with a highly publicized corruption campaign and a parade of televised con-
fessions. Altehenger has not only opened a timely window into the history
from which those initiatives spring, but also shaped the research agenda for
those who would explore it further. Her book will appeal to historians of mod-
ern China, culture, and law, as well as to observers of the contemporary PRC,
and that is an exceptional feat.

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doi:10.1017/S0738248019000634

Taisu Zhang’s first book offers a new and insightful perspective on a topic
that many scholars have debated in the last generation: the reasons for the
Great Divergence of the economic trajectories of China and England.
Zhang’s contribution brings together several long-standing theses to offer a
novel proposal: China’s failure to develop an industrial economy in the eigh-
teenth century was the result of its more *equitable* property distribution. He
makes this argument even more provocative by adding that the most funda-
mental cause of the historical differences between the economies of England
and China must ultimately be attributed not to any particular institution (the
most common medium of comparative history today), but rather to culture.
Zhang directly states that the existing “noncultural divergence theories… are
simply logically incomplete” (6). If this ambitious claim gives some readers
initial pause, they will be rewarded with a novel perspective if they forge
ahead. For in pressing such a large thesis, the author has synthesized a wide
range of arguments into a single framework to provide scholars of legal devel-
opment, economic history, and Chinese history alike with a new perspective
on the developmental trajectory of the late empire.

The bold dimensions of the argument are mirrored in the scope of the work
itself. In order to find the cultural origins of the economic institutions under
consideration, the author takes us back to 1041, the year that the emperor of
the Song (960–1279) first decreed that officials of the state bureaucracy
were permitted to perform the rites of extended ancestral worship (once solely the privilege of the aristocracy). The result was the widespread appearance of halls of ancestral worship throughout the empire and a concomitant growth in the size and number of kinship organizations.

The growth of these local networks occurred during the storied economic expansion and population growth of the Song dynasty, the exuberance of which “severely limit[ed] the state’s political reach,” allowing the newly appeared “kinship networks and social organizations to assume more prominent roles in local governance” (201). These kinship organizations, which outwardly embraced Neo-Confucian norms that placed family hierarchy at the center of an orderly society, continued to grow over subsequent dynasties. By the time of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, the heads of these lineages were actively promoted to positions of communal authority by the state. In the nineteenth century—the period covered in the bulk of Zhang’s evidence—the result of the dominance of lineage organizations in local society was the domination of village governance by a gerontocratic elite.

The power held by the most senior members of lineage organizations, Zhang suggests, had a real impact on the land market: “because these senior relatives were often quite poor and therefore sympathetic to the interests of similarly situated households, their wide-ranging influence over dian [mortgage] transactions probably dampened the ability of higher-income households to obtain their preferred normative and contractual outcomes” (157). In disputes between poor landowners who had mortgaged their land and the cash-rich households to whom the land had been mortgaged, land owners in China were far less likely to be forced to give up their land immediately after defaulting. This is the critical point of comparison with mortgage defaults in England where foreclosure was swift and backed by strict legal institutions in support of lenders. The sum result was that land shifted into the hands of wealthy estates quickly in England—giving rise to large-scale agricultural management—and slowly in China, where small-scale land ownership did not allow for the sorts of capital accumulation and economies of scale that were later critical to industrialization.

This book is a worthwhile read for scholars of each of the fields the author engages, and will remain a compelling narrative for future scholars to grapple with. It provides a genuinely interesting and compelling argument about the link between seemingly unrelated institutions of ancestor worship and land tenure over the long-term trajectory of China’s history. The balance of its assertions center on the widely accepted wisdom that land was, indeed, particularly difficult to alienate from poor debtors in Qing China compared with in other economies in the same period. And although Zhang has done an excellent job of reframing the problem of land tenure, economic development,
governance, and lineage in a refreshingly new way, two questions remain open for further research.

First, the evidentiary basis of Zhang’s research is more suggestive than conclusive. Although he draws some illustrative examples from various well-known Qing archival collections across several jurisdictions, the weight of his argument linking community authority and dispute resolution rests on an analysis of the village-level governing structures derived from the Mantetsu surveys of Japanese researchers in twentieth century North China. Leaving aside the potentially problematic nature of Japanese surveys, this empirical base, although detailed, begs the obvious question: what has been gained or lost by choosing to study the influence of lineage organization in one of the places where the development and domination of these institutions is least remarked by scholars? The field abounds with anecdotes of the domination of local society and the victimization of poor households by powerful lineage organizations outside of North China, which is not generally considered a stand-out example of a lineage-dominated society. Given that many of the regions known for powerful lineage organizations (the Pearl River Delta, for example) were far more economically vibrant than the North China plain, the question of how representative the author’s findings about lineage organization in North China might be for other regions must be answered. If scholars heed Zhang’s challenge, an excellent research agenda for regional and temporal variation in lineage organization, village governance, and land distribution patterns has been set.

Second, although Zhang does an excellent job of demonstrating the path-dependent nature of developments that linked the Northern Song state’s promotion of orthodox Neo-Confucian values to particularly equal (or “poor-friendly”) land distribution patterns in the nineteenth century, the most central and provocative of his arguments—that historians interested in the Great Divergence must return to cultural explanations of economic trajectories—is not fully convincing. For although Zhang suggests that no institutional explanation of economic difference can be complete without an original “cultural” cause, the primary explanations of change deployed seem to be patently institutional in nature. Only when describing institutional inertia does Zhang invoke the notion of culture. In this vein, “culture” seems to act merely as a marker of attachment to existing institutions. This seems to add too little to the analytical dimensions of the argument to warrant strong claims about the futility of arguments that do not take “culture” into account.

The question of culture and its interaction with institutions can be taken up by future scholars who might feel compelled to test Zhang’s provocation beyond the field of evidence currently offered, in order to connect his bold thesis to the much larger body of work on lineage organization and local society in other regions. It is sincerely hoped that experts on the history of imperial China’s lineage organization in other times and regions will further advance
the question that the author proposes about the relationship among culture, history, institutions, and economic trajectories.

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For more than two decades now, the history of crime and punishment has been an enormously flourishing branch within the broader history of early modern Europe. Susanne Pohl-Zucker’s book represents a striking example of this genre. Based on her dissertation (University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, 1997), the book’s central ideas were further developed during her assistant professorship at Cornell University, and finally during her time working as a freelance historian in Mainz from 2004 onwards. The book examines the process of “making manslaughter” in the sense of defining and negotiating an offense that could be considered a crime, a misdemeanor, or neither if the underlying incident were interpreted as an accident or justified self-defense. Strongly attuned to the cultural history of crime, the book analyzes the flexible practices by which early modern authorities, communities, and the directly affected parties reacted to acts of violence leading to the death of at least one participant. With very good reason, Pohl-Zucker interprets manslaughter as a juridical category that in legal and popular thinking almost always referred to male behavior and was strongly connected to concepts of male honor.

The book focuses on a well-selected number of case studies from the Duchy of Württemberg and the imperial city (formally until 1648) of Zurich as two realms that were shaped by strongly differing constitutional laws. The book does not follow a comparative approach, however. The two regions of investigation are rather meant to illustrate the fascinating variety of legal procedures and institutions and the diverse dynamics of legal practices in the early modern Holy Roman Empire. The time frame of the book addresses four centuries traditionally attributed to two historical periods: medieval and early modern. The author, however, correctly recognizes that assuming a decisive break near