

Introduction

In March 1912 a group of over sixty women's suffrage activists stormed the parliament of the new Republic of China in Nanjing demanding the right to vote and stand for election. They smashed windows, chanted slogans, and scuffled with security guards while the male parliamentarians who inherited the mantle of rule dismissed women's claims to full, equal, enfranchised citizenship in Asia's first republic. Nine years later, in March of 1921, another women's suffrage group marched into the provincial parliament of the southern region of Guangdong to press the case for political equality with men in their provincial constitution. Conservative male legislators hurled ink boxes and chairs at the women, rendering one petitioner unconscious and leaving several others with cuts and bruises. Clearly, the prospect of Chinese women voting and standing for election on an equal basis with men generated considerable tension and anxiety among the political elite of early Republican China.

The persistence and vigor of the women's suffrage campaigns eventually produced the longed-for success. Within a few years of the Guangzhou incident, the constitutions of several important provinces provided women

equality with men in political rights, and women were elected to provincial legislatures. By 1936 a national constitution guaranteeing women equality had been drafted and waited only for the election of a National Assembly for ratification. A decade later, in 1946, the women's suffrage activists won a guaranteed minimum 10 percent quota of seats for women. Despite this impressive record of feminist success in China, little is known about the Chinese women's suffrage movement. The women that led the campaigns from the 1900s to the 1940s had apparently slid into the recesses of history—their courage, vision, and initiative forgotten.

The women's suffrage campaign was but one part of the vibrant women's movement in China in the first half of the twentieth century. For the women involved, winning the franchise was deemed the key to simultaneously redressing past injustices and confirming women's rightful place in the present political arena in order that potential future injustices could be prevented. Other women's groups focused on winning improvements in wages and conditions for women workers, and yet others still aimed to link women's activism with philanthropy and welfare or family reform. Women in these various groups collaborated and contributed to each other's campaigns because women activists in China soon came to conceive of women as a group with a unity of interests and political needs. However, the activists that took winning the suffrage as their prime focus regarded formal political power as the ultimate guarantee of all other rights. Improved work conditions and wages for women and effecting family and marriage reform that expanded women's rights were all seen to be dependent upon women gaining representation in formal legislative processes, according to the suffrage activists. They believed that women politicians could best defend women's rights.

Through narrating the story of the women suffragists' campaigns, this current volume demonstrates that over the course of the first five decades of the twentieth century China's feminists moved pragmatically between arguments based on women's inherent equality with men and those based on women's difference from men. In China, arguments for suffrage rights that invoked the logic of the "essential and fundamental equality of human beings regardless of sex" appeared as frequently as those that invoked the logic of the "essential and fundamental differences between the sexes." These twin logics were not regarded as diametrically opposing tools, as was often presumed in Western feminist writings of the late 1980s and 1990s, and neither did they cause schisms in the movement as a whole. In the hands of China's feminists, both became strategic tools of fluctuating

efficacy depending on the particularities of the historical moment. Thus, China's suffrage feminists mobilized "equality arguments" and "difference arguments" at distinct times within their campaigns. Difference arguments initially were important in building a notion of women's collective political interests and later became powerful tools for winning special quotas for women in legislative bodies. Equality arguments were at first fundamental to the destruction of long-standing notions of women's lack of independent personhood—a view that deemed political participation unnecessary for women as individuals. Later the equality arguments came to underscore campaigns for legal reforms on matters of winning equal access to education, property, and divorce. Pragmatic goal orientation typified the Chinese suffrage movement during the first half of the twentieth century rather than theoretical purity.

This book explores the evolution of this feminist-activist pragmatism and in so doing suggests that anxieties among contemporary feminist theorists about the relative merits of one argument or the other may be less pressing if one takes a historical view.¹ Both "equality" and "difference" are useful arguments, depending on one's specific political goal in relation to the given historical and cultural context.

Significantly, China's suffragists mobilized both arguments within the premise of women's collective disadvantage as a group. Until the end of the nineteenth century, recognition of women's lower status as a group compared to men did not translate into recognition of the potential political utility of this consciousness. From the first decade of the twentieth century the expansion of the women's movement created a collective notion of women as human beings that deserved identification outside clan or familial relationships.² The feminists' propounding of women's unity of disadvantage created just such a political category that over the course of the decades under consideration became increasingly publicly accepted. Whether women as a political category were equal or different from men was less important than the underlying premise that women were identifiable as a discrete and disadvantaged political group. And, as a recognized political group, they pressed convincing arguments for political representation.

