

## REVIEWS

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**Chang, Hsiao-Shan, *Simmel and Postmodern Social Theory*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), SSAP, 2020. 339 pp.**

Chang Hsiao Shan's book *Simmel and Postmodern Social Theory* is a comprehensive exploration of the intellectual legacy of the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel. Chang examines Simmel's significant contributions to postmodern social theory. In challenging prevalent scholarly critiques of Simmel, Chang endeavors to provide a fresh interpretation of the German thinker's work within the context of postmodernism. Chang's distinctive and audacious perspective establishes this work as a significant contribution to the growing corpus of Simmel studies within the Chinese academic landscape.

The book initiates its exploration by acknowledging the belated recognition of Georg Simmel in the East Asian academic milieu. Chang underscores the recent and thorough examination of Simmel undertaken by Chinese scholars. This investigation delves specifically into Simmel's research methodologies, areas of study, cultural theories, and aesthetic and artistic perspectives, as well as his contributions to feminism and religious thought. Moreover, the book addresses the existing gap in research on Simmel's influence on postmodernism. Chang positions Simmel as a foundational

figure in postmodern social theory and seeks to reinterpret his ideas from this vantage point. The author emphasizes that scholars' fascination with Simmel stems from an interest in his writing style, methodology, and theoretical framework, often described as sociological impressionism.

These unusual qualities of Simmel's works have garnered scholarly criticism for their perceived lack of rigorous historical analysis, unconventional approach to the practice of sociology, and sometimes rambling descriptions. However, Chang challenges these criticisms, asserting that Simmel's ideas closely align with a postmodernist framework. The author also highlights Simmel's unique deconstructivist writing style, his opposition to the reduction of differences to similarities, and his attempt to construct meaning from decontextualized and disparate life experiences. Yet the very complexity and multifariousness of Simmel's thought underscores the difficulty in unraveling the German sociologist's academic and literary thinking, which resists confinement within any one time, space, or interpretive paradigm.

Chang's book notably examines Georg Simmel's role as a pioneer in sociology and an early proponent of postmodernist social theory, situating Simmel's work within the historical trajectory of sociology. Simmel's place as a figure at the crossroads of sociology and postmodernism makes interpreting his thought challenging, but Chang takes up the gauntlet in exploring how Simmel's ideas navigated these distinct domains of inquiry. In an approach similar to Weinstein and Weinstein (1993), Chang's work seeks to identify a postmodern Simmel by engaging him in a scholarly conversation with other postmodernist luminaries, including Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Derrida. This dialogical approach establishes Simmel's intellectual affinity with postmodernist thinkers. The writer's theoretical framework reinterprets Simmel's ideas in light of theoretical nuances introduced by later thinkers such as Foucault. Moreover, Chang's book contributes meaningfully to our understanding of the coevolution of postmodernism and sociology.

However, Chang's construal of postmodernism as a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense introduces some (albeit intellectually interesting) challenges in Chang's argumentative edifice. If postmodernism is a paradigm, then postmodernism stands alongside the three canonical schools of positivism, interpretivism, and criticism in sociological thought. In my view, this is less an incorrect move by Chang as it is bold. Indeed, postmodernists resist having their thought be calcified into anything resembling a paradigm and Chang acknowledges that postmodernism is a "less stringent 'quasi' paradigm." Therefore, the reader is left to wonder how Simmel's status as a founding figure in sociology aligns with his identity as a postmodernist and whether a gaping chasm or an organic connection exists between them. In addition, Simmel is considered to be a key figure in the development of modernist social theory, and tension between Chang's postmodernist characterization of Simmel and modernist social theory's intellectual debt to Simmel is likewise present.

The book's nine chapters also serve as a clearly organized and accessible introduction to sociology. Chang systematically unpacks Simmel's intricate ideas, using a well-structured framework to meticulously explore the philosopher's methodology, ontology, and epistemology. The author's succinct analysis sheds light on Simmel's research interests while elucidating the German thinker's sociological and philosophical pedigree and his influence on later thinkers. Moreover, Chang provides a preliminary analysis of the historical evolution of sociology and Simmel's place within it, drawing heavily on Western viewpoints while incorporating a uniquely Chinese perspective on contemporary sociological theory. Both Chang and the Weinstens attempt to unravel the theoretical connections between Simmel and postmodernist perspectives. These authors offer distinct interpretations and in-depth explorations of Simmel's thought within the framework of postmodern social theory. Chang and the Weinstens' books provide valuable perspectives on Simmel's thought and reward close reading and comparison.

Although the characterization and analysis may be bold for the reader in some parts, Chang's book is a worthy contribution to Simmel's scholarship. By comprehensively examining Simmel's thought, the book challenges the stereotype of the German thinker as a sociological impressionist, positioning Simmel as a sociologist firmly within the theoretical framework of postmodernism. This perspective provides an opportunity for a reassessment of his theories and prompts a deeper appraisal of Simmel's often profound contributions to postmodernist thought. Chang extensively probes Simmel's dual identity as a modern sociologist and a postmodern thinker, enhancing readers' understanding of his influence on the history of sociology. The author's examination of Simmel's thought enables readers to understand how the latter's ideas intricately intertwine sociology and postmodernism. Chang's work presents a novel interpretation of Simmel's ideas and challenges the Chinese academic community to reassess Simmel's position in postmodern social theory. In general, the boldness of Chang's analysis and interpretations make for an engaging and worthwhile read. The book provides a novel vantage point for understanding Simmel's ideas and is valuable for its provocative probing of the interactions between sociology's founding figures and proponents of postmodernism.

In summary, Chang's work is thought-provoking, offering a fresh perspective on Simmel's research and examining his unique place in the history of postmodernist social theory while deepening readers' understanding of postmodernism. The merit of Chang's work lies in its bold reinterpretation of Simmel and in its challenge to readers to reflect more broadly on postmodernism and the development of sociology. In conclusion, despite facing certain challenges, these difficulties stimulate us to delve deeper into exploration and contemplation, leading to a better understanding of Simmel's unique position in postmodern social theory. The value of this book lies not only in its reinterpretation of Simmel but also in guiding readers toward a more profound reflection on postmodernism and sociological development. Through an in-

depth analysis of Simmel's scholarly contributions, this book endeavors to construct a new theoretical perspective, redefining Simmel's position in the history of sociology

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**Vázquez, J. (Coord.), *Emociones, poder y conflicto. Perspectivas teóricas, género, resistencias y políticas de Estado*, México: IBERO/UAM/Universidad del Rosario, 2023, p. 340.**

Reading a work like the one I will discuss in this review<sup>1</sup> is always both a challenge and a pleasure, especially because it was crafted by various brilliant hands, minds, and hearts. This book was coordinated by Juan Pablo Vázquez Gutiérrez and edited by Universidad Iberoamericana and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, both in Mexico City, along with Universidad del Rosario (Bogotá, Colombia).

This compilation features contributions from eleven colleagues, some of whom provide an introduction that serves as a broad corridor leading us into the theoretical frameworks that form the backbone of the book. In its twelve chapters, which cover a range of highly suggestive and diverse topics, there converges a single objective: to analyze the intricate interweaving among the categories that make up the title of the work: *Emociones, poder y conflicto. Perspectivas teóricas, género, resistencias y políticas de Estado*.

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<sup>1</sup> The English translation was done by Iván Alejandro Aguilar Aldaz, Anthropology student at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, Mexico.