Whether we credit it to globalism or cosmopolitanism, the need to reach out of the archives of a single nation and to explore themes that are shared across cultural boundaries has invigorated much recent scholarship. Marxist historians led the way. Perhaps this was because Marxist theory offered a structure for explaining the historical relation of worker to capitalist that refused to see the differences between national histories as absolute. Practitioners of this sort of history thought in terms of structures that allowed for a shared and comparative history; the same theoretical apparatus could be employed whether the labor relations were in Buenos Aires or Boston, Milan, or Manila.

Feminist scholars, on the trail of patriarchy, followed suit. They have found it increasingly interesting to cross boundaries of time and space and engage in dialogue with those concerned with common questions but different epochs and locales. Patriarchy has flourished in wildly disparate societies, and, like class and race, gender is permanently in the process of social formation. Hungry for analytical strategies, feminist scholars have reason to read outside their disciplinary and geographical and temporal “fields,” and they have often done the first of these things (it is no accident that so many feminist scholarly journals are interdisciplinary), though less commonly the latter two.¹

¹. For good introductions to moves to internationalize the history of women and of gender, see Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, eds., Writing Women's
Still, if the work is compelling enough, even the biggest gulfs of time or space are obstacles that can be overcome. And Susan Glosser gives historians of the United States, Europe, Africa, and Latin America a good reason to read about China. She also adds to a growing body of evidence within feminist historiography for the need to find new ways to integrate, on an equal footing, tales about gender and tales about politics.

In the early 1970s, when the history of women was being reinvigorated, political history was generally understood to be a subject innocent of gender. (A collection of historiographical essays commissioned by the American Historical Association herded women’s history into the same chapter as family history.) For Susan Glosser, though, as for many other recent writers on related themes, family history and gender history are necessarily linked to national political history. She argues, in the chapters to come, that the construction of gender is integral to a nation’s understanding of itself, and gender identities are substantially constructed inside families. In listening to Chinese men arguing in the 1920s about the qualities of the perfect wife, we hear gender ideologies being shaped. We can also find, perhaps to our surprise, arguments we have heard before—in the United States in the era of the American Revolution, in Italy during the Risorgimento. That is in part because Chinese men imported these lines of reasoning from abroad, in part because similar lines of reasoning emerged from congruent political goals.

The struggles against traditional Confucian values that took place in early-twentieth-century China can seem far removed from those American Revolutionaries waged against conservative ideologies in the eighteenth century, but there are some eerie resemblances—some of which Glosser explicitly notes in her study. Chinese reformers challenged a Confucian tradition that required upper-class women (and in some cases those of non-elite status as well) to be metaphorically and literally secluded in their homes, their mobility restricted by the pain of bound feet. Chinese reformers condemned footbinding both for principle and for practice, and expanded their condemnation of tradition into an assertion of women’s entitlement to knowledge so that they could be better wives and mothers. (Because “the trope of the powerless and victimized” woman was useful to reformers, Glosser argues, they generally ignored the real power that women—especially as mothers-in-law—could wield in the traditional elite

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household.) As Chinese reformers warmed to their task, Glosser explains, they offered a vision of the modern woman that calls up the image I named the “republican mother” in a work published more than two decades ago. We also see the contours at some moments of what might be called—to play on both terminology used by other historians of gender interested in the West and a slogan bandied about in contemporary China—a cult of domesticity with Chinese characteristics.2

The ideology of republican motherhood, which flourished in the era of the American Revolution, located politicized, educated women as contributors to the stability and vitality of the state. Such a mother was an informed citizen who transmitted her well-grounded opinions to her children, educating her sons and daughters to lead patriotic and virtuous lives. Moreover, before she was a republican mother she was a republican wife, choosing a virtuous man for her husband and correcting her husband’s lapses from civic virtue. Against the founders’ fear that republics were fragile, dependent on the virtuous choices of the generation that created them, unlikely to be retained when the revolutionary generation was replaced by descendants who had not experienced the moral crises that drove the founders, the republican mother inserted herself. She promised to nurture successive generations of virtuous citizens. Like Glosser’s New Culture reformers, she agreed that the nation “needed healthy, educated mothers to produce citizens sound in mind and body.”

