

over global Communist movements—a development that profoundly transformed Moscow’s foreign policy. By the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union seemed less focused on pushing the Soviet model of modernization to the Third World, and more prone to direct military intervention in postcolonial conflicts. In their relations with Egypt, for instance, the Soviets turned a blind eye to Gamal Abdel Nasser’s good relations with the West, and even to Nasser’s persecution of Egyptian Communists (3:78). The Soviets even deceived Nasser with false intelligence regarding Israeli plans so as to provoke a war in 1967 (3:83–84, but better presented in the work of Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, “The Spymaster, the Communist, and Foxbats over Dimona: The USSR’s Motive for Instigating the Six-Day War,” *Israel Studies* 11, no. 2 [Summer 2006]: 88–130). By the end of the 1960s, realpolitik—not Communist ideology—had become the main guide for Soviet policy: “Soviet aid was ideologically flexible . . . Just as Moscow was not interested in a wholesale export of the Soviet system, the ‘recipient’ countries were similarly intent on attracting maximum advice while preserving maximum autonomy” (3:78, 80).

Besides increasing Soviet “flexibility” on ideology, there was the unavoidable reality that Third World “interest in Soviet technology declined in the 1960s and 1970s” (3:82). The truth was that Soviet technology lagged far behind the West, and this more than anything else brought a serious decline in Soviet global influence during the last decades of the twentieth century. Add to this that Moscow’s armed intervention in Ethiopia and Afghanistan had rendered the Soviet Union an

international pariah, encouraging an unprecedented level of unity among Western allies and an increasing reluctance in the Third World to accept Soviet aid (3:87–88).

The Cambridge History of Communism is a paradigm-changing series, one that replaces the well-worn Communist bashing typical of most previous Western studies. The collective essays are tantalizing and important. In its own way, each essay in the collection offers nuance and context that has been sorely lacking in the monolithic, one-size-fits-all treatments of earlier writers who routinely conflated Communism, totalitarianism, and violence. It turns out that the history of Communism was a living, breathing thing—not merely Moscow’s weapon for world domination, but also a pathway for Third World countries to blend anticolonialism and anti-imperialism with national struggles for independence. Like any institutionalized ideology, Communism could push for women’s equality in some parts of the world but rest comfortably with existing or “traditional” gender roles for women in parts of the world like Central Asia. Among the most fascinating discoveries, regularly appearing in essay after essay, are the ways in which Communism—an intrinsically antinationalist program—was often transformed into a nationalist ideology, one that rarely resembled the original visions of either Lenin or Stalin. Any legitimate history of Communism must be able to account for such polarities.

JEFFREY BURDS
Northeastern University

WANG ZHENG. *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1964*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. xv, 380. Cloth \$85.00, paper \$34.95, e-book \$34.95.

In the intellectual and cultural flowering of China’s May Fourth Movement (1919), Henrik Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* became a powerful touchstone. The main character, Nora, who leaves a stifling household and enters the world on her own, captivated a generation of young Chinese. That the play ended only with Nora’s exit did not escape Chinese observers; wondering about the society Nora would face, the writer Lu Xun spoke on the question in his 1926 essay “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?” Years later and in the Communist guerrilla base of Yan’an, the woman writer Ding Ling commemorated Women’s Day 1942 by launching a critique of the conditions facing fellow female cadres. Women who married would be criticized as “Noras who have returned home,” and yet men remained free to marry and divorce. “Women,” Ding Ling concluded, “are incapable of transcending the age

they live in, of being perfect, or of being hard as steel.” Even if Nora left home to become a revolutionary, her fate was to live in the world she inherited.

But in the case of the Chinese revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power, defeating the Nationalist Party in a civil war and establishing the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. For the Noras who joined the party, the world they inherited was theirs to transform. In her new book *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1964*, Wang Zheng traces the history of feminists who worked for the state, either within the All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) or for the cultural bureaucracy. She asks important questions: Where were women to be found, and what did they achieve? How did women work within a party system that remained male dominated

and hierarchical? Such explorations lead to a larger question: What happened to China's socialist revolution? Placing the story of state feminists at the center, Wang's answers suggest a broad rethinking of the place of culture in social transformation, of the role of individuals within the CCP and its institutions, and of the use of power in political campaigns.

