BOOK REVIEW:

“THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE HISTORY OF WOMEN’S ECONOMIC
THOUGHT” BY KIRSTEN MADDEN AND ROBERT W. DIMAND

REVIEWED BY

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This “preprint” is the accepted typescript of a book review that is forthcoming in revised form, after minor editorial changes, in the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (ISSN: 1053-8372), issue TBA. Copyright to the journal’s articles is held by the History of Economics Society (HES), whose exclusive licensee and publisher for the journal is Cambridge University Press (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-history-of-economic-thought>). This preprint may be used only for private research and study and is not to be distributed further.

The preprint may be cited as follows:

May, Ann Mari. Review of “The Routledge Handbook of the History of Women’s Economic Thought” by Kirsten Madden and Robert W. Dimand. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (forthcoming). Preprint at *SocArXiv*, osf.io/preprints/socarxiv

Routledge International Handbooks
The Routledge Handbook of the History of Women's Economic Thought
By Kirsten Madden and Robert W. Dimand

Review by Ann Mari May

The profession of economics is beginning to awaken to a long denied reality – the reality that women's voices in the history of economic thought have often been neglected and the experiences that influence their views seldom analyzed.

While a core of economists have long been aware of the paucity of women in the discipline and its influence on what is accepted as the history of economic thought, the past few years have brought the reality of gender imbalance in the discipline to the forefront. Through articles in *The Economist* and surveys supported by the American Economic Association reported in the *New York Times*, troubling issues associated with gender imbalance are increasingly revealed to a larger audience. As a result, conversations are emerging on how to address the outcomes of this imbalance as well as the imbalance itself. No longer can the average economist argue that gender imbalance is not present while ignoring the intriguing influence of women's experiences on their views.

For this reason, the *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Women's Economic Thought* (hereafter *The Handbook*), edited by Kirsten Madden and Robert W. Dimand, provides a welcome collection of essays that adds to our understanding of women's contributions to economic thought. Perhaps more importantly, it illuminates the impact of the experiences of a wide variety of women on their economic thought.

The Handbook is unique in covering both the thoughts *and* experiences of women contributing to economics. The chapters offer extensive geographic coverage and provide insights into the economic thoughts of those from Austria, Britain, China, Italy, India, Japan, Russia and the Soviet Union, the US and a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, the approaches taken are unique. Not only are we exposed to examinations of what would traditionally be thought of as economic thought, but we are also challenged to consider writings of those without academic credentials as economists. For example, through an examination of Indian Buddhist nuns' poetry, we gain a view of patriarchy that traverses the centuries. Here, Sheetal Bharat reveals many barriers facing women in pre-independent India but also women's agency through their own written word.

Women economists' voices illuminated in these essays provide a rich forum for discussion from a variety of points of view. This diversity in views is evidenced across essays that range from Zoe Sherman's essay on Eleanor Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Raya Dunayevskaya – an essay that examines their views on the

intersections of class, race and gender; to Giandomenica Becchio's examination of women economists trained in the Austrian School.

At the same time there are essays that examine differences in views among women economists with similar backgrounds. Here, Virginie Gouverneur's essay on Harriet Taylor Mill, Mary Paley Marshall, and Beatrice Potter Webb is particularly interesting for its thoughtful examination of the writing of these women (or when they took part in the production of works by their husbands) as well as their influence on the writings of their husbands. We gain an appreciation for the ways in which not only society shapes the views of women, but the ways in which women worked within the context of marriage to express their views – sometimes without their names being attached to those views.

Clearly, many of the authors in this volume embrace a broad definition of economics inclusive of the household, marriage, and extending the discussion of paid labor to the informal sector. Farida Chowdhury Kahn's essay brings together the work of Lourdes Beneria and Martha (Marty) Chen on women's employment in the informal sector, to examine how women's employment is often an extension of what society has deemed to be their appropriate household duties and that this work is often dangerous, invisible, and underpaid. Here we see how Beneria and Chen have challenged existing frameworks surrounding the concept of "economic development" to be inclusive of women's lived reality.

Mary Ann Dzuback, provides an illuminating examination of the ways in which women economists who often were credentialed with doctoral achievement were limited in their ability to do research and participate in the construction of knowledge in academe. Women economists were banished from the halls of some private institutions, seldom located at state universities, and worked creatively to sustain their identities as productive scholars at Mount Holyoke, Smith, Goucher, Bryn Mawr. Without graduate students (except at Bryn Mawr) and the other accouterments that come with a research university, and lacking the kind of prestige conferred upon scholars in a research university, these women nonetheless continued to be productive scholars.

In the end, two themes permeate this collection of essays: exclusion and resilience. The diverse and interesting mosaic describing women's contributions to economic thought told by these essays show that women were not passive participants regardless of their location. Women's contributions to economic thought shed light on the barriers to entry, constraints to participation, treatment and livelihood outcomes. They also show that there are women who participated in their own subjugation. Moreover, the voices we hear through these essays are not confined to those whose accreditation lies in purview of the higher learning. However, they also provide evidence of tenacity and resilience in the face of these barriers.

Needless to say, one of the challenges of analyzing feminist contributions to economics lies in incorporating the diversity of experiences, influences, and views of

women throughout time and across the globe. It is for this reason, that Madden and Dimand's collection of essays offers such an important contribution to this gap in our knowledge of the history of women's economic thought.

The Handbook provides a powerful mechanism that addresses the missing information on women's economic thought. However, as Alice Wu's analysis of the *Economics Job Market Rumors* forum demonstrates, the biases that have created this imbalance continue to be alive and well – albeit perhaps driven a bit underground in anonymous forums.

As the editors of this volume point out, "this handbook is not easy to capture, condense, or consolidate into leading archetypes and primary themes." Yet, the essays in this volume offer considerable insights into important aspects of women and economic thought as well as women's experiences that contribute to that thought. For those interested in broadening their view of the history of women's economic thought, it is a richly challenging read.

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