
The book under review is a welcome addition to the growing body of Western and Chinese scholarship on the gender history of modern China, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. In many ways, however, it also fills a yawning gap in the literature. Recent studies of the early twentieth century have explored, amongst other things, the construction of the ‘new woman’ in the newspaper/periodical press and in literature, the complex links between nationalism, modernity and gender, the impact of an emerging public education for women (and of women’s growing public visibility in general at this time), the nature and significance of new scientific and medical discourses of sexuality, and the political/social/cultural ramifications of changes in women’s dress and hairstyles. Yet one of the most remarkable gender phenomena at this time has hitherto elicited very little focused and substantial analysis—the Chinese women’s suffrage movement, which began in the years leading up to the 1911 Revolution and succeeded in obtaining electoral quotas for women in the Nationalist-promulgated constitution of 1947. Conventionally viewed as the politically inconsequential activity of a small number of privileged ‘bourgeois’ women, and cast further in the shadows by a widely-held assumption that Chinese women only gained significant political rights with the national victory of the (male-led) Chinese Communist Party in 1949, this Chinese women’s suffrage movement, as Louise Edwards remarks in her conclusion (p.238), contributed significantly not only to revolutionising gender politics in China, but also to transforming its political landscape.

*Gender, Politics, and Democracy* admirably sets out to restore the narrative of female activists’ agency in this story and to describe the ways in which such agency impacted upon male politicians, legislators, and government officials. In the introduction (Chapter1) Edwards reminds us that China’s suffrage feminists advanced two rationales for granting women political rights—one based on the assumption that women were the same as men, and the other that they were fundamentally different from men—and that they pragmatically used one or the other at different times and within different contexts during the first half of the twentieth century. Another important aspect of China’s suffrage campaign (albeit discussed only briefly in the introduction and subsequent chapters) was that Chinese feminists very much perceived themselves as part of a global movement, and sought whenever possible to link their campaign with that of the International Women’s Suffrage Association (IWSA)—for example, in 1912 Chinese suffragists invited representatives from the IWSA such as Carrie Chapman Catt to China, where they attended large public meetings and rallies in several cities. At the same time, Edwards differentiates the approaches adopted towards the concept of citizenship in China and the West; thus, while for Chinese suffragists citizenship was *embedded* within the right to participate in politics, in the West citizenship was constructed...
with sex-specific rights and duties in mind. A contrast with Japan, however, is less convincing. Edwards argues that while in Japan the campaign for women's suffrage was seen as 'un-Japanese' and therefore unpatriotic, in China women's suffrage was proclaimed as the symbol of national progress and hence, constituted a patriotic rather than treacherous act; furthermore, whereas in Japan the 'new woman' was again perceived as an alien and thus undesirable phenomenon, in China female suffragists were able to appropriate the image of the 'new woman' as a positive symbol of future national rejuvenation. In fact, discourses of the 'new woman in China from the 1910s to the 1930s revealed a far more complex picture, one in which the 'new woman' was seen in highly ambivalent and negative terms very similar to those in Japan; it might also be noted that female campaigners for suffrage rights in Japan during the 1920s and early 1930s made use of exactly the same kind of argument sometimes used in China (i.e. that women deserved political rights precisely because they were different from men). Subsequent chapters provide a clear chronological account of the suffrage movement from the early 1900s to the late 1940s.

Chapter 2 describes the role of anti-Qing female activists during the last years of the monarchy; about 100-200 women joined Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Revolutionary alliance), the first political organisation to recognise the principle of equality between men and women. It was during this period that the concept of nüguomin 女國民 (female citizen) was formulated as a justification for the granting of political rights to women. For these activists, women's participation in national affairs would demonstrate that women were equal to men, and thus deserving of suffrage. During the 1911 Revolution itself women formed a variety of military and militia units, some of which were later transformed into the first formal suffragist organisations. Chapter 3 focuses on the crucial first years of the Chinese Republic (1912-1914), arguing that women's self-representation and activities during this period were singularly 'feminist' in nature (i.e. women were said to be inherently equal to men, and that such equality was not premised, as it had been before 1911, in accord with an anti-dynastic or nationalist agenda). Ultimately, however, in Edwards' words, the 'Han patriarchy' (p.65) that came to power after 1912 was no more willing to grant political rights to women than the previous Manchu patriarchy had been Edwards usefully reminds us, however, that China's suffragists at this time were not advocates of universal suffrage, but rather demanded equality with men in suffrage rights, themselves still subject to a number of conditions. The provisional constitution of March 1912, as well as electoral laws in August 1912, excluded women from politics; at the same time the heir of the Tongmenghui, the Nationalist Party (Guomindang; GMD), abandoned its commitment to gender equality. Although at a national level the women's suffrage campaign seemed to have been utterly defeated in 1912, the movement's credibility called into question by the moral outrage expressed by male (and female) commentators who denounced the 'transgressive' and 'subversive' behaviour of those suffragists who had passionately protested against the 'betrayals' of 1912, Edwards points out that the provincial assembly of Guangdong (at least