



The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory (Weatherhead Books on Asia)

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He-Yin Zhen (1886–1920) was a female theorist who played a central role in the birth of Chinese feminism. Editor of a prominent feminist-anarchist journal in the early twentieth century and exponent of a particularly incisive analysis of China and the world. Unlike her contemporaries, He-Yin Zhen was concerned less with China's fate as a nation and more with the relationship among patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, and gender subjugation as global and transhistorical problems. Her bold writings were considered radical and dangerous in her lifetime and gradually have been erased from the historical record. This volume, the first translation and study of He-Yin's work in English or Chinese, is also a critical reconstruction of early twentieth-century Chinese feminist thought in a transnational context. The book repositions He-Yin Zhen as central to the development of feminism in China, juxtaposing her writing with fresh translations of works by two of her better-known male interlocutors.

The editors begin with a detailed portrait of He-Yin Zhen's life and an analysis of her thought in comparative terms. They then present annotated translations of six of her major essays, as well as two foundational tracts by her male contemporaries, Jin Tianhe (1873–1947) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929), to which He-Yin's work responds and with which it engages. Jin Tianhe, a poet and educator, and Liang Qichao, a philosopher and journalist, understood feminism as a paternalistic cause that "enlightened" male intellectuals like themselves should defend. Zhen counters with an alternative conception of feminism that draws upon anarchism and other radical trends in thought. Ahead of her time within the context of both modernizing China and global feminism, He-Yin Zhen complicates traditional accounts of women and modern history, offering original perspectives on sex, gender, labor, and power that continue to be relevant to feminist theorists in China, Europe, and America.

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