

The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing. Edited by Grace S. Fong and Ellen Widmer. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010. Pp. xiv + 431. €130.00/\$185.00.

This volume marks a new stage in the study of Chinese women's history and Chinese women's writing. Ably edited by Grace Fong (who is also the editor of the series, "Women and Gender in China Studies," in which the book appears) and veteran editor Ellen Widmer, it brings together essays by leading scholars of Chinese women's writing. The subjects of the essays are not virgin topics for their authors, as almost all have published extensively on closely related themes and bodies of texts. But rather than rehashing existing work (only Fong's essay has appeared elsewhere), the authors distil from their depth of knowledge of sources and context what are often gems of insight. The most significant contribution of the volume lies in the light these essays shed on Ming and Qing women's consciousness. This is not a collection focused on male constructions of the feminine or representations of women, dotted with speculation on women's subjectivity. Through the sources the chapters bring to light, the authors' sophisticated interpretations of these often highly convention-bound sources, and—one of the outstanding features of the volume—the inclusion in the body of the essays of long passages from the sources in Chinese with English translations, *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* greatly enhances our understanding of women's lives, feelings, and both personal and political preoccupations.

Many of these sources are from a joint digitization project between McGill and Harvard Universities that Fong has spearheaded. The remarkably rich database of *Ming Qing Women's Writings* that has resulted from this project was compiled between 2003 and 2005 and served as one of the premises for the volume (although some authors rely on the database in a more cursory way than others). The database builds on Hu Wenkai's 胡文楷 *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 (A survey of women's writings through the ages) first published in 1957, revised in 1985 and now available in a new edition with supplements.¹ It includes a trove of women's writings from the Hart Collection (fifty-three titles) and the regular collection (forty some) of the Harvard-Yenching Library.

The volume is organized into four parts according to the spatial aspects of women's writing: "In the Domestic Realm," "Larger Horizons: Editing and Its Implications," "Beyond Prescribed Roles," and "The Personal Is Political: Responding to the Outside World." The essays do not, however, share an overarching conceptual framework. It is unfortunate that an effort at broader theorizing is left to the conclusion of the volume in an essay that was written too late for the authors to engage its provocative thesis. Certain figures appear in a number of chapters—Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–c. 1685) is featured in discussions

¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, ed. Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生, rev. and enl. ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2008).

on writing, politics, and Buddhism—as do certain themes—women’s writing on war, for example—but the narratives on these recurring individuals and topics are rarely placed in direct conversation with one another. In order to do each of the essays justice, I will, therefore, discuss them individually.

Part I: In the Domestic Realm

In “Writing and Illness: A Feminine Condition in Women’s Poetry of the Ming and Qing,” Grace Fong explores the subjective experience of female illness in a sample of some 450 poems from the database of *Ming Qing Women’s Writings*. She makes a number of striking observations in examining this corpus of material. First, three-quarters of the women in the sample included poems on illness in their collections, marking this as a theme that demands scholarly interpretation. This call for interpretation becomes even more exigent when one considers Fong’s second observation, that anthologies compiled by men include fewer poems on illness. The gendered nature of poetic expressions of sickness is further underlined by the third observation: that men and women wrote illness differently: women’s writing was not as graphic as men’s and generally lacked specificity. Fong concludes that illness opened up an alternative space and temporality for women. While it is difficult to imagine them writing while seriously ill, they were best able to inhabit this new, liberating space in the period of convalescing: when they were well enough to hold the brush and sustain a thought, but not well enough to return to daily tasks that normally overwhelmed a woman’s existence. Illness thus became an ennobling experience with spiritual dimensions that women felt inspired or compelled to describe in poetry. Despite the limitations of these extant “illness poems” including the constraints of feminine decorum around the nature of illness, these works afford us access to a level of experience not recorded in medical treatises or case histories. This access is greatly enhanced for the reader by Fong’s elegant translations and by the introduction of women like Gan Lirou 甘立嫫 (1743–1819) who left over 1,000 poems composed at different stages of her life.