Finding Women in the State revolves around several overlapping institutions and figures. The ACWF was a national umbrella organization led by the party but distinct as a "mass organization." The socialist film industry is the second system under study, which was headed by Chen Bo'er, a former movie star who in 1949 was appointed to take over a significant film studio in China's northeast. Films are one of the primary cultural products examined in the book. Another cultural product is *Women's Life*, the only women's magazine with national circulation in the early years of the PRC, founded and led by the social activist Shen Zijiu. Both Chen and Shen were members of the executive committee of the ACWF, a circle with both historical and bureaucratic ties. By weaving together personal biographies, institutional histories, and close readings of media and film, Wang paints a rich and detailed portrait of what she terms "state feminism."

As Wang makes clear in her introduction, the women she describes would not have used the word "feminist." The CCP rejected the term "feminism" (*nüquan zhuyi*) as bourgeois, using instead terms like "women's work" (*funü gongzuo*) or "working on the women's movement" (*zuo fuyun gongzuo*). Nonetheless, Wang defines her subjects as "socialist state feminists" to highlight their commitment to the masses (socialist), their activism within state institutions (state), and their persistent dedication to equality between men and women (feminism) (8). Other important terms include actors' categories like the "mass line" (the principle that the party had to both learn from and lead the grass roots), the "cultural front" (the use of art, film, and literature to raise ideological consciousness), and "feudalism" (a politically strategic code word for backwardness). To discover women in the state, Wang demonstrates, is to understand how state feminists "routinely operated in a *politics of concealment* in their endeavors to promote feminist agendas" (17), using party language such as "anti-feudalism" and always crediting party leadership rather than their own efforts. Wang explains that the politics of concealment is why state feminists' lives and accomplishments have been understudied: first, political campaigns silenced feminists, and then since the reform era, broad refutation of Maoist politics resulted in the concurrent negation of its gender policies.

To approach a topic long elided, *Finding Women in the State* marshals an impressive array of sources. Wang is up-front about her personal feminist activism in China, but although it brought her to many informants, she was never able to gain access to the archives

of the ACWF. Nonetheless, like many others who work on an increasingly restricted period, Wang is able to triangulate from local archives, official publications, biography and memoir, and almost sixty of her own oral histories. *Finding Women in the State* makes a significant intervention in the fields of modern Chinese history, gender history, and the history of socialism. "The issue here," Wang writes, "is not only to recognize women's agency but also to reconceptualize state power" (2). Her book illustrates how socialist state feminists grappled with the persistence of Nora's world within the Communist party-state.

Finding Women in the State is divided into two parts: one on the making of the ACWF and its relationship to the CCP, and the second on the film and media productions of the "cultural front" leading up to the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). A note on periodization is required here. For the interdisciplinary China studies field, the Mao era is denoted by the period between the founding of the PRC in 1949 until his death in 1976, with the years following called the "reform era" or sometimes "post-socialist" China. Within the Mao era is the watershed of the Cultural Revolution, itself divided between an intense beginning of open violence and a later period that witnessed a return to normalcy and the Nixon visit. Thus the years between 1949 and 1966 are often perceived as a foundational time of "socialist construction," despite the fact that they were also marked by intense political campaigns and a devastating famine. By defining her study as 1949–1964, Wang offers an alternative periodization—one that pinpoints 1964 and its attendant narrative of class struggle as the endpoint of socialist state feminism.

Wang begins with the birth of the ACWF, focusing on a case study of the Shanghai Women's Federation. She details the efforts of the CCP to organize housewives at the grass roots, which was met with enthusiasm for the opportunities afforded by local women's congresses. But the "politics of concealment" were already at work; Wang traces how individuals like Deng Yingchao practiced anonymity, telling others that "we should work in the spirit of a nameless hero" (quoted on 50). The second chapter of *Finding Women in the State* shows that feminism was an easy target in political campaigns like the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, when the very existence of the ACWF was called into question: If women were already liberated, what was the point of an ACWF?

Here, Wang excavates the backstory behind a sudden conservative turn, as represented by the policy of "diligently, frugally building the country and diligently, frugally managing the family" (see 56–74). Wang concludes that "the double diligences policy . . . should be regarded as representing one of those successful maneuvers behind the scenes, a state feminist lobbying stunt" (70). With Deng Xiaoping as a patron, the women managed to preserve the ACWF.

