
Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History. Mann, Susan and Yu-Yin Cheng, Eds. U of California Press, July 2001. ISBN: 0-520-22276-8. 374 pages, with illustrations. \$19.96 (also issued in hardback, ISBN: 0-520-22274-1, \$50.00).

Publications on women in Chinese culture have increased exponentially in since the 1970s, but most of them have dealt with modern Chinese women or with texts about rather than by them. Very few have dealt with periods in Chinese history analogous to the European medieval period, even fewer with theoretical approaches drawn from ongoing feminist debates, and yet fewer with original texts by and about Chinese women. Only a handful have offered actual translations of these texts, with commentary. *Under Confucian Eyes* fills some of these gaps in our knowledge of Chinese women as writers and subjects from the eighth through the nineteenth centuries. The texts include biographies, drama, fiction, funerary writing, poetry, and a form also common to Western women, letters. While not all of the texts presented are attributed to women, they all contribute to expanding our knowledge of social gender in China under Confucianism. The texts are representative of the relatively few shorter works that have survived.

This anthology is unique for including translations as well as analyses and criticism. *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* edited by Kang-I San Chang and Haun Saussy (Stanford Univ. Press, 1999) includes a substantial number of texts, but the introductions are very brief. It is obviously to be used as a companion textbook where the teacher fills in the requisite background information.

The selections in the Mann/Cheng anthology include depictions of women's everyday lives through both their own writings and official biographies and court documents written by men. A valuable feature of the anthology is the translators discussions of the situational and critical details important to understanding each piece in its original context as well as in our contemporary interpretation. Each translator gives their individual perspective on the act of translating and the particular difficulties of each piece.

The anthology includes 18 complete texts or collections of texts, rather than the fragments of longer texts often found elsewhere. Ten of the eighteen are attributed to male authors; two are collections presenting many women's voices; four more, several pieces by one woman. The editors' "Guide for Students and Teachers," states that "the texts are arranged chronologically to supplement the readings in any history course that deals with China, East Asia, or the world between the dynasties of the Tang (618–906) and the Qing (1644–1911)" (p. 9). The editors provide Confucian definitions of the division between public and private spheres and address the differences between Western and Chinese interpretations of this division.

The first 11 selections span the eighth (Tang Dynasty) through the sixteenth (Ming dynasty) centuries, and may thus be of interest to Western medievalists. The

“Biography of the Daoist Saint Wang Fenxian,” and “Biography of the Great Compassionate One of Xiangshan,” are hagiographical. The first woman described, Wang Fenxian, was Daoist and the second, Miaoshan, the Great Compassionate One, was Buddhist. Their stories, written by men in official court records, will sound familiar as the two saintly women avoid traditional family roles and pressures, including arranged marriages, and, in one case, suffer death for their beliefs.

The Book of Filial Piety for Women, written for women by “a Woman Nee Zhen” (c. 730 A.D.) was a well-known conduct guide. Like medieval Western books and letters designed to instruct women on their proper behavior in the private sphere, as daughters, wives, and mothers, this text uses both religious doctrine, in this case a Confucian/Daoist amalgam, and exemplary figures from everyday life. The translator, Patricia Buckley Ebrey, is an expert on texts of this period and has written extensively about them. Her essay on her own practices as well as on the situation and interpretation of this particular text are invaluable as a guide to the history of Chinese women under early Confucianism in the Tang Dynasty, the value of contemporary feminist theoretical approaches for understanding the texts, their context, and original audience (although this text was popular well into the nineteenth century), and the comparative potential for medievalists working in Western contexts.

Two of the selections in the epistolary genre are letters of instruction and guidance by husbands to their wives and children, the “Letter to my Sons,” is by their mother Gu Ruopu (1592–1681). While dated a bit late for comparison with Western medieval writing, this and other letters offer an indication of a vast and ongoing epistolary tradition for both Chinese women and men from the twelfth century on. In her essay on Gu Ruopu, the translator, Dorothy Ko, emphasizes the importance of the epistolary form in women’s writing while also deploring the loss of so much Classical Chinese women’s writing. Letters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries take up three sections of the book, providing much information about the literary forms, education, and daily lives of these women.

Under Confucian Eyes is a valuable anthology and would make a good introduction to pre-modern Chinese women and their writing for any reader, especially if they are then likely to go on to more specific collections. It is I hope only the first of many to come. It would be useful to have the same self-reflexive, critical, feminist perspectives on earlier extant works by and about women as well as on longer works and collections of less standard ones such as letters, biographies, and funerary writings. The official dynastic biographies, especially, could profit from this kind of analysis that reads between the lines of formal conventions. The importance of the translator role to the understanding and interpretation of such texts is clearly demonstrated. This collection and a very few others mark the arrival of feminism in Chinese studies. *Under Confucian Eyes* has taken us on a great leap forward in our understanding of historical Chinese women and in our ability to compare them to women in the West.

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