

Wang Zheng. *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. 417. Paper \$28.95.

Wang Zheng, Associate Professor of Women's Studies and History and Associate Research Scientist of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan, examines the evolution of women's rights in China from 1919 through the 1990s. She uncovers the heroines of the women's rights movement to show that women were important for the movement, before and after 1949, despite both men and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) claiming women did not need to push for liberation. Zheng traveled to China and interviewed five women who participated in the women's movement at the local level. She argues that women did not need to be leading, nationally known figures to support women's rights.

Divided into two sections, Zheng first explains the historical background to help the reader understand the second section, which consists of the interviews. Women's rights had become an important concern during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, a primarily youth-centered protest focused on anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. In order to help modernize China, men proposed that women needed a bigger role in society other than as concubines or wives. However, women who tried to voice their opinions in women's magazines and journals were told to keep quiet as they had nothing new to contribute since they were not educated enough to understand the issues. Before the CCP took control in 1949, women's interest in the party was largely due to its claim that they supported women's rights. However, after rising to power, the CCP adopted a more genderless approach to equality, stating that supporting the women's movement, or any other movement targeting specific groups, was not beneficial to the people as a whole. The government argued that everyone should have the same benefits, and there was to be no distinction between male and female. The existence of a women's movement suggested that there was a difference between the way men and women experienced the Chinese Revolution.

The five women, Lu Lihua, a school principal, Zhu Su'e, an attorney, Wang Yiwei, an editor-in-chief of a woman's journal, Chen Yongsheng, an educator, and Huang Dinghui, a career revolutionary, shared perseverance in light of different hardships ranging from poverty, miscarriage, or a family member's death due to armed conflict. Lu Lihua opened her own all girls school to promote physical education. Zhu Su'e, as an attorney, defended women who were abused by men and traditional Chinese sentiments, such as foot binding and concubinage. Wang Yiwei used her position as founder and editor of a women's journal to advocate women's rights by writing about male oppression. Chen Yongsheng became a physical education teacher to promote women's health. Huang Dinghui, the only interviewee who was a member of the Communist Party, helped to establish the CCP as the primary government prior to 1949. She spent much of her time after 1949 in prison on the CCP's blacklist for marrying a capitalist who fled to Taiwan. All five women were located in and around Shanghai.

The background information provided in part one might be overwhelming for those not familiar with Chinese history. However, the information is well documented and chronologically organized. The interviews in part two offer micro histories. The interactions of the five women with varying political authorities, as well as ordinary people, help to connect personal and national experiences. These narratives provide insight into what individual lives were like, sharing their experiences from 1919 and the 1949 Mao era, concluding with life in modern China in the 1990s. Upon publication, only two women, Zhu Su'e and Huang Dinghui, were still alive and living in Shanghai.

Before the fall of the dynastic system in China, women had few rights. They endured many forms of suffering such as foot binding, concubinage, and being sold into prostitution by their own family. Upon marriage women were usually sent to live with the husband's parents where they were often regarded as family slaves. Compared to women's status and treatment prior to the women's movement in 1919, the push for women's liberation was a success. Women could hold jobs of significance such as running a company and were not reduced to domestic chores. Men still hold the gender advantage as baby boys continue to be preferred in the patriarchal social order, and males dominate the political realm. However, the women's movement brought women to a position much closer to men than ever before. Anyone interested in gender, Chinese or oral histories would enjoy reading this book.

Michael Todd