Wang next turns to the magazine *Women of China*, with a biography of the institution and its founders in Yan'an, 1939. The analysis of the magazine as cultural product focuses on the production of images of women—often working women and ethnic-minority women. Wang makes the convincing case that magazine covers were “co-authored by both a state feminist photographer from the power center and the ‘laboring women’ on the periphery” (93), making *Women of China* a symbol of devotion to a “mass line.” Not limited to the mere reading of images, Wang’s analysis speaks to the popularity of the magazine, from the ways the magazine’s content pushed the boundaries of what was politically acceptable, to the wide response of readers’ letters in the thousands, and to the ways in which *Women of China* was sold on the street. As in the ACWF, leaders of *Women of China* used the language of the state, here “anti-feudalism,” to promote a feminist agenda.

The final chapter of part 1 reveals how state feminism came under political attack in 1964, when Chen Boda, editor of the theoretical party journal *Red Flag*, published an essay called “How Should We Deal with the Women Question.” The essay condemned *Women of China* and two recent feature stories on women’s life aspirations and on the standards for a partner. Paralleling the 1957 challenge to the ACWF, *Women of China* also became a victim of high politics with dire results: the end of the open debate format of the magazine, a suffusion of ideological articles, and a suppression of the publication as a public space. Wang takes this opportunity to comment on the broader implications of Maoist class struggle, arguing that it created false dichotomies that denied “desires and motivations that did not neatly align with political categories of either bourgeois or proletarian, and/or capitalist or socialist” (137). Mao’s class struggle, Wang concludes, “would hasten the demise of the Chinese revolution rather than prevent it” (138).

Part 2 of *Finding Women in the State* brings the reader back in time to the creation and use of film in socialist revolution. Through the career of Chen Bo’er, Wang presents the development of socialist film as deeply embedded in the rural experience, from the staging of dramas in Yan’an to the creation of revolutionary heroine films in the 1950s. This framing provides a fresh way of looking at the Yan’an period, often glossed as a moment when individual artists were suppressed in rectification campaigns. Rather, Wang argues that “the Yan’an Talks were by no means a monologue singularly produced in the great leader’s mind for the purpose of controlling Party members and harnessing artists’ creativity, but rather Mao’s theorizing of Communist cultural producers’ innovative practices” (159). In the life and work of Chen Bo’er, Wang restores the faith and passion that intellectuals held in the promise of building a new China—one grounded in time spent in the countryside.

To illustrate the tensions inherent in producing films in socialist China, Wang traces a second career: that of Xia Yan, a central figure in 1930s left-wing cinema and then a leader in the film industry until 1964. From the 1930s, Xia translated international feminist texts, conducted fieldwork among women textile workers, and wrote plays with feminist themes. Appointed to transform the Shanghai film industry in the 1950s, by 1954 he was deputy minister of culture. Wang uses Xia’s work to highlight the agency of state feminists in the arena of film: productions like *New Year’s Sacrifice* “introduced to the general public a highly gender-inflected definition of feudalism and confirmed the legitimacy of a feminist agenda” (193), and likewise, filmic revolutionary heroines “permeated the psyche of at least two generations of Chinese women born and growing up in socialist China” (198).

The final two chapters of part 2 reflect on the greater meaning of culture in the socialist revolution, and on the specific portrayals of gender and class in the cultural realm. With the former, Wang contributes to recent discussions of the role of culture in the Communist revolution, which as a whole have both complicated the image of culture (more diversity, more traditional influences, more global connections) and argued for the role of culture in legitimizing the CCP. To these interpretations, *Finding Women in the State* adds a nuanced reading of the inner contentiousness of cultural industries—film in particular. Specifically, although it has long been recognized that Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing (who once played Ibsen’s Nora in her early acting career), was a central figure in revolutionizing Peking opera and creating the model works, Wang illuminates the downfall of Xia in 1964 as crucial to Jiang’s political rise. Further, Wang analyzes the revolutionary heroines in Jiang’s model plays, arguing that Jiang “created a theatrical fantasy in which gender-marked women could function in a men’s world almost free from the effects of gender hierarchy” (216–217). In other words, despite the persistence of revolutionary heroines, the problems of gender disappeared.

