

**Occupational Hazards: Sex, Business, and HIV in Post-Mao China.** *Elanah Uretsky.*

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 280 pp.

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*Occupational Hazards* draws on Elanah Uretsky's encounters with government officials, businessmen, and their friends and families in Ruili—"the ground zero of China's HIV epidemic" (15)—to reveal a hidden story of HIV/AIDS. Thanks to the ritual practices of *yingchou* (business entertaining), sex with female entertainers and women other than one's spouse becomes a necessary part of work for male officials and businessmen, bringing heightened risk of HIV/AIDS. This is a hidden story worth revealing, because existing public health and social science studies typically associate vulnerability to HIV infection with marginalized populations, such as "injection drug users, female commercial sex workers, and men who have sex with men" (6). By looking at powerful men who are not usually seen as being at risk, this book follows the trend in anthropology to "study up" and uses it to "turn AIDS on its head" (7).

Epidemiological surveys and public health interventions typically focus on stemming the biological risk of HIV infection by charting and modifying individually motivated behaviors (e.g., condom use). Challenging this approach, Uretsky explores the social rewards for male officials and businessmen of engaging in casual, extramarital sex as well as the social risks of not doing so. In particular, she looks beyond sex to *yingchou* as a whole, examining its gender dynamics, cultural shaping, and politico-economic functions. She shows

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as [doi: 10.1111/amet.12511](https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12511).

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that while the market economy assumes exchange to be universal and impersonal, the market-government ties and the distribution of state-controlled resources in post-Mao China require network (*guanxi*) building and personal displays of loyalty, often in the form of offering and receiving lavish entertainment. She then shows that the hegemonic masculinity in urban China requires men to work hard outside of their homes in order to obtain high socioeconomic status. An important resource for this endeavor is men's homosocial relations, including those built through *yingchou*. Moreover, men learn to separate their emotions, bodily needs, and marital obligations—a separation that allows or even encourages them to enjoy extramarital sex.

Undergirding these practices, Uretsky suggests, is the emerging sexual culture in contemporary China, where “people are seemingly free to explore their individual sexual desires but at the same time must restrict public perception of their sexuality” (88) in order to abide by the state's political control. In this context, men constantly negotiate the risks and power that derive from sex. For example, they often treat mistresses and minor wives—women for whom they provide outside of their legal marriages and who perform wifely duties, including childbearing, for them—as status symbols, business partners, and (politically and biologically) safe sex providers. Beyond these individual interests, *yingchou* also facilitates the informal economy across the Sino-Burma border, a function that contributes to China's economic interests and political security. These individual and collective functions of *yingchou* thus encourage men in power or aspiring to it to both engage in risky behaviors and cover things up—for example, they may not seek medical help when they might be infected.

Uretsky's multifaceted discussion challenges not only our common distinction between work and sex (or leisure in general) but also our tendency, when we focus on sex as work, to restrict our interest to female commercial sex workers and their precarity.

Unfortunately, the broader applicability of these insights is obscured by her tendencies toward cultural essentialist formulas and assumptions of Chinese exceptionalism. Uretsky asserts that the surge of sexuality in contemporary China that allows businessmen and male officials access to extramarital relations is a revival of the traditional Chinese sexual culture, which “celebrates sexuality outside the reproductive realm” (91), rather than “a revolution toward a foreign sexual culture” (13). Yet historians such as Leon Rocha have shown that the ascription of a quintessential *ars erotica* to ancient China came from sinologists’ orientalist mistranslation. Moreover, the market economy in many parts of the world is quietly maintained by personal trust and loyalty, which are in turn built through homosocial networks. A nonessentialist reading of the Chinese story could shed light on how crony capitalism elsewhere may likewise be associated with forms of masculine sociality that entail exploitative and hazardous access to sex. Similarly, while the author claims that the trajectory of HIV in China “is grounded more in culture” (139), as if HIV elsewhere were more about biology, her story might in fact teach us how to trace the biocultural pathways of HIV/AIDS in general.

While Uretsky’s attempt to turn AIDS on its head is theoretically significant, the evidence that supports it is rather thin: the book mentions only two male officials who have contracted HIV through *yingchou*. Certainly, masculine sex work is an important part of *yingchou*, but the occupational hazards it produces are multiple, following a complicated gender pathway. The book cites a survey by William Parish and colleagues, published in 2003, to demonstrate the relationship between *yingchou* and men’s elevated risk for sexually transmitted infection. However, the survey actually shows that while women whose partners have high incomes and often socialize or travel have an elevated risk for chlamydial infection, those men themselves do not have a higher risk for infection than other classes of men. Beyond sex, as Uretsky mentions in passing, feasting and other activities associated

with *yingchou* may also bring about health risks worth addressing. While I understand the difficulty of conducting research under “a shroud of secrecy” (142) and of entering a circle of powerful men as a female researcher, I wonder if it might add to the shroud of secrecy to focus solely on an extreme condition about which one can only speculate. In contrast, a more multidimensional perspective might allow the ethnographer easier access to and a more comprehensive grasp of the hazards of *yingchou*, as well as the local responses to them.

On the whole, this book helps us understand how gendered and classed bodies become the site of sex work and of a masculine homosociality that facilitates the post-Mao market economy. With a more substantiated, comprehensive, and nonessentialist analysis, Uretsky could provide a broader critique of crony capitalism, leading to biosocial interventions of its bodily practices.