Women's collective identity as a disadvantaged political group was framed not only in contrast to men as a presumed politically advantaged group, but also in connection to the key political signifier of the time—the nation. Consciousness of women's politicized collectivity was central to rhetoric of national strengthening from the 1898 Reform Movement onward. Indeed,

nationalism and feminism emerged almost simultaneously in China, and as a consequence much scholarly attention has been devoted to untangling the connections between the two.³ Sometimes this “untangling project” was driven by the search for a pure feminist tradition and other times by the desire to deny the existence of this very same feminism. Yet the pragmatism of the suffrage activists points to a new perspective on our understandings about the connection between nationalism and feminism in China.

In an attempt to find a path between the search for a pure feminist tradition or the denial of one, one current scholarly perspective on these twin forces presents an intimate relation between nationalism and feminism. For example, Peter Zarrow stated, “feminists generally argued their case for the equality of women in China while accepting a discourse dominated by nationalist concerns.”⁴ Wang Zheng argued, “women wove the two lines of argument—national strengthening and equal rights—into a single thread: national strengthening required women’s equal participation in all spheres.”⁵ While emphasizing the intimacy of the connections between feminism and nationalism, even this kind of scholarship tends to reify a static conception of both feminism and nationalism. As will become clear through the chronological development of the chapters to follow, neither feminism nor nationalism connoted the same theoretical perspective or activist position across the entire five decades.

The commonplace use of the term “nationalism” in current literature homogenizes a diverse range of positions, beliefs, expectations, and actions.⁶ Just as Chinese feminism incorporated arguments based on both equality and difference, Chinese nationalism embraced apparently contradictory sentiments of nativism and internationalism. Depending on the dominant political voice at each particular historical juncture, Chinese nationalism has assumed many diverse forms including anti-Manchu Han chauvinism, anti-imperialist Marxism, and anticommunist radicalism as well as national salvation, nation building, and national defense. China’s feminists found the flexibility of the meanings encapsulated in “nationalism” extremely useful since they were able to invoke multiple different qualities within the broad category of nationalism as it suited their cause. However, from the mid-1920s onward, as the political situation in China concentrated power in the hands of two major political parties—the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP (*Gongchandang*) and the Nationalists (*Guomindang*)—the feminists’ flexibility to mobilize around the term “nationalism” diminished as one or the other party wrought supreme control over its meaning. Nonetheless,

nationalism was contested throughout the decades, and feminism's connection to it evolved pragmatically at each point of contestation.

Declaring that China's feminists were always also nationalists does little to illuminate their political positions, actions, or arguments given the fluctuations in meanings of *nationalism* over the course of the five decades in question. As the women's suffrage movement in China explored gendered notions of political citizenship they invoked these ever-fluctuating conceptions of nationalism and national benefit as it suited their particular goals. Multiple versions of patriotism and nationalism were variously safe havens, useful tools, and firmly held beliefs at different times over the course of the decades of struggle for women's franchise in China. Dismantling the commonplace assumption that there was one, unitary nationalism, with identical political characteristics and utility across the entire period is crucial to understanding the nature of Chinese feminism, as we will see below.

WHO WERE THE SUFFRAGISTS?

Throughout this volume, readers will be introduced to a host of individual suffrage activists and will come to appreciate the evolution of the movement's membership over the course of the decades under exploration. Starting with a narrow elite the movement broadened to include both middle- and working-class women by the mid-1920s. The diversification of the women's suffrage movement mirrors that of China's politically active population as a whole. While the membership increasingly drew from a broader cross-section of society, the leaders of the suffrage movement filled the ranks of China's expanding professional class. Suffrage leaders comprise China's first women school principals, university presidents, doctors, journalists, and lawyers. They sought political power to extend the scope for women in China's public spaces and naturally went on to form the core of China's first women politicians and party leaders.

As Chapter Two shows, women active in seeking equal political rights with men during the years immediately before and after the 1911 revolution were comparatively wealthy and were overwhelmingly privileged with education, first in their family homes and later as students in Japan. For the most part these women were free of marital responsibilities—being variously unmarried, widowed, or separated.⁷ Without family or clan restrictions, these first suffrage activists crafted political identities for themselves

as women that were both public and antagonistic. They fought in formal military battles and served as spies and assassins as part of the movement to build a Chinese democratic republic—without which they would have no suffrage rights. They wrote articles and gave speeches at rallies demanding their audience to recognize the necessity of improving women's rights and status. The early suffragists' freedom from financial and marital constraints along with their privileged access to education was central to expanding awareness about the possibility of women's political consciousness and group activism. Their success was evident in the growth of the women's movement in later decades.

