

# FORGOTTEN WOMEN: THE SCIENTISTS

**Author:** Zing Tsjeng

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**Reviewer:** Dr William P Palmer

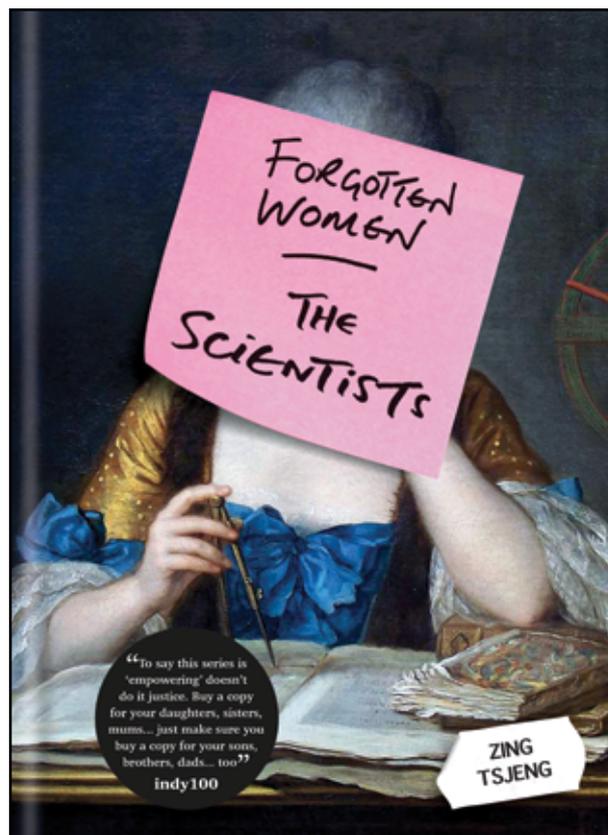
This is a review of *Forgotten Women: The Scientists* by Zing Tsjeng. However, it should be noted that the book is one in a series by the same author. Other titles in the series are *Forgotten Women: The Leaders*, *Forgotten Women: The Artists* and *Forgotten Women: The Writers*; it may be that school librarians will be interested in the whole series.

The most curious aspect of this book is its printing style; the size of typeface changes in what appears to be a random fashion, which is a feature I personally do not like, but it is said to help students retain interest.

Forty-eight women scientists were chosen and each scientist has three to four pages that describe their life and work and include a portrait of the scientist. The illustrations, by thirteen different artists, are a major and very welcome feature of the book. Zing Tsjeng chose to describe the lives and work of the forty-eight female scientists because forty-eight women have won a Nobel Prize for science.

The forty-eight scientists are divided into seven groups based upon the subject areas in which they worked. The areas are: the Earth and the universe, biology and natural sciences, medicine and psychology, elements and genetics, physics and chemistry, mathematics, and technology and inventions. This is an unusual categorisation, because women chemists can be found in two different groups. The subject areas with the most female scientists mentioned were medicine and psychology, and biology and natural sciences.

The key to the author's choice of scientists is provided by one sentence in the introduction (p. 12) 'The women who battled the interlocking foes of sexism, racism and class-based prejudice are those that I most admire...'. This is shown in the choices made, where several of the women mentioned are not found in other books on female scientists. This is a factor in



making the book a unique contribution to the study of women scientists.

The title of the book implies that it will be those women who Zing Tsjeng believes to be forgotten scientists who feature in the book. It is a tribute to Zing Tsjeng's scholarship that she has found more information about some of these women than is usually available. For example, Tapputi (or Tapputi-Belatekallim) (p.140), who may have been the world's first chemist, a perfume-maker mentioned in a cuneiform tablet dated around 1200 BC from Babylon in Mesopotamia, was one of Zing Tsjeng's forty-eight scientists. She has obtained an impressive amount of information about Tapputi and her work.

The information about the female scientists is remarkably accurate, though I did notice that Zing Tsjeng incorrectly stated that Dmitri Mendeleev published the periodic table in 1896 (p.116), rather than the correct date of 1869. This is an unfortunate error, as chemists celebrate the 150th anniversary of the periodic table in 2019.

This book combines scholarship and general interest brilliantly and certainly deserves a place in the school library or amongst the favourites of any science student.