The last chapter chronicles the rise and fall of the image of “Iron Girls” from the socialist to the post-socialist eras. Iron Girls—based on a real brigade of agricultural workers in Dazhai, Shanxi Province—was a term used to describe women workers who “both embodied a new socialist feminist gender subjectivity in the pursuit of socialist modernity and with their own bodies further authorized their inscription in the development of socialist feminist ideology” (228). Wang discusses post-socialist critiques of the Iron Girl among intellectuals, suggesting that attacks on Maoist excesses obscured a conservative call for “gender differentiation” (*nannü youbie*) and classist denigrations of physical labor. The fall of the image of the Iron Girl thus represents China’s transition from socialism to capitalism—“part of the process of *class* realignment at

that moment of profound political rupture” (239). Wang recapitulates this theme in the conclusion, when she examines the present-day covers of *Women of China*, unrecognizable to the original editors as advertisements for consumption rather than for production, for the urban rather than for the rural, and for femininity rather than for feminism.

Finding Women in the State will be of great interest to historians of gender, of the revolution, and of the state. Its many contributions include probing what happened to the Chinese socialist revolution and its vision of women “holding up half the sky.” In this way the study could go further and compare other promises made and broken, particularly to peasants and to workers. Were such trajectories similar or different, and why? In addition, comparisons could be made to previous and other regimes; the Nationalist Party was also a revolutionary party that betrayed its woman suffragists

in its inaugural convention in 1912. Does the imperative behind the “politics of concealment” lie in the Leninist party system, an authoritarian mode of government, or in Chinese culture itself? In her conclusion, Wang attends to the legacy and future of socialist feminism. Recounting the 2015 case of the Feminist Five—a group of activists detained for organizing an anti-sexual harassment campaign to commemorate International Women’s Day—Wang describes a public response to their accounts of imprisonment: the invocation of one of Xia Yan’s filmic revolutionary heroines, Sister Jiang. The readiness of such an allusion suggests the persistent power of socialist feminists’ ideals, even as a new generation of feminists may choose revolution over the state.

DENISE Y. HO
Yale University

DAGOMAR DEGROOT. *The Frigid Golden Age: Climate Change, the Little Ice Age, and the Dutch Republic, 1560–1720*. (Studies in Environment and History.) New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xxii, 364. Cloth \$120.00.

Over the past few years, the climate has come to be seen as a significant agent of historical developments. A plethora of recent studies have drawn connections between various kinds of climatic fluctuations and outbreaks of human conflict throughout history. In line with research linking contemporary climate change and outbreaks of epidemic disease, scholars are suggesting that plague dynamics of the past were closely associated with particular climatic conditions. The climate has also been held responsible for dictating spatial and temporal shifts in premodern agricultural production and macroeconomic performance—the dominance of the Amartya Sen “entitlements” and distribution paradigm increasingly obscured by an alternative view that pre-industrial famines were mainly a production issue (and therefore, a climate issue). Climate has also been linked with historical migration dynamics. Once upon a time, to be a historian and to be labeled “environmentally deterministic” was simply uncool and to be avoided at all costs—hence an aversion to climate-related explanations. Fast-forward to today, however, with our contemporary concern for climate change, and throw in much more convincing paleoclimate evidence, and the notion of “nature as historical protagonist” is much more palatable, it seems. Big books are now being written on transitions, turning points, crises, and so on: Bruce M. S. Campbell’s “great transition” of the late Middle Ages was not a story of Malthusian population dynamics, Brennerian social property relations, or a commercial revolution; rather, it was a story of global climate

change installing a new socio-ecological regime characterized by repeat epidemic activity and famine (*The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World* [2016]). The “crisis of the seventeenth century” may have been characterized by a complex assortment of political, economic, social, religious, and demographic problems, but according to Geoffrey Parker, underlying this “global crisis” was a broader framework of climatic and environmental conditions associated with the Little Ice Age (*Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* [2013]).

For Dagomar Degroot and his *The Frigid Golden Age: Climate Change, the Little Ice Age, and the Dutch Republic, 1560–1720*, climate is also centrally placed—although in this case, climate is not associated with degradation and decline, but with (relative) success and prosperity despite difficult environmental pressures and challenges. That the coolest phases of the Little Ice Age occurred (roughly) simultaneous to the so-called “golden age” of the Dutch Republic—a time of economic and cultural vitality for very select parts of the Northern Netherlands—is not really an original insight, since the Dutch Republic has long been identified as an anomaly to the general crisis narrative, by the likes of Jan de Vries, Geoffrey Parker, Maarten Prak, and others. The point of originality in Degroot’s line of argumentation is that climate change linked to the Little Ice Age led to a set of environmental challenges and pressures that pushed the Dutch Republic into a set of active human