Anne McLaren’s chapter, “Lamenting the Dead: Women’s Performance of Grief in Late Imperial China,” compares different genres of lamentation by different classes of women. These include lower class illiterate women of Nanhui 南匯, Jiangnan 江南, whose oral laments are the subject of McLaren’s impressive book, *Performing Grief*.² They also include Ming literati women whose written laments McLaren uncovered by searching for terms related to mourning in the *Ming Qing Women’s Writings* database. The focus of the chapter is, however, on the writings of two particular women: Shen Yixiu

² Anne E. McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008).

沈宜修 (1590–1635) and Bo Shaojun 薄少君 (d. 1625).³ These Ming women writers used all available resources to express inexpressible grief over the premature deaths of their daughters in the case of Shen, or husband, in the case of Bo. They appropriated elements of both oral performances of grief such as use of the term *ku* 哭 for wailing (although it was not considered decorous for them to wail themselves) and of male laments often written by husbands mourning their first wives. McLaren underlines some similarities between women’s oral and written laments such as the dual articulation of talent and virtue through the grieving process. Her purpose is not to draw direct links between these related forms, however. Nor is it to interpret the precise meaning of the more learned expressions of grief: whether Bo’s poems reflect contemplated suicide, for example. Her objective is rather to juxtapose the expansive modes in which women expressed grief and the restrictive ways men continued to contain that expression by framing it with familiar tropes of chastity and the tragic fate of the talented woman.

Part II: Larger Horizons: Editing and Its Implications

Ellen Widmer compares six anthologies compiled by women in “Retrieving the Past: Women Editors and Women’s Poetry, 1636–1941.” They include Shen Yixiu’s *Yiren si* 伊人思 (Their thoughts) of 1636, which is comprised of 46 entries; Wang Duanshu’s *Mingyuan shiwei* 名媛詩緯 (Classic of poetry by famous women) of 1677, which includes more than 2,000 poems by over 1,000 authors; Yun Zhu’s 惲珠 (1771–1833) *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* 國朝閩秀正始集 (Anthology of correct beginnings by boudoir talents of our dynasty) of 1831 and the sequel of 1836 which represent 4,000 poems and 1,500 authors; Shen Shanbao’s 沈善寶 (1802–1862) *Mingyuan shihua* 名媛詩話 (Remarks on poetry by famous women) of 1845, which as a *shihua* is generically different from an anthology; Shan Shili’s 單士釐 (1858–1945) *Guixiu zhengshi zai xuji* 閩秀正始再續集 (Second sequel to the anthology of correct beginnings by boudoir talents) of 1911–1918 which features 200 authors; and Xian Yuqing’s 冼玉清 (1895–1965) *Guangdong nüzi yiwén kao* 廣東女子藝文考 (Research on literary writings of women of Guangdong), which not only includes poetry but short sections on classics and history by 106 authors.

In her analysis of the collections, Widmer asks overarching questions about a feminine tradition, a sense of which, she concludes, is strongest in the works of Shen, Yun Zhu, and Shan. She further discerns two impulses behind anthologizing projects: preserving the past, and educating in the present and for the future. She questions the

³ Both Shen and Bo have been the subjects of previous scholarship and Shen is discussed in the following chapter by Ellen Widmer. The essay by Wilt L. Idema on Bo Shaojun that McLaren refers to is now forthcoming: “The Biographical and the Autobiographical in the One Hundred Poems Lamenting My Husband by Bo Shaojun (d. 1626),” in *Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women’s Biography in Chinese History*, ed. Joan Judge and Hu Ying (Berkeley, CA: Global, Area, and International Archive/University of California Press, 2011).

anthologists' strategies for collecting the materials: whether women worked alone, with male assistance (which is evident in all but the case of Shan), or with a team of female assistants (Yun Zhu). She isolates a number of principles of organizing the collections including social status and virtue—only married courtesans were included in such works and were generally relegated to the back of anthologies; the inclusion or exclusion of ethnic minorities; and historical scope: Wang celebrated women from a bygone dynasty, Yun Zhu from her current dynasty, while Xian reached back to the Tang. In terms of sources, Widmer concludes that women collected a broader range of genres than did anthologists of male writings. These included poems that appeared on paintings and on walls, and poems that were embroidered or orally transmitted. In the process of analysing the genesis of anthologies of women's writing, Widmer also makes some provocative suggestions about private libraries and the possible role of booksellers that are of great relevance for late imperial book history.

