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## Women in Republican China (Book Review)

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tion of a book by Chen (*Chungguo tungyi chuyi* [*Proposal for the Unification of China*]) in which he developed his political philosophy, articulating a point of view clearly in favor of federalist principles. Essentially, the book outlines a system of government that rests on a platform of village-based democracy. As the primary units of the Chinese federation, villages would be managed by self-governing councils elected directly by the villagers. These village councils would choose representatives to serve on councils governing the next level of administration, the districts; district councils would select representatives to county councils; county councils would choose representatives to provincial assemblies; and provincial assemblies would elect delegates to a national parliament. There would also be an independent judiciary and a national conference elected directly by voters at the provincial level to serve as a counterweight to the parliament. The constitution and by-laws of the Zhigong Party also stipulated that there should be tolerance of multiparty competition at the ballot box, and freedom of enterprise and the press. In a nutshell, in Leslie Chen's opinion it was a program that reflected Chen Jiongming's belief in an open political system and his confidence in the sustainability of democracy, at least at the grassroots level.

Most historians pay little attention to Chen's *Zhigongdang* on the grounds that without an army or a territorial base Chen and his political allies were marginalized to the point of irrelevance. Leslie Chen himself shows that from 1926 until his death in 1933 Chen Jiongming had little influence over events in south China; he spent much of his time either in Hong Kong or in north China conferring with northern leaders about either peaceful reunification or the Japanese threat. The author, however, still appears to believe that there was during the 1920s a real chance for Chen's federalist movement, one that was destroyed by the political and military intrigues of Sun Yat-sen. Leslie Chen's revision of the record concerning Chen Jiongming's idealism and his effort to bring to light some of Sun Yat-sen's less attractive qualities (e.g., his unbridled ambition and his willingness to compromise with foreign powers – Japan and Russia – in order to secure their support for his revolution) are well documented and on target (if not necessarily original in the case of Sun Yat-sen). Less convincing, however, is his suggestion that but for Dr. Sun's machinations China might have peacefully developed a federal system of government. Perhaps in his enthusiasm to clean up his father's image, a job that he does very well, he has reached a bit too far. That, however, is a minor, and perhaps understandable, flaw that does not fatally detract from what otherwise is a well-researched and competently argued piece of scholarship.

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Thomas D. Curran

Lan, Hua R. and Vanessa L. Fong (eds): *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook*. (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), xl + 239 pp., \$ 69.95. ISBN 0-7656-0342-X.

The title of this work is not entirely apt, for this is not a sourcebook on women themselves so much as it is one on the views of people of both genders concerning women's place and role in Chinese society during the May Fourth era. It is a collection of 43 pieces written by Chinese men and women from 1916 to 1930

(only five were written after 1922). A few of the pieces have long been available in English, and a number of others have been readily available to Chinese readers for nearly two decades in such collections such as *Wusi shiqi funu wenti wenxuan* [Selected-essays on the women's question during the May Fourth period] published by Beijing Shudian in 1981. What is unique is that they have been brought together, into an integrated collection in English for the first time. In addition, the editors have organized them by topic, separating them into five separate categories, and have provided introductions that highlight the themes to which each section is devoted. Section headings include Love, Marriage and the Family; The New Women Martyrs; Women's Education; Women's Emancipation; and Women and Social Activism. Also, there is a very helpful general introduction written by Christina Kelley Gilmartin, a well-known expert on the women's movement in China; and the editors have provided a brief biography for each of the authors in the collection about whom biographical information is available.

The editors' purpose was to present samples of writings that display some of the variety of ideas that were developed within the May Fourth discourse on women's issues. Their goal would be best served, they believed, by choosing from a wide range of authors, and one finds here Communists, liberals, literary figures and even Japanese sympathizers (e.g., Wang Jingwei). Although the authors that they chose approached the issues from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives, there are some common themes. Especially, they tended to view the subordination of women to a patriarchal culture as a symbol and sign of cultural backwardness and national humiliation; most saw women's liberation as one component of a broader strategy of social reform that was necessary to rescue China from its stagnation and move her into the modern world.

In her introductory essay, Professor Gilmartin points out that the May Fourth commentators on women's issues intentionally chose to ignore the "proto-feminist" critique of 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese thinkers on the grounds that it was spawned within a matrix of values and ideas that were essentially traditional. Consistent with the iconoclastic spirit of the times, their attention was focused, rather, on developing a new argument, one that turned to the West rather than China's past for inspiration and that revolved around the issues of national salvation rather than freedom and human rights. Their discourse rejected traditional modes of thought and behavior, and as Gilmartin put it, was "embedded in a vocabulary and intellectual framework that valued 'modernity'." [p. x.] This vision of modernity, however, was colored by patriotism and an overwhelming concern with the fate of China in the face of domestic economic and social crises and foreign penetration. One example is Chen Duxiu, the May Fourth intellectual and future general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, who wrote a famous piece in 1916 in which he excoriated Confucian values for the impediment they presented to the evolution of a modern personality. In the excerpt from that piece chosen for this collection, we find Chen seeking the emancipation of women as a necessary ingredient of a modern society. Personal independence, he argued, is necessary for economic and political life, both of which are in turn essential for modernization. Confucian ethics, including those that pertain to gender relations, obstruct the development of personal independence; therefore, in the interest of developing a nation, they had to go. What was necessary, Chen and other writers

of a similar frame of mind argued, was a total transformation of Chinese society; the place of women was merely one concern among many. An unusual selection in which appears the motif of progress toward some conception of a modernized society is a 1920 piece written by the then anarchist Yun Daiying in which the author argued that as society evolves toward a more perfect state it must have public child care facilities that utilize "scientific methods of childrearing." To do so would both allow women to develop their economic potential and ensure that their "ignorance" regarding childcare matters would no longer do "long-lasting damage to their children." (p. 33)

