of the European history of the body: male and female bodies comprise feminine-yin and masculine-yang aspects of a bodily androgyny that simultaneously replicates, and is encompassed by cosmological processes of yin and yang (Figure 3, 49). Furth argues that instead of the Euro-American image of sexual androgyny centred on gender identity and the individual, the bodily androgyny the Chinese

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imagined mirrored both the social order of a gender-interdependent family and the cosmic order of dynamic interplay of yin and yang uniting Heaven, Earth and Humanity (311).

In chapters two and three, Furth establishes the route of her first path by describing the emerging new literature on gynaecology and obstetrics in the Song dynasty. With the unprecedented imperial patronage of medicine and large-scale printing during the Song dynasty, more medical knowledge became accessible, a new class of literati-physicians formed, and the new gynaecological texts emphasized female blood as the marker of corporeal difference requiring the specialized diagnosis and treatment of women. The Song obstetrical literature further differentiated the female from the male body by essentializing female blood as unclean, the foetus as destabilizing and birth as a bodily crisis.

In chapters four through six, Furth continues this first path into the Ming dynasty. The famines and epidemics following the Mongolian–Chinese warfare fostered medical revisionism, openness to new paradigms for understanding disease processes and criticism of Song approaches to gynaecology and obstetrics. Furth argues that the intensified seclusion of women following the Mongol occupation resulted in a revisionist move away from the specialized gynaecology of the Song and back to the androgynous 'Yellow Emperor's body' of classical medicine. To support this argument, she analyses how *To Benefit Yin* for women and *To Benefit Yang* for men – two books published by the same author in the 1620s – constructed female and male gender norms through an alchemical and medical discourse on sexuality, fertility and longevity.

The central arch of Furth's historical analysis moves from the more gender-specific gestational body of female impurity of Song medicine to the more gender-neutral generational body of both males and females in Ming medicine. Learned medical discourse in the Ming thus emphasized the androgynous body of both men and women as a reflection of cosmic process, transmutation and change in contrast to the Euro-American two-sex conception of sexual bodies, differing in substance, structure and fixed essences (310).

In chapters seven and eight the two paths of the history of gynaecology and obstetrics and of gender ideology in Chinese medicine combine into one. Furth first uses the medical casebook of a literati-male physician Cheng Maoxian, who practised in the 1610s and 1620s, and then focuses on female healers from grannies, midwives and wet nurses to the exceptional case of Tan Yunxian, who was the only female physician in Chinese medical history to leave a published record of her practice. Social, cultural and medical historians will find her nuanced analysis of the case records of these two physicians and their comparison from a gendered perspective both exemplary and more easily accessible to students than the previous chapters.

The greatest strengths of *A Flourishing Yin*, however, are also the source of its greatest weaknesses. By writing for the first time in English a coherent history of gynaecology and obstetrics of the literate Chinese medical tradition, we are left with portraits of women largely painted by men (except for the remarkable record of Tan Yunxian), and biased toward the elite fraction of the Chinese population. By starting from an androgynous classical ideal she constructed as a heuristic tool, Furth also assumes greater unity, consensus and knowledge on this ideal than probably existed in Chinese society. Research could still be done on the regional, social and local diversity of gender ideology in medicine as well as of gynaecological practices throughout the period she covers. Finally, her epistemological challenge to western scholarship on the history of the body is well taken, but the density, complexity and detail of her presentation of

the Chinese case may prove to be an obstacle to otherwise sympathetic readers. Furth, nevertheless, not only takes her readers down the three paths that began her enquiry, she has also paved them painstakingly well and broken new ground along the way. Her contribution to the three fields she set out to address is extraordinary and will keep her colleagues busy for years to come.

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Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (1999), viii + 236 (Stanford University Press, Stanford, $45.00).

Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (2000), xvi + 413 (Stanford University Press, Stanford, $55.00).

Both of the books under review were published in the Stanford University Press series 'Law, Society and Culture in China'. Taken together, these two works highlight the contributions that legal history can make to another emergent field, the study of women, gender and sexuality in China and elsewhere.

Bernhardt's study analyses changes in women's rights to inherit property during the period stretching all the way from the beginning of the Song dynasty to the eve of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Her primary focus is the 'logic' of successive legal institutions as codified in the law, which she calls 'legal regimes'. She analyses five such regimes: Song, early Ming, mid-Qing, transitional (early Republican) and modern (Republican). In these regimes, 'women' appeared in their legal personae – widow, daughter, wife and concubine. Due to the paucity of extant cases for the earlier period, Bernhardt's analysis focuses on the reasoning of the jurists as revealed in statutory law. For the later periods, she highlights the intended and unintended social consequences of the law, illuminating in the process the gap between the statutes and social customs. As such, *Women and Property* is an accomplished work of institutional and social history.

The most salient contributions of the book stem from its chronological sweep, which affords revisionist insights about changes and continuities in the legal roles and positions of women. For example, previous scholars have emphasized the relatively high legal status of Song women and the subsequent decline in this status, as evinced in the alleged right of a Song unmarried daughter to inherit a share of family property at the time of household division (the so-called 'half-share law'). Bernhardt overturns this view, arguing that, in light of the logic of the Song legal regime, 'there was no "half-share law" . . . and indeed could not have been' (8).

The early Ming witnessed a radical decline in women's legal position. The turning point was 1369, when a sonless widow could no longer inherit her husband's property *as his wife* and, instead, had to establish a lineage nephew as his heir. She enjoyed only custodial rights over his property through the heir. Furthermore, the widow became vulnerable to the lineage head, who had to give his consent to her choice of heir. This loss of formal control was mitigated to some extent in practice by the high regard and sympathy with which a chaste widow was regarded by Ming and Qing judges, who often affirmed her choice over that of the lineage head.

A more controversial revisionist insight concerns the impact of Republican legal reforms (1929–30) on women's welfare. The Republican Civil Code was motivated by the ruling party's