The women leading the movement from the 1920s onward were typically educated in China or the USA rather than Japan and grew more concerned about their potential to represent women as a constituency. At this time we see the full power of the collective consciousness of women's unity of disadvantage coming into effect. In the public spaces created by their women political leaders through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, a wider variety of women were active in a broader range of political spheres—women from all walks of life with a full range of political perspectives appeared in the public arena. Communists and Nationalists joined forces to campaign for expanded women's political space, making effective use of their now well-developed sense of women's collective identity and the power of its politicized lobby. Since the 1920s, as a result of the sustained efforts of the suffrage activists, women voted and were elected to formal political positions in villages, cities, and provinces to a range of different assemblies, parliaments, and councils.

Rather than being a brief spark of "bourgeois feminism," the discussion to follow shows that women's suffrage activism in China was a sustained campaign, where activists of one generation passed information, tactics, and energy on to the next, oftentimes across political party divides. The increasingly common public appearance of individual women in high-level political roles signified the importance of women's suffrage to the overall status of women in China. These women advocated changes to fundamental social and economic structures in their espousal of an explicit agenda for increasing women's power and influence relative to men. Regardless of an individual woman's perspective on the preferred political system, the public appearance of women leaders in advocacy roles on behalf of women as a collectivity increasingly ensured that no political party could ignore the question of women's status and role in society.

As the following section argues, there are strong and pressing reasons for an enhanced appreciation of the history of the women's suffrage movement. Above and beyond its significance to the Chinese women's movement as a whole, the suffrage movement had important impacts on the broader Chinese political scene.

WHY EXPLORE THE CHINESE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT?

This suffrage movement warrants wider attention for a number of reasons—not least because the women involved deserve recognition for their struggles and successes in reshaping China's political terrain. A deeper understanding of the history of this movement contributes to our expanding knowledge of China's gendered political landscape and the history of women's suffrage at a global level. The suffrage movement also reveals the complex reformulations of Chinese notions of political legitimacy that took place in the transition from monarchy to democracy (albeit fragile) during these decades. It uncovers the fraught search for publicly recognized political legitimacy that accompanied the transition from a government structured around monarch-appointed literati bureaucrats to popularly elected legislators. The women suffragists' public contestation of the centuries-old assumption that formal political power was embodied in the male form undermined many attempts by male legislators to assert legitimacy for assemblies that did not include women in the post-monarchy political order. Parliaments and senates that excluded women, the suffragists declared, were illegitimate and unrepresentative structures.

The women's suffrage movement shows us the manner in which the anxiety about China's weakened international standing made these new, male-only political structures vulnerable to attack. The women argued that a "modern" nation, such as China aspired to become, included women as full and equal political citizens. They invoked examples of "advanced" nations around the world to which China's current parliaments were unfavorably compared. By presenting women's suffrage as an emblem of modernity, the activists played on China's new leaders' longing for international respect. In this regard the story of the suffragists provides evidence of the manner in which China's leaders grappled with the impact of globalization on China's domestic politics in their oftentimes defensive assertion of China's integrity and equality within the "brotherhood" of nations.⁸

The story of the suffragists' campaigns also shows how women complicated the long-standing Confucian premise that formal education legitimized access to political power. This was a system that was open only to men, and for centuries Chinese governments drew learned men into their bureaucracies through formal examinations on philosophy and literature. Mastery of this knowledge was deemed to demonstrate virtue, which in turn legitimized a man's exercise of bureaucratic power. In the first half of the twentieth century, women suffragists uncoupled this naturalized connection between men and political power through demonstrations of women's literacy, erudition, and eloquence and their participation in formal, examinable education. Rather than challenge the link between education and access to power, the women activists promoted women's participation in the education system. They agreed that educational attainment was an important marker of the right to wield political power and then demonstrated that women could be as expert in learning as men once they won access to the same education system.

Simultaneously they transformed gendered customs of politics by carving a space for women in public affairs. Their sustained and often controversial public political actions gradually dismantled customary prohibitions restricting "good" women's public presence. Previously, isolation in the domestic sphere signified a woman's high moral standing, yet over the course of the first half of the twentieth century a "good" woman increasingly was conceived as a politically aware and politically active woman. This shift impacted directly on family politics and national politics as well as on gendered codes of personal virtue.