To the more or less dispassionate analyses of writers such as Chen and Yun, the editors have added the satirical voice of one on China's best known literary figures, Lu Xun, who noted that while conservative males standing guard against the erosion of Chinese values extolled chastity for Chinese women, they seldom choose to have any part of it for themselves. "Men cannot," he declared, "make rules for women that they do not keep themselves." (p. 12) Even Lu Xun intellectualized the issue, however, arguing that the original notion of chastity was a product of a primitive society that had been kept alive for centuries by "professional Confucians" who dominated the media of public opinion. (p. 15) Also presented here is Lu Xun's literary treatment of the same subject, his famous short story, "The New Year's Sacrifice," in which a destitute widow suffers bitterly for having been widowed at an early age and having chosen not to remain faithful to her husband's memory.

While only thirteen of the items in this collection were written by women, reflecting the fact that even discussion of women's issues in China during the 1920s was dominated by men, many of the notes that they struck are in harmony with those of the writings by male authors. As Lan and Fong point out, however, some of the females tended to approach the subject with a "greater sense of personal urgency" than their male counterparts. In one example, Wang Huiwu, the author's anger and resentment over her sense that women have been "cheated" by men is palpable. Men had, she charged, forged an "iron trap," the marriage and family system, that was so strong that even those women who had received higher education could not free themselves from it. (p. 162) Forced into a condition of permanent economic dependency, women had been deprived of the right to participate in state affairs or to become officials. Of course, she added with a delightfully sardonic twist, "the bright side of this is that none of those imbecile congressmen, treasonous bureaucrats, and other kinds of traitors can be a woman." (p. 158) On the positive side, one notes an occasional bit of optimism, as in the case of the young writer, Bing Xin (1902-1999) who concluded her essay marking the opening of Yanjing University to women in 1920 with the simple phrase, "Long live Yanjing University!" (p. 135)

Here we have only begun to plumb the issues presented in this wonderful collection. There is a great deal more here; the editors have gathered a broad range of writings on both theoretical and practical issues surrounding what many May Fourth era thinkers called "the women question." In addition to having chosen wisely, they have produced a very readable work. Chinese writers in the May Fourth era were in the midst of a language reform that involved both the adoption of the vernacular (as opposed to classical Chinese) as a form of written

expression and the translation of Western concepts and terms into modern Chinese. Their writings are at times confusing and stylistically inconsistent. Nevertheless, the translators and editors of this volume have done an excellent job rendering accessible several dozen short pieces dealing with one of the most significant of the many cultural movements that shook 20<sup>th</sup> century China. M. E. Sharpe has done its part by producing a paperback version at one-third the price of the hard copy, making the book available to students. It would make an excellent addition to the syllabus of courses on 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese history, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, and I believe it also deserves and will receive the attention of people probing gender issues far beyond the China field.

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Abe, Ryūichi: *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xxii + 593 pp., \$ 40.00. ISBN 0-231-11286-6.

At two points late in this study of the influential Japanese Esoteric Buddhist or Shingon master Kūkai (779–835), Ryūichi Abe provides useful summaries of the ground he has attempted to cover. In chapter 9, “A Genealogy of Mantra: Kūkai’s Legacy,” Abe states that his study “has sought to disengage Kūkai from the narrative structure of modern sectarian history of the Shingon School, in which Kūkai has always been portrayed as an exemplary Heian Buddhist, the founder of the Shingon Sect. It has also striven to recontextualize Kūkai in the historical conditions of the early Heian intellectual community . . .” (386). At the beginning of the same chapter, Abe provides another statement of the major topics he addresses in the volume: “Kūkai’s alliance with the Nara Buddhist establishment; his construction of the categories of the exoteric and esoteric in which the two were understood as complimentary; his Buddhist legitimization of emperorship, which challenged the Confucian ideology of the state” (359). These summaries offer a good sense of the broad agenda of this study and of the importance of the topics the author considers.

The task of reimagining Kūkai within the intellectual context of his age occupies much of the early portions of the book. In chapter 1, “Kūkai and (Very) Early Heian Society,” Abe argues that early Heian society should be seen as an extension of Nara (710–784) society rather than as a distinct new phase of Japanese cultural and religious history. As in the Nara period, a Han Confucian ideology provided the frame of reference for understanding the power of the emperor and the methods for maintaining order in society. The legal expression of that ideology was the *ritsuryō* system. The Buddhist establishment of the Six Nara Schools and, in the early Heian period, Shingon and Tendai was permitted to exist only within that Confucian ideological and legal framework. Buddhist priests were treated as quasi-government officials, valued chiefly for the protective services they could render the state, and their activities were closely watched. In his treatment of Kūkai’s early intellectual development, Abe shows how he gradually shifted his interests from Confucianism, which he studied in his teens as preparation for government service, to Buddhism. He further demonstrates