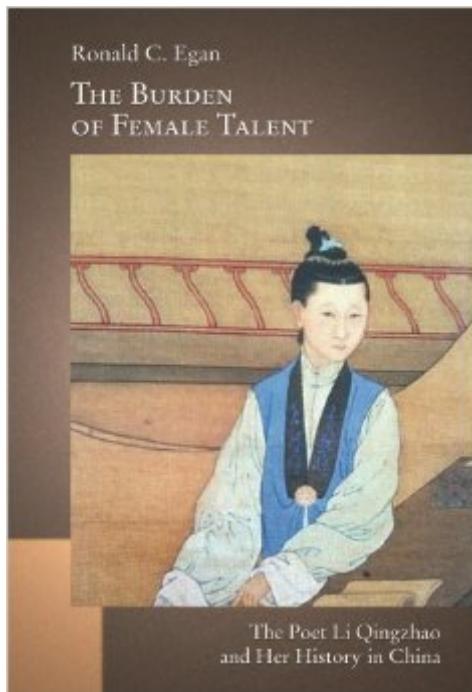


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The Burden Of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao And Her History In China (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series)



Synopsis

Widely considered the preeminent Chinese woman poet, Li Qingzhao (1084-1150s) occupies a crucial place in China's literary and cultural history. She stands out as the great exception to the rule that the first-rank poets in premodern China were male. But at what price to our understanding of her as a writer does this distinction come? *The Burden of Female Talent* challenges conventional modes of thinking about Li Qingzhao as a devoted but often lonely wife and, later, a forlorn widow. By examining manipulations of her image by the critical tradition in later imperial times and into the twentieth century, Ronald C. Egan brings to light the ways in which critics sought to accommodate her to cultural norms, molding her "talent" to make it compatible with ideals of womanly conduct and identity. Contested images of Li, including a heated controversy concerning her remarriage and its implications for her "devotion" to her first husband, reveal the difficulty literary culture has had in coping with this woman of extraordinary conduct and ability. The study ends with a reappraisal of Li's poetry, freed from the autobiographical and reductive readings that were traditionally imposed on it and which remain standard even today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The literary analysis is great by Prof. Egan, though there is a bit of repetition throughout the book in reference to lines, works, and details. Given the nature of the topic, there could have been a better theoretical framework to tie the book together neatly. It would have been a little bit more

sophisticated, though the current work is already very good. The book starts off with a macro, historical view of writing women in the Song Dynasty, then the micro focus on Li Qingzhao, her acceptance and status within the Song literary world. The author then moves on to cover Li's acceptance by later generations, and the changes that have taken place in the scholarship surrounding her body, physically and metaphorically, of works. My favorite chapter is the one focusing on Li's Afterword, I found the observation of it being written as a warning to other collectors more refreshing than the traditional view of a work reminiscing her once happy marriage. The revelation that Zhao Mingcheng had offspring from local gazetteers definitely is a new direction in potential research, but has yet to shine more light on the evidence and where it may lead to. Though given the customs of the time and the political/social status of the Zhao family, the presence of concubine(s) was definitely a likely scenario.

Great

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