Unlike scholars who study gender gaps from socio-economic perspectives, Zang’s new book explores how Islamic religiosity and family processes affect gender inequalities in employment, earnings, domestic labor, household management, and spousal power among Uyghurs in contemporary Urumuchi. The book challenges our common-sense understanding of Muslim women’s disadvantages by pointing out that there is “a reasonably good degree of gender egalitarianism in power and authority in Uyghur families” (p. 173). Zang argues that religiosity is a weak mechanism for women’s subordination because Uyghurs see Islam as their ethnic identity and experience religion in terms of Uyghur traditions rather than religiosity. He finds family processes are a major mechanism of gender inequalities and reasons that matters related to mundane life “outweigh religious piety in guiding Uyghur behaviors” (p. 178). Zang uses interviews, surveys, and field observations as primary sources, and employs qualitative and quantitative methods in the study. The book contributes to scholarship on gender and family studies by making important statements such as that participation in family work increases the degree of gender egalitarianism in Uyghur households, and Uyghur women’s contribution to domestic labor and household management rather than their labor market outcomes establish their power and authority at home.

The book has eight chapters. Zang explores theoretically the relevance of religiosity and family processes to sexual stratification in Chapter 1. Since Islamic institutions in Urumuchi are “weak and under strict control by the Chinese government” (p. 7), Zang proposes that Islamic socialization through rituals, values and practices could account for Uyghur female subordination. He reasons that Islamic culture has had an impact on the Uyghur family processes since it endorses the value of early marriages, high fertility rates, large family size, and multi-generational residence. Zang clarifies that religiosity and family processes complement rather than compete with each other in explaining gender inequalities. In Chapter 2, Zang briefly outlines the historical backgrounds of Xinjiang and Urumuchi and introduces his research design and methodology. He has chosen ten neighborhoods with the highest percentages of Uyghur households, and analyzed the male and female sub-samples separately. Zang estimates the ability of control variables (age groups, educational attainment, family background, social
embeddedness, and gender-role ideology) to explain the variances in statistical models, and compares these with those of religiosity and family processes.

Zang first investigates Uyghur women’s inequalities in the public sphere—employment and earnings in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. He maintains that the significant gender gaps among Uyghurs in full-time work and earnings cannot be adequately explained by gender differences in educational attainment and efficiency. Since “sexual stereotyping and patriarchy” (p. 62) are the main determinants of the level of Uyghur women’s labor supply, Zang explores the origin of such gender bias by conducting bivariate and multivariate analyses of the effects of religiosity and family processes on employment and earnings. He finds that measures of religiosity are not a key determinant of labor participation and earning power for both women and men. However, family variables (early marriage, fertility, presence of young children, and multigenerational residence, family size) affect men and women differently. Family processes are responsible for Uyghur women’s low labor participation and they may forsake earnings for household responsibilities.

Zang focuses on gender gaps in Uyghur homes in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, addressing issues of household chores, household management and family power respectively. He finds a gendered division of household chores and household management—Uyghur women do more routine housework (shopping, cooking and cleaning) and men more removals of heavy objects; Uyghur husbands are more likely to manage family finances, wives non-money matters, and both husbands and wives are involved in maintaining external relationships. His explanations for such gendered outcomes are that husbands and wives “engage in different household tasks to demonstrate and reaffirm their gendered selves” (p. 109), and that the values and norms concerning gender roles account for gender variation in household management. Through data analyses, Zang finds family processes are more helpful in explaining variances in the allocation of household chores and household management than religiosity, which explains very little.

The most interesting part of the book is Zang’s exploration of the issues of power and authority in the home in Chapter 7. He uses decision-making to measure overt spousal power, and the ability to draw compliance and reverence from family members to measure authority. Through statistics analysis Zang argues that Uyghur couples are moving towards gender egalitarianism in the allocation of power and authority. He reasons that women’s emotional work, their expertise in household matters, and their contributions to family well-being all give
them legitimate power. Again, Zang finds that religiosity has a limited explanatory power concerning gender differences in domestic power. Instead, factors such as early marriage, the presence of a young child, and co-residence point to the influence of family processes.

Chapter 8 is a convincing conclusion, arguing that family processes explain gender inequalities among Uyghurs in both the public and private spheres better than religiosity. Interviews in the book give readers access to the minds of ordinary Uyghurs, and photos of street scenes sharpen readers’ perceptions and imagination. The book would have benefited from better proofreading and editing. Nevertheless, spelling errors and typos cannot reduce the value of Zang’s solid scholarship nor deny the elegance of his writing.

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