Robyn Hamilton focuses on the anthologies compiled by one particular woman in "The Unseen Hand: Contextualizing Luo Qilan and Her Anthologies." A star student of Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798), Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭 (*fl.* 1795) was also the object of much artistic attention: ninety men wrote poems in praise of her talents and at least two artists painted portraits of her, reproductions of which are included in the chapter. Luo descended from a prominent literary lineage and had wide-ranging religious and aesthetic interests. She was both a practising Buddhist and an accomplished painter, one of the few women whose works are held in the Palace Museum in Beijing. She was even renowned for her culinary skills. The criteria for inclusion in Luo's anthologies was not gender—she featured writings by both men and women—but rather shared religious or artistic passion. Hamilton specifically discusses thirteen of these anthologized men and three women. They include Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (male, 1730–1802) and Jiang Zhu 江珠 (female, *fl.* eighteenth century) who shared Luo's Buddhist spiritual quest; and two other women, Lu Yuansu 盧元素 (*fl.* eighteenth century) with whom Luo formed an embroidering and painting duo; and Zhou Lilan 周澧蘭 (*fl.* eighteenth century) who shared Luo's love of painting. Luo exhibited a highly *un-guixiu*-like desire for fame (which she would herself criticize in her later work). In seeking the logic behind the content and ordering of Luo's anthologies, this unabashed desire for recognition may be more relevant than Hamilton suggests: Jiang Zhu's poem which functions as a preface to Luo's anthology of women's writings glorifies the anthologist's illustrious background and depth of learning. Luo sought visibility not only for herself, however. She decried the impediments women faced in becoming recognized poets and used her anthology as a vehicle for the writings of lesser-known women. In perhaps the most telling example of what Hamilton describes as Luo's feminist interests, when she found herself a childless widow, she adopted a daughter, not a son.

In "From Private Life to Public Performances: The Constituted Memory and (Re)writings of the Early-Qing Woman Wu Zongai," Wei Hua unpacks the multiple paratextual layers to the fascinating story of the beauty, talent, and chastity martyr, Wu

Zongai 吳宗愛 (1650–1674). A young widow, Wu committed suicide *en route* from her native Yongkang 永康 in Zhejiang 浙江 province in the captivity of rebel forces loyal to the Fujian Feudatory commander Geng Jingzhong 耿精忠 (1644–1682). The rebels were taking her to marry one of their generals. Although the precise motivation for Wu's suicide will never be known, according to its heroic retelling in the nineteenth century, she agreed to leave her native village with the rebels in order to save the county from violence. She did not commit suicide immediately but waited until she was far enough from Yongkang to ensure her community's safety. The prime agent for the later retelling of Wu's story was Wu Tingkang 吳廷康 (1799–after 1881). Asked to write a preface to a collection of Zongai's poems in 1843, Wu Tingkang did not learn of her sacrifice until 1854 when he served as an official in Yongkang. At that time he published a new edition of the poems with expanded paratexts—including prefaces, postfaces, biographies, and a historical account of the rebellion. He further commissioned a popular play, Huang Xieqing's 黃燮清 (1805–1864) *Taoxi xue* 桃谿雪 (Snow at the peach stream) that added mythic dimensions to Zongai's story and further expanded its audience. In these various treatments Wu became a composite of the ideal woman, combining the beauty of Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (*fl.* first century B.C.E.), the talent of Cai Yan 蔡琰 (b. 177), and the filial heroism of Hua Mulan 花木蘭 (*c.* 500).