Histories of women suffrage in China also promote further knowledge of China's long-term, continuing, and evolving engagement with democracy and democratic principles. The first half of the twentieth century is routinely dismissed as a period of political and military chaos, yet as this book reveals, the vibrancy of the democratic activism grew from the extensive, albeit often flawed, political structures in place. Frank Dikötter presents a convincing case that governance in these decades "displayed considerable elements of continuity in terms of political vision, administrative practice or government personnel" and that the politically engaged population experienced openness to new ideas and the world "as global flows fostered an unprecedented degree of diversity."⁹ The campaigns of the women's suffrage activists in engaging with governments and bureaucracies and in eliciting support and tactics from their global sister suffragists support Dikötter's

view. The history of democratic activism in China has long been captive to disputes between pro- and anti-Marxist positions that have variously decried the corruption of the republican governments or the repression of the CCP governments.

This history of democratic activism in China is a hotly contested and evolving process—the changing reception of the histories of the women's suffrage campaigns provides new insights into this phenomenon. Until the last decade, historians from the People's Republic of China (PRC) had routinely dismissed the women's suffrage campaign as a marginal bourgeois movement, yet a new interest in histories of women's suffrage is emerging there, no doubt inspired by increasing democratization in China itself.¹⁰ In such scholarship, the CCP's role in harnessing and leading the women's suffrage movement toward their democratic goals is newly celebrated as China's ruling party seeks to inscribe its machinery with democratic historical roots.

The several decades of feminist campaigning for suffrage rights also provides strong evidence for a political voice in China outside of the CCP and the Nationalists. The dominance of these two major political parties in the histories of this period has obscured those struggles that worked within, around, and between these two groupings—including a sometimes antagonistic feminist movement. Moreover, it reveals that women developed a clear feminist agenda that cut across party, nation, or class loyalties as they invoked their collective identity as women and moreover sustained this through several decades of activism.

The significance of the Chinese movement on international women's suffrage studies is equally important, though largely unknown. China's feminist activists became fully informed about international developments over the course of their fifty-year engagement, and the international suffrage movement similarly publicized progress reports on the Chinese suffrage movement. However, today English-language scholarship on women's suffrage would lead one to suspect that little occurred outside of the Western world or its direct colonies. Many comprehensive, detailed studies on women's suffrage have been published for the anglophone world of Britain, USA, Australia, and New Zealand alone. But no similarly comprehensive studies on non-Western case studies have appeared. As Carole Pateman observed in 1994, "We know remarkably little about how women won the vote around the world. . . . How important are cultural differences, or difference in political regimes?"¹¹

Important attempts to redress the Anglocentrism of the suffrage histories include the pathbreaking 1994 volume by Daley and Nolan that included Pateman's challenge. More recently, in 2000, Fletcher, Mayhall, and Levine contributed to the internationalization of suffrage histories with a volume titled *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire*—an exploration of suffrage struggles in countries linked by common colonial history.¹² In the same year DuBois and Cherny edited a special issue of *Pacific Historical Review* dedicated to exploring the histories of women's suffrage in nine separate nations bordering the Pacific Ocean.¹³ Mina Roces and I followed this with the publication of *Women's Suffrage in Asia* in 2004 in order to present the diversity of women's engagement with formal politics in several key nations in Asia.¹⁴ This current volume contributes to the lengthy process of filling the lacunae Pateman identified by providing a comprehensive overview of the history of the campaign for women's suffrage in China—one of the world's most enduring cultural and political entities.

The China case study is important for providing a breadth to our understandings of women's involvement in the development of democratic institutions in the international context for a range of reasons. China provides a window into the functioning of women's suffrage movements in a cultural system that evolved, prospered, and declined outside of the Judeo-Christian sphere and in different philosophical traditions from those that produced the Enlightenment and evolutionism. It provides insights into the manner in which suffrage movements intersect and interact with nationalist or anticolonial struggles in countries where the very concept of a discrete, politically unified nation was fraught with uncertainty. National identity and citizenship were hotly contested concepts for that large section of the world living ostensibly in their own lands but effectively with European domination of their economies and policies. We can learn from the China case how women utilized and exploited that ambiguity to further their specific goals.

Finally, the China case study demonstrates that there are many points of confluence between the Western and the non-Western women's suffrage struggle. The inspiration gained by suffrage activists from the experiences of their sisters around the globe cannot be underestimated. Conversely, the arguments deployed by opponents to women's suffrage are startlingly similar across the decades and among cultures. Biological determinism and gendered essentialism underpin the arguments presented by opponents to suffrage from around the globe.

SCARCITY OF SCHOLARSHIP ON
THE "CHINESE SUPFRAGETTES"

A complex matrix of Chinese and international factors coalesced to inhibit scholarship on Chinese women as political activists lobbying for their rights as citizens. Some of these factors mirror reasons given for an earlier paucity of Western interest in Western woman's suffrage struggles, but others are specific to the Chinese case.

