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The 10 Best Books about Chinese Women in 2008

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Note: these books appear in no particular order since all are excellent.

1. Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question* in China. Stanford University Press. Focusing on the so-called "woman question" (*funü wenti*) of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Judge re-examines China's turn-of-the-century pursuit of modernity through analysis of biographies of notable women that illustrate Chinese approaches to their own history and to the Western world as mediated through Japan.

2. Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family*. University of California Press (2007). Mann cleverly reconstructs the lives of women in the elite Zhang family of Changzhou from the Taiping Rebellion through the Boxer Uprising and demonstrates that the oft-maligned "talented woman" (*cainü*) of the late imperial period was directly linked to the oft-celebrated "new woman" (*xinnüxing*) of the Republican era.

3. Anne Walthall, ed. *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History*. University of California Press. The two articles on women in the Song and Qing courts appear alongside articles on palace women in Nigeria, Mexico, France, Korea, Japan, and the Mughal and Ottoman empires, to mention just a few. This expansive collection, edited by UC Irvine's own Anne Walthall, affords the first comprehensive review of the women who served in royal courts and palaces around the world, and thereby offers a welcome correction to our androcentric understanding of monarchies.

the 1990s, with delightful analysis of how gender, class, and nationalism have influenced Chinese fashions through the ages.


7. Wang Anyi, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. Trans. Michael Berry and Susan Chan Egan. Columbia University Press. Winner of the 2000 Mao Dun Literature Award, this 1995 novel from the well-known Shanghai novelist came out in English translation this past year. Beginning in 1945 Shanghai, in the sliver of time between wartime Japanese occupation and Communist liberation, the novel traces the steps of one Miss Shanghai as she travels through the longtang alleyways of everyday Shanghai and observes the lives of its occupants, which she traces through 1986 (though with a slight jump over the Cultural Revolution decade of 1966-76).

8. Lijia Zhang, *Socialism is Great!* Atlas and Co. Journalist and freelance writer Zhang narrates the boredom and hilarity of her life as a munitions factory worker in Nanjing, where she becomes infatuated with an aloof young man partly as a means to escape her boredom, and her eventual leadership of worker protests in 1989.

9. Xiaolu Guo, *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*. Chatto & Windus. This inventive novel that also poses as a Chinese language textbook follows the romance between Z, a 20-year-old girl who left her village in China for London, and her 44-year-old bisexual, ex-anarchist vegetarian British boyfriend. Like the film ”Lost in Translation,” the story explores belonging, alienation, and the missed communication that we often attribute to cultural differences but that exists between any two individual minds.


Tags: Chinese Women, Gender