other unintended consequences. Its commitment to monogamy meant that the legal existence of concubinage was denied, even as the actual existence of concubines made it necessary to specify their property rights. Moreover, the code was imposed on a society that did not accept it, leading to frequent lawsuits and sharp disagreements between local and higher courts. To get around the new legal requirement that daughters receive a portion of the father's estate, families often divided their property before the death of the father, giving it all away to the sons. When the father passed away, a daughter might receive her legal mandated share of his remaining estate, but a legally mandated share of nothing is still nothing.

This book should be read by anyone interested in Chinese social, legal, and cultural history, of the modern as well as the late imperial period, and in women's history in general. It could also easily be assigned to undergraduates. Though the arguments are rich, important, and original, Bernhardt has managed to keep the work short and accessible to non-specialists. In so doing, she has had to strip the case records, some of which run to hundreds of pages, to their barest essentials. Even if it is not, strictly speaking, necessary to an understanding of the case, what reader would not like to know more about the background to a 1939 lawsuit brought by three sisters and their widowed mother against their father's concubine? Why had the father described his daughters as "extraordinarily villainous" a few days before his death? What lay behind his ten-year legal battle with his wife? This is more than just a desire for salacious detail. The lived experience of the participants must have given rise to the attitudes and preconceptions, the *mentalités* that brought them to court in the first place, and these are not as fully detailed as other new aspects brought to light by Bernhardt's work in the archives.

As is so often the case, telling the women's story leads us to rethink the story as a whole. Bernhardt's deft study of the changing inheritance rights of women reveals important new dimensions to the theory and practice of transmission of property through the generations in China, and to the role of the changing legal system in resolving the tensions between the two.

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Gerard William Boychuk — *Patchwork of Purpose: The Development of Social Assistance Regimes in Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998. Pp. xxii, 159.

It will come as a surprise to most readers of this little book that the ways in which poor and dependent Canadians have been treated by public authorities have varied from one province to the next to a degree which has changed little over the last two centuries. Contrary to most assumptions, neither the increasing intervention of the federal state in social policy, through cost-sharing programmes such as the *Unemployment Assistance Act* of 1956 or the Canada Assistance Plan of 1966, nor the growth of international trade has led to more homogeneity.

Social assistance, because it represents the measure of last resort, stands as a particularly telling institution (p. xix), but it has been neglected by historians of social policy, in large part because of the variety of programmes across the country, a phenomenon at the centre of Boychuk's concerns. Moreover, in light of the local nature of the administration and politics of assistance that has often led historians to limit their reflection to a province, and in a field where English- and French-language historiographies tend to develop separately, Boychuk's national scope is unusual. Finally, Boychuk's data extend to the 1990s, so that such factors as participation of the majority of women in the labour market and the impact of neo-conservative governments on the welfare state are fully examined. In overcoming these usual difficulties of the history of social policies, the book provides a comprehensive, succinct, and clear guide to students, instructors, and researchers alike.

Boychuk's approach is also dynamic, as he considers social programmes in constant and mutual relation to the history of economic structures and of families. An exceptionally clear introductory discussion of strong theoreticians of the history of social policies such as K. Polanyi, T. Skocpol, R. Tittmuss, C. Pateman, and T. Marshall signals an approach that does not take the stated goals of social policy for granted. The author perfects a typology of regimes of social assistance according to their relation to markets and families, and the labels he retains for his comparative work (residual, Conservative, market/family enforcement, market performance, redistributive — pp. 14–15) pay justice to the wealth of possible moral, economic, and social roles that institutions of welfare play. In a domain in which administrative language is frequently off-putting and categories of analysis seldom go beyond the uncritical use of "private" and "public", this work of identification draws attention to meaningful problems.

The second chapter offers systematic analysis of all provincial regimes before 1950. Behind the usual indiscriminate reference to the English poor laws, which themselves included considerable differences in assumptions about the poor and their social and economic impact, Boychuk finds four provincial traditions that "appear to hinge more clearly on their specific economic and social contexts than on the period in which social assistance systems were initially constructed" (p. 26). Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island, the closest examples of the "residual" type, tended to stay away from responsibility, reinforcing by this absence of action the family and the market. In contrast, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, in a "stratifying" approach similar to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1590–1794, took over responsibility for some form of assistance to poor people they deemed "deserving", actively reinforcing the hierarchy between sexes and classes and thus developing "Conservative" systems of relief. These systems differed from Nova Scotia's and New Brunswick's "stigmatising" rules, which, in the spirit of the English New Poor Laws of 1834 and later, constructed poorhouses so undesirable that they actively forced male dependants to work and women dependants to seek the protection of a family. Finally, Newfoundland's colonial tradition of assistance to seasonally unemployed fishermen was the closest to a "redistributive" model, comparable to the Speenhamland period of the English Poor Law, between 1795 and 1834, by which the poor were ensured a minimum income.

For the period after 1950, the author also calls upon statistical information on levels and categories of help, which he has carefully standardized to allow comparison, in a third chapter devoted to federal initiatives and a fourth to further exploration of provincial regimes. Having established that the convergence towards national standards is a myth, Boychuk nevertheless identifies some general trends. In all provinces, the poor reputation of assistance has tended to undermine the kind of strong popular support that would be necessary for the imposition of national norms, as the more successful attempts of central authorities to implement health policies have shown. All provinces have also witnessed, if at a different pace, "an increasing concern with the effect of assistance on the economy rather than with the moral implication of assistance" (p. 95). In the light of these recent changes, the strength of "Conservative" regimes in curbing the logic of the market by considering single mothers as "unemployable" appears as a most interesting phenomenon.

The published reports and regulations of governments and social agencies comprise the main sources through which the author establishes the importance of local economic, social, and political traditions in the history of assistance. Despite his insistence on the importance of history, Boychuk makes little use of the abundant literature on the history of welfare and poverty recently contributed by Canadian historians. As a result, the author rarely seeks to analyse further the provincial economic and social elements that helped to compose one tradition: readers are left asking why, for instance, the regime of British Columbia since the 1950s is one of the most "market-oriented" in the country (p. 76); or they are invited to believe uncritically the interpretation of the causes of rural depopulation contained in Quebec's *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Health and Social Welfare* of 1963 (p. 84), despite important warnings made by Bernard Vigod in the 1987 collection of Allen Moscovitch and Jim Albert entitled *The Benevolent State*.

The author proves convincingly that "Canada has not one assistance system but ten distinct provincial variants, each reflecting a particular way in which the state reinforces or undermines the market and the family" (p. xx). For policy makers, the book is explicitly intended to warn about the possibilities of centralization and its false association with progress. For historians, it provides a new, thorough, and detailed map of problems waiting for explanations.

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David Cannadine — *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Pp. xv, 293.

Class as an analytical concept has been taking a drubbing over the past decade. The collapse of communist regimes, the Blairing of the British Labour Party, and the recanting of numerous erstwhile Marxist social scientists, including a number of social historians, have set in motion a prolonged, and not particularly productive, debate about the relevance of class. David Cannadine has not so much waded in as