Modernity in Harmony Cave seems represented to some extent by household appliances and bodily hygiene practices: the adoption of modern habits, such as a private bathroom with a flush toilet, contributes to promoting the construction of a new socialist civilisation. Villagers who live in new houses see themselves as representatives of a superior "modern material civilization" (p. 159), in contrast to those who still dwell in clay-brick houses lacking a separate bathroom unit. Santos points out that changes in hygienic practices have resulted more from cultural/social values associated with new technologies than from the real benefits of such practices, human uses of technology being rarely culture free. The author argues that the flush toilet can be interpreted as a technopolitical project as well as a civilisational process: this "flush toilet revolution" (p. 156) thus contributes to the making of modern identities in China.

Finally, Chapter Six deals with local religion. Santos considers religious festivals as "technologies of ethical imagination" subject to civilising forces that promote the construction of a new "socialist spiritual civilization" (p. 174). Compared to national official efforts, local religious festivals give rural communities more opportunities to elevate moral civilisation; they are, however, not exempt from moral frictions among villagers regarding ritual monetary contributions. The author argues that we should develop an "action-oriented pluralistic conception of ethical life" (p. 203) in order to understand both small-scale projects of self-cultivation and the macro-level politics that shape the Chinese Communist Party projects of national ethical standardisation, such as the improvement of human quality (*suzhi* 素質).

The strengths of this book lie in the profound involvement of the researcher in his fieldwork. Twenty years of paying visits to the villagers and sharing life with them have the merit of building a consistent dataset that allows for a detailed report of rural life, which is much needed in the literature on social change in China. Readers who are familiar with ethnographic research will find this work well-structured. However, readers would have benefitted from a concluding chapter recapitulating the main points of Santos' arguments, since his analysis of the rural transition to modernity spreads in several directions. Social scientists less familiar with ethnographic writing may have appreciated a more robust theoretical framework, but there is no deficiency of theory: the book is an informative, well-grounded, and enjoyable read.

HONG FINCHER, Leta. 2023. *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (fully updated 10th anniversary edition).
London: Bloomsbury.

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Leta Hong Fincher's pathbreaking analysis (2014) of an effectively institutionalised culture of discrimination against women in their late twenties/early thirties who, for one reason or another, found themselves without a husband, became an instant hit with students, journalists, and feminist activists in and outside China when it appeared. In a gender environment that discouraged critical enquiry, its revelations about the extent of legally binding discriminatory practices emboldened countless women in China to begin to speak up about their own experiences.

This 10th anniversary revised edition is no less startling in its revelations. Indeed, it is difficult to read the revised edition without a sense of increasing indignation if not outrage. Readers will recall that the macro-political context for the revelations in this revised edition is the total absence of women from the highest echelons of Party-state government. The 20th Party Congress held in October 2022 was confirmed as the first time in decades that there was not one single woman in the Chinese Communist Party's ruling Politburo. Only 11 out of 205 members on the Central Committee are women. China's ranking in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2012-2022) fell from 69 to 102 out of 146 countries.

This second edition indexes an explicit reassertion of masculinist and patriarchal practices in every dominant aspect of society: gender discrimination in university admissions, gender disparities in the financial and legal aspects of property ownership, falling numbers of women in the social labour force, increasing unemployment among 16- to 24-year-old women, and against rising rates of divorce, increased state media efforts to shame single women and pressurise them into marriage. If the term "leftover woman" (*shengnü* 剩女) has in recent years been replaced by "good wife and virtuous mother" (*xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母) with two or three children, then this foregrounds even more visibly the main

reproductive and demographic objective underpinning the relentless insistence on marriage: to reverse the trend in falling fertility in order to sustain an (unpaid) female labour force to care for the increasing numbers of elderly people in an ageing population with no or little access to pensions and social care.

The book's structure mirrors that of the first edition: women's falling fortunes in China's property market; the huge gender disparities in wealth accumulation; a brief historical overview to contextualise the current situation as compared with the Ming dynasty; domestic, gender-based and sexual violence against women; the resurgent feminist and LGBTQ+ movement. With the exception of the historical excursion in Chapter Four, each chapter marshals statistical and media evidence to demonstrate how the situation has deteriorated since 2014.

So, to take the topics in turn, if very schematically, an official study of 2022 noted that only one quarter of married couples in China listed the wife as an owner on the property deed, while around 92% listed the husband. The reason is that, despite the fact that women had contributed to the purchase from their own earnings, they felt compelled to compromise with their partners' and in-laws' insistence that their assets be legally listed under their husbands' name. In the case of joint mortgages, the "primary loan recipient" is invariably the husband, meaning that in the case of divorce, the legal documentation about mortgage payments would only show the man's payments, creating bureaucratic nightmares for women wanting to justify any financial claims they might have on the property. Such reinforcement of the patriarchal norm of the male head of the household continues to be shored up by views – held by women as well as men – that a man's financial contribution to house buying is worth more than a woman's, regardless of how much she and/or her family might contribute to its purchase.

Property ownership is a dominant marker of middle-class identity in China's cut-throat market economy. Indeed, owning a home is widely seen as a man's ticket to a good marriage; failure to do so emasculates him in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of society, and possibly of his family. The wealth associated with property ownership is stacked up to minimise if not exclude women's access to it: divorce regulations prioritise settlements based on the legally recognised ownership of the property, inheritance regulations are untaxed (which in a context of continuing son/male preference favours the patrilineal transmission of wealth), and banking regulations are heavily weighted against women's autonomous interests.

Chapter Four is almost identical to the version in the first edition. I can't help but feel that it was a pity that this could not have been revised to better explain the historical forces, in both the Mao era and before, that contribute both to compelling women to marry and bear children before they reach the age of thirty, and to sustaining Xi Jinping's resuscitation of a popular neo-Confucian ideology prioritising men's public activities and women's domestic and reproductive activities.

Amidst mounting evidence of sexual and gender-based violence against women in China, Chapter Five charts both the advances and the setbacks in China's mainstream approaches to intimate partner violence. Hence, the Anti-domestic Violence Law[1] was passed in 2015, and implemented in 2016, after more than a decade of women's lobbying against repeated bureaucratic hurdles to introduce it. However, in the absence of reliable critical accounts of how and where it is implemented and alongside continued evidence of sometime brutal intimate partner abuse, it is difficult to assess the effects of this law on upholding girls' and women's interests. If anything, the zero-Covid lockdowns all over China after 2020 produced a higher incidence of violent abuse of girls and women within families, which, when reported, the police largely refused to follow up on, on the grounds that the epidemic prevented them from doing so.

Finally, in a condensed version of the discussion in the author's *Betraying Big Brother* (2018), Chapter Six focuses on the feminist and LGBTQ+ resistance that has exploded into the international public eye since 2014 – from the arrest of the Feminist Five for their street protests against patriarchal norms in marriage and public life to the revelations of women's struggles to publicise cases of abuse and victimisation since China's #MeToo movement took off in 2018.

Alongside the volume's dismal account of the ongoing re-entrenchment of gender discriminatory practices in China, there is considerably more to sustain the author's argument that the ongoing media campaign against "leftover women" appears to be part of a backlash against perceived threats to the social and gender order of China's political economy. I would go further and say that it constitutes a more or less systemic and deliberate sidelining of women's and gender-diverse interests. Finally, analysis of the reach of the publicity about domestic violence and the #MeToo campaign, and the grassroots activities oriented to supporting gender-diverse interests and rights cannot be included in a book of this length, but maybe the author will take this on as her next project.

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