Ellen Carol DuBois argues that Western academic studies of the suffrage movements around the world were hindered by the notion that a narrow elite with conservative political tendencies dominated women's suffrage struggles.¹⁵ Academic trends in the 1960s and 1970s encouraged research into nonelite histories and ordinary people's lives. The suffragists were an unfashionable subject matter in this milieu. Similarly, in her analysis of the trends in historical writing on women's suffrage, Sandra Stanley Holton confirmed DuBois's point about academic fashions. She notes that in scholarship on the topic there was tension between the "constitutionalist" school writing prior to the end of the nineteenth century and the "militant" school writing for the bulk of the twentieth century. Holton argues that the former histories have been largely ignored in part because of the "measured tone" they adopted relative to the latter's more revolutionary flavor.¹⁶

An excellent example of the impact of this trend to favor revolutionary histories on China studies is provided by Roxanne Witke's 1973 statement that "the women suffragists were among the more articulate factions of urban intellectuals, and their public appeal was narrow if not divisive." She continues by describing the suffrage movement's calls for working women to join their movement as "fatuous . . . given the elitist scope of their concerns."¹⁷ Chinese historians in the PRC have also tended to dismiss the women's suffrage movement as an affair of "bourgeois" conservative and elite women. Suffrage was overlooked because it was erroneously regarded as an institutional reform rather than a social movement wherein the suffragist "set out to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture" of their nations.¹⁸ Marxist historical method, favored above all other methods in the PRC since 1949, has prioritized worker and peasant struggles and glossed over the broader women's movement as a dead-end battle for gender equality rather than full liberation. As China's foremost scholar of women's studies, Li Xiaojiang, wrote: "Just as the political slogan of 'equality' that originated with the bourgeoisie can also include equality between men and

women, so it was a socialist revolution opposed to a feminism of women's rights [bourgeois feminism] that brought women political liberation. This is not just an opinion but historical fact."¹⁹ Suffrage struggles are given only passing mention in the standard texts of Chinese women's history published in China itself and are often described as being ineffective until coming under CCP guidance.²⁰

Yet, the narrative of the experiences of Chinese women activists provided below supports DuBois's assertion that it is inaccurate to dismiss women's suffrage as a "conservative, right-of-center" cause.²¹ As will be clear throughout the book, Chinese suffragists maintained delicate and complex relationships with both the left and the right and proved to be effective political lobbyists in rapidly changing conditions. Dismissing the relevance of a movement on the basis of its elite origins conceals the deeper political motivations, including the historically strong opposition to "bourgeois parliamentarianism" and feminism more generally on the part of socialist and communist movements internationally.

The barriers inhibiting Western scholarly analysis on China's women's suffrage movement also include factors specific to China and her place in the world. Western academia, for the most part, had previously drawn heavily on an Orientalist tradition that posited China as a nation where despots ruled over an acquiescent and passive population. The existence of politically active women did not tally with this version of China. Indeed, the early women's suffrage movement in the West developed an Orientalist epistemology to argue its case in the 1860s and 1870s. Rendall reveals that from this evolutionist perspective women's suffrage was a higher point in the ladder of social and cultural development to which all civilized nations of the world would aspire.²² To provide the explicit comparison necessary in evolutionist rhetoric, the "passive, oppressed, and ignorant" state of non-Western women was invoked as evidence that nations of progress and advancement were moving in a linear fashion toward full democratic rights for women. Women in the "barbarous East" were constructed as benchmarks, immobile and homogenous, from which Western women's advancement could be monitored. Movement in the benchmark casts the schema into chaos. In her 1912 visit to China, the eminent American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt devoted considerable space in her reports of the journey to proving that women were actually in China's parliament. She visited the legislature in Guangzhou to see these women with her own eyes in order to counter widespread American disbelief of China's advanced status on women's rights.²³

So disruptive were reports of progress in women's political rights in these "backward" nations that humiliating international comparisons were invoked to shame legislators into political reform. In 1918 one Washington-based suffrage journal, *The Suffragist*, pressed its cause in an article titled "In Heathen Lands," stating (not altogether accurately): "Equal suffrage has now been established in almost every country in Europe. However, in Africa, China, the United States and the Fiji Islands it is still considered that woman's sphere is in the home."²⁴ In 1919 the same journal revealed the tensions provoked in "civilized nations" by movement in the "benchmarks of backwardness," declaring "women are reaching out to lift up their sex, in such countries as China and Japan, where womankind is yet considered scarcely better than the animals of the field—using the influence of their increasing power to an advantage which ultimately will break the shackles from the wrists of enslaved womanhood the round world over."²⁵