Hemmed in at every turn by the old law of domestic relations, republican motherhood could legitimate only a minimum of political sophistication and interest. The republican mother did not vote or participate directly in politics; she could be spared the sharp criticism normally directed at intellectually active women because she placed her learning at her family’s service. Like the ideology of xiao jiating (literally, the small family), the ideology of republican motherhood claimed a modest space

for the individualism of the wife, altering the female domain in which most women lived out their lives, and justifying middle-class women’s claims to be part of the civic culture.\textsuperscript{3}

Some of the similarities across time and space just alluded to are intentional; Glosser tells us that New Culture radicals of the 1910s and 1920s looked to the Western nuclear family as a modern alternative and made Nora of Ibsen’s \textit{A Doll’s House} their model. They dreamed of companionate marriage; they linked individual happiness to the welfare of society; and although they did not claim “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as explicit goals, entitlement to personal happiness resonated through their writings. Access to divorce was necessarily part of the companionate ideal; petitioners for divorce in China at the end of the decade of the 1930s (not unlike petitioners for divorce in Revolutionary America or France) were overwhelmingly women. By the 1930s the \textit{xiao jiating} ideal had imploded to include “rational” consumer choices as part of the way “women fulfilled their civic duties,” along with educating their children and making the home comfortable for their husbands.

There were many differences, of course. The ideology of \textit{xiao jiating}, Glosser tells us, was embedded in an attack on traditional family systems. In the United States, those who articulated the ideologies of republican motherhood and companionate marriage had included women as well as men; Chinese reformers seem to have been almost all male and uninterested in female subjectivity. It was their own individualism they were prepared to heighten. As Glosser puts it, “Men took it for granted that it was their happiness at stake.” Moreover, in China, to an unusual degree, due to a mixture of political factors, the power of an invasive state ended up being bolstered by family reform rhetoric.

In general daily usage, at least in the United States, the languages of marriage and of family life are thought to describe private life, a sphere of experience guarded against state intrusion. We habitually contrast the

\textsuperscript{3}. It is interesting to note that in the United States in the 1790s, as Susan E. Klepp has argued, the ideology of republican motherhood developed in the demographic context of the “fertility transition” to smaller families. Free women, she writes, “applied egalitarian ideas and a virtuous, prudent sensibility to their bodies and to their traditional images of self as revolutions inspired discussion and debate. . . . On the household level, restricted fertility and high rates of literacy or years of education were persistently linked: the higher the educational attainment of women, the lower fertility rates.” See Susan E. Klepp, “Revolutionary Bodies: Women and the Fertility Transition in the Mid-Atlantic Region, 1760–1820,” \textit{Journal of American History} 85 (1998): 916, 915. It is also worth pointing out that the \textit{xiao jiating} ideology, as Glosser suggests, not only limited the amount of space carved out for the individualism of the wife—the same was true for the husband.
family and the state, the public and the private. And yet, the family is basic to a society’s system of political communication; patterns of family authority intersect with the general political culture, here as well as in places that are sometimes assumed to be unusually oriented toward familial units. Among the vocabularies for the expression of state power are the rules of marriage. Many elements of marriage and family life are shaped by state policy: the ceremony itself registered in state offices; parental obligations to support and protect children enforced; divorces framed by public law; police invited to interrupt domestic violence; inheritance law controlling what can be handed to heirs and who, in the event of intestacy, those heirs will be. Men and women, whether or not they are married, whether or not they are heterosexual, shape their relationships to each other within the boundaries of the state’s expectations for their behavior.

Simultaneously, the state’s own vision of itself often depends as much upon family behavior as on public law. For example, practices of child raising precede formal schooling and can situate children variously for participation in societies that expect greater or lesser degrees of self-government and civic participation. These practices can change over time. Before the American Revolution, divorce was rare and when it occurred, custody of young children invariably went to the father; by the 1830s, the ideology of republican motherhood had contributed to a new configuration of women as appropriately the nurturers and educators of their children, and the old rule began to crumble.

A generation ago, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba envisioned political socialization as a process in which an individual develops a definition of self as related to the state. In the talk—and there is a lot of good talk in Glosser’s book—about what husbands and wives owe to each other, to their families, and to the community, we can hear educated Chinese men of the first half of the twentieth century struggling to articulate new relations of marriage. We also hear them, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, struggling to articulate new claims for their own self-fashioning, for their relations with their wives, and for new relations between the private family and the public order.

That they hesitated to challenge the public order as they inherited it would constitute their tragedy. But Glosser has retrieved the voices of men of modest fame and enabled us to listen in as they reflect on the

most intimate relations of their lives. Their state would be listening. If
the public sphere presses so heavily on the private, then historians of the
public order cannot avoid the history of the family and of ideas about
it. Reading across borders, in an effort to tie together histories of gender
and histories of politics, all this suggests, is something that is well worth
doing for many different kinds of reasons. And for students of Western
histories looking for some way to get a sense of the stakes involved in
Chinese debates on the family and public life, the pages that follow by
Susan Glosser are an excellent place to start.

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