As we will see in the following chapters, Chinese women rejected the role they had been assigned in the evolutionary ladder. They perceived themselves to be mothers and daughters of one of the greatest world civilizations, albeit temporarily weakened, and accordingly took their lessons from nations that they regarded as being of similar stature. Imitating the success for women's suffrage in New Zealand and Australia, where women won the franchise in 1893 and 1902 respectively (before China's suffrage activists were organizing), carried far less force as an argument for women's suffrage in China than success in more prestigious colonizing powers like Britain, USA, and Germany. Women in these nations won the franchise in 1918, 1920, and 1918, respectively, enhancing the Chinese women's suffrage campaign considerably through their recognized prestige and power internationally.²⁶

Another reason advanced to explain the privileging of histories of Western women's activism on suffrage issues has been our scholarly preference for unity and closure.²⁷ Work on women's suffrage has prioritized consistently the year that universal womanhood suffrage was won. This perspective posits a unified, linear path between the poles of "no female franchise" and "female franchise." Such clear lines are not possible in nations emerging from colonial rule, civil war, or external invasion and whose social fabric was fragmented by economic chaos during the period when women's suffrage was advocated.²⁸ In countries like China, where the political and military situation led to frequent changes in the structures of governance, the women's suffrage campaigners took multiple paths and made complex and astute allegiances to survive the rapid shifts. It is commonplace to see

the dates of women's suffrage victories in various states of the USA or Australia listed separately in chronologies or overviews. Similar recognition of diversity and partiality in non-Western nations is urgently needed if we are to break the Orientalist practice of homogenizing and generalizing the non-Western experience. It is crucial to avoid dismissing the victories of women suffrage activists simply because there is less unity in the narrative than we are accustomed to or feel comfortable reading.

The absence of distinct and fixed political boundaries and geographic borders in nations extricating themselves from colonial or economic imperialism has also tended to make the women's suffrage campaigns appear less "authentic" because they are often intermingled in myriad ways with broader democratic, Marxist, or national independence struggles. In the case of China, explorations of the history of the women's movement in the early twentieth century have been retarded by the view that feminism was purely a tool for furthering nationalist or democratic ends used specifically by women. In 1942 Song Qingling (1893–1981), wife of the Republic of China's founding father, Sun Yat-sen, declared: "From the very start, our women fought not under the banner of a barren feminism but as part and parcel of the democratic movement as a whole."²⁹ Similarly, Roxanne Witke wrote in 1973: "A remarkable trait of politically motivated Chinese women was that the most avant-garde would not be arrested at the feminist stage of struggle for suffrage and women's rights."³⁰ The movement for women's equal political rights to men is often summarily dismissed as merely feminism and therefore inconsequential to the real struggle.

A further reason for the paucity of work on women's suffrage internationally, including in China, emerged from the overwhelming acceptance of the "rightness" of women's equal access to political and electoral powers as the twentieth century progressed. Diverse political interest groups sought to claim credit for the suffrage success once it was won. In her pioneering work on women's suffrage, Patricia Grimshaw noted in 1972 that research on the Western experience was inhibited initially by the common perception that women were granted suffrage rights without the existence of a sustained campaign (you cannot research a movement that did not exist).³¹ Governments around the globe have been enthusiastic promoters of their own agency and foresight in "giving" women the vote. Grimshaw's work on New Zealand was the first to reveal this tendency, and later scholars have found similar patterns elsewhere.³² The suffrage campaigners' lengthy struggle to persuade their government of the necessity and rightness of the cause is less prominent

or even denied in the various national narratives, and only since the 1970s have scholars, led by Grimshaw's work, redressed this misconception.

Historiography and popularly circulating stories of nationhood in both China and Taiwan have certainly supported this type of abbreviated history of women's access to voting rights. Popular perceptions are that Chinese women did not struggle to win the right to vote. Instead, enlightened and paternalistic governments granted it to them—the Nationalist Party in the case of the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, and the Chinese Communist Party in the case of the PRC. Women's agency was denied in the case of China just as it had been in the histories of the early New Zealand victory outlined by Grimshaw. Li Ziyun, an expert on women's writing in contemporary China, reflected the general perception of how Chinese women won the vote. In 1994 she wrote, "New China [post-1949] made provisions for women's political, economic and legal rights. With one flourish of the pen, Chinese women acquired the right to vote, something their sisters in the West had spent decades even centuries fighting for."³³ The Chinese political consciousness, reflected by Li, thus acknowledges the struggles of Western women while blithely denying the existence of indigenous Chinese activism on the issue. Ch'ien Tuan-sheng's seminal work on China's political history described the 1946–47 constitution under which Taiwan was ruled for many subsequent years, as encouraging women's reluctant interest in politics. Of the set minimum quotas for women, Ch'ien wrote, "the reference to women is intended to give them stimulus to seek elective offices."³⁴ In fact, as will become clear in the chapters to follow, many women lobbied long and hard to win the special quotas, and many more before them had campaigned seriously for the chance to vote and stand for parliament.

In the histories of both the PRC and the ROC on Taiwan, the narrative of female activists' agency and male governments' reactive acquiescence is consistently ignored. Neither the CCP or the Nationalist Party have been at pains to dispel these myths since neither has been enthusiastic about encouraging the excavation of histories of democratic movements until very recently. Both governments have legitimized their rule on the basis of a putative unified popular mandate that stems from benevolent paternalism rather than a democratic electoral process. Popularization of the histories of groups that proposed alternative versions of the origins of the two systems would have undermined the supposed unity of the masses. At best, both parties claimed that the authentic women's movement of the nation was subsumed into their respective Women's Affairs bureaus. These bureaus

served often to constrain women's activism within the broad party agenda, but they also afforded women powerful negotiating positions.³⁵ Moreover, as will become clear in the chapters that follow, there were women who deliberately remained independent of the two main parties and who remained effective lobbyists for women precisely because they were not constrained by rigid party discipline.

Since 1949 improvement in the position of women in China has been a major public relations success for the CCP government internationally. Much work of considerable importance has been achieved in the PRC promulgating and implementing policies that have enhanced the status of women in the ensuing years. These successes were achieved without the existence of a separate feminist lobby group. The official rhetoric is that the CCP through its women's wing, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), obviates the need for an independent women's movement by preempting women's concerns.³⁶ Part of the story that "the CCP knows best" on women's issues includes the teleological narrative: before 1949, in the feudal past, Chinese women were abject slaves suffering under the cruel and harsh Confucian family and clan structures; after 1949, the CCP legislated and educated the masses to halt these oppressive practices.³⁷ Discussion of the presence of an independent women's organization that sought to fight against these very privations, or the existence of a government and legal system that could be and was lobbied on behalf of women during the period of the Nationalist government, undermines somewhat the horrific "before 1949" stories. Moreover, recent scholarship by Susan Mann and Dorothy Ko on the varied lives of women in the Ming and Qing has demonstrated that the picture of unmitigated misery in "feudal China" is far from accurate.³⁸

The excellent albeit scarce scholarship on the history of the Chinese women's movement during the years prior to 1949 has for these and other reasons focused primarily on women in the communist movement or women workers. In the PRC in particular, these two groups of women have been projected as the heroes of the twentieth century women's movement at the expense of the contribution of middle-class or elite women who promoted democratic-constitutional government. The full mosaic of women's contribution to social and political development in the first half of the twentieth century requires academic scholarship on multiple perspectives. In this respect this current volume will contribute to the field opened by the dynamic and pathbreaking work of Christina Gilmartin, Kathryn Bernhardt, Gail Hershatter, Wang Zheng, and Emily Honig.³⁹

SUFFRAGE OR PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS?

In the PRC today there is considerable concern about the falling rate of women's participation in formal politics since the lifting of the protective quotas for women in the late 1980s. In all discussions about this trend the phrase used is *funü canzheng* or "women's participation in politics." The identical term, *canzheng*, was used to describe the campaign that sought to win equal political franchise for women prior to the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Indeed, a cursory glance at this volume's bibliography reveals that magazine and newspaper articles routinely append *canzheng* to a range of terms for women (*nüzi*, *funü*, *nü*, *nüxing*). Yet I have translated this term as "suffrage" rather than "participation in politics" or "involvement in politics." This choice requires a brief explanation.

Tani Barlow has already provided a detailed discussion of the evolution of the terms for "women" in her 2004 book, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, revealing the changing political connotations of these words in relation to feminist identity. The term *canzheng* is also problematic, albeit to a far less complex degree, in its connotational evolution. In contemporary PRC usage *canzheng* does not signify "suffrage"—the legal right to vote and stand for election—but rather to the actual participation in formal politics. Specifically, it refers to participation in the PRC government bodies and the CCP-authorized departments, committees, and mass organizations. It is invoked in numerous volumes and articles espousing the importance of increasing the involvement of women in PRC politics and of overcoming obstacles to this improved quality and quantity of participation.⁴⁰ In the ROC on Taiwan a broader conceptualization of the term has come into use—including not only participation in formal politics and electoral processes but also the informal activities of participation in public rallies, lobby groups, and public speaking.⁴¹ Actions that aim to influence government in any way at all are included in this broader ROC understanding of *canzheng*.

Yet in the first half of the twentieth century, the period covered by this book, *canzheng* meant "suffrage"—it centered on the twin rights to vote and to stand for election associated with the full political franchise of full citizens. The women active at this time linked their campaigns with the international women's suffrage movement and clearly adopted the term *canzheng* as equivalence for "suffrage." For example, the International Women's Suffrage Association (IWSA) was routinely translated as *Wanguo nüzi canzheng hui* during the decades in question. PRC historians of early Republican

China, aware of the potential for misunderstanding, often declare their definitions. For example, Wu Shuzhen wrote on the first page of her article on the Chinese suffrage movement: "The women's suffrage movement is women's struggle to win the right to participate in government."⁴² Such attention to definitions was unnecessary in the commentaries written prior to 1949. Accordingly, throughout this volume I have adopted the term "suffrage" when translating pre-1949 references to *canzheng*.

Moreover, the division between informal politics and formal politics current today was irrelevant in China during the first half of the twentieth century. The two processes were inextricably linked. At this time women activists and radicals asserted their right to practice informal politics, lobbying and parading, and pamphleteering and rallying, simply by "doing."⁴³ Their campaign for the right to access formal political rights equal to their fathers, brothers, and sons manifested all the traits we currently associate with informal politics. Indeed, much energy was expended mobilizing increasing numbers of women to participate in social, economic, military, and family politics in order to demonstrate the fitness and capability of their sex to access formal political power in the public realm.

BUILDING EQUALITY INTO THE CONSTITUTION

The chapters to follow reveal that the women's suffrage activists were intent on effecting constitutional change. They believed that if women's equality with men were embedded within a national or provincial constitution, their rights would be assured. Their trust in the protection afforded by a constitution was not unique at this time. Belief in the notion that constitutional government and the adoption of an organic law would strengthen China and lead to good government flourished among both radicals and conservatives and men and women. During the first half of the twentieth century it gained philosophical credibility as a form of government that could be scientifically engineered and morally willed by the people to succeed. Andrew Nathan noted that the technocrats and active modernizers of China at the dawn of the twentieth century held constitutionalism as an overriding goal and "their models were the Western nations and Japan, where constitutions and national power seemed conspicuously linked."⁴⁴ Faith in constitutional government as a panacea to the political disunity that China faced during the 1920s continued, albeit in increasingly

fragile forms and programs for stability were almost always framed in the context of constitutional debate. Nathan clearly demonstrates that there was a true belief that constitutionalism would save, revive, and modernize China. Edmund Fung has shown that even into the Nationalist government period in the disrupted 1930s and 1940s, “for the liberal intellectuals of the Nationalist period, democratic and constitutional change offered the best hope for a peaceful and modern China. They advocated democracy (*minzhu*) and constitutionalism throughout the period, only to find the road to democracy was blocked.”⁴⁵

Constitutionalism became a touchstone of political discussion even though it was ineffective in resolving China’s vast problems. Ch’ien Tuan-sheng notes that between 1908 and 1946 China had no less than twelve constitutions, provisional constitutions, and constitutional drafts.⁴⁶ Warnings about the futility of trusting the constitutional path were frequent. For example, the 1923 Nationalist Party manifesto argued that a constitution, in itself, could not protect China from decline. The document explained that a “prerequisite of a constitution is whether the people are able to guard it. There is no use putting the cart before the horse. What is more, if the people are not organized, the existence of a constitution will not enable them to use it; and even if there are no militarists to abuse it, it will only remain a dead letter.”⁴⁷

While the bulk of China’s population had no knowledge or interest in constitutional matters, the reformist intellectual and political elite section of the population considered it to be a matter of grave concern. No government with democratic pretensions, however flimsy or short lived, maintained its legitimacy without paying at least lip service to the revision of one or the other of the numerous constitutions that emerged in China during these years. The nurturing of a concept of citizenship whereby the people and the state interacted within a constitutional framework was a major concern for advocates of reform.⁴⁸

Like the majority of China’s enthusiastic reformers, China’s suffragists were convinced of the rationality of this process. They had faith that a constitutional government would improve the status of women by guaranteeing equality with men by force of legislature. Accordingly, as we will see in the following chapters they committed themselves to decades of engagement with the process of constitution drafting and amending to ensure that women’s interests were enshrined in any document that might emerge from the turmoil of Chinese politics during these decades.