In analysing the textual apparatus around Wu Zhongai's published poems, Hua underlines the extent to which male networks were mobilized to use women's writing and morality to further their own social and political ends. Late Qing constructions of the longstanding talent/virtue dichotomy were central to this male agenda. In some instances poetry, the distillation of a woman's talent, was purportedly passed on because of her virtue; alternatively, the writing served to make a woman's virtue known. Wei Hua leaves us with the intriguing thought that while Wu Zongai's poems were a mere paratext to her life, her tragic seventeenth-century story in turn served as a paratext to the pressing sense of imperial crisis in the mid-nineteenth century.

Part III: Beyond Prescribed Roles

The third section opens with Wai-yee Li's "Women Writers and Gender Boundaries during the Ming-Qing Transition." Li offers close and erudite readings of the writings of a number of women—from courtesans to chaste widows—who responded to events at the time of the violent Ming-Qing transition, a period on which she has much expertise.⁴

⁴ See her introduction and essay in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, ed. Wilt L. Idema, Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 46–73.

The authors include Wang Duanshu, Liu Shu 劉淑 (born c. 1620), Wu Qi 吳琪 (c. mid-seventeenth century), Zhou Qiong 周瓊 (c. mid-seventeenth century), Gu Zhenli 顧貞立 (1624–after 1685), Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1617–1664), and Li Yin 李因 (c. mid-seventeenth century). In analysing the multiple layers of these women’s writings, Li probes key metaphors including the sword and prominent themes such as the act of writing itself. She posits a relationship between political engagement and gender discontent, questioning whether engagement gave rise to discontent or whether women’s dissatisfaction with their prescribed roles predisposed them to political action. Tracing a lineage of women at least as far back as the late Ming who wrote odes to and perhaps wielded swords, who cross-dressed and placed martial valour above feminine pieties, the chapter ultimately renders the late Qing martyr Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) much less of an anomaly. Li’s careful analysis further raises the important question of whether the feminist impulse can ever be completely disassociated from politics.

In “Chan Friends: Poetic Exchanges between Gentry Women and Buddhist Nuns in Seventeenth-Century China,” Beata Grant explores another kind of engagement that took women beyond the boudoir: spiritual engagement with Chan Buddhism and personal friendship with Buddhist nuns. Many of these nuns had been gentry daughters, wives, and mothers themselves and some were blood kin, such as Wang Duanshu’s elder sister Wang Jingshu 王靜淑. These Chan friends, who included Gui Shufen 歸淑芬 and Chan master Yikui Chaochen 一揆超琛 (1625–1679); and Shang Jinglan 商景蘭 (1604–c. 1680), Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介 (1620–c. 1669) and the nun Guxu 谷虛, often shared an élite background and the literary training such a background allowed for. As a result, their friendship was articulated and sustained through evocative poetry. The poems illuminate, first of all, the degree to which gentry women understood Chan Buddhist doctrine—a largely textual creation with its beginnings in the Song dynasty. Huang Kexuan’s 黃克選 poems on Yuanduan Yufu 元端御符, for example, reveal solid knowledge of textual sources. The poems also suggests how late imperial gentry women constructed the attractions and limitations of alternative life trajectories—and by extension, how they understood the limitations of their own lives. In some instances gentry women admired their Buddhist counterparts for better transcending sorrow, and for their lives of monastic leisure and tranquility. A few, including the widow Jin Shuxiu 金淑修, were encouraged by their Chan friendships to take up the tonsure and a rigorous path of study themselves. In other instances, however, the poems express more ambivalence towards the religious life among women than among their male counterparts.

The Chan friendships further highlight important convergences between the two sets of women who lived in what Grant calls “parallel worlds of enclosure” (p. 218). Both *guixiu* and nuns had to respect the sanctity of their inner quarters: gentry women

by definition were not allowed to freely leave the inner chambers, and they were further discouraged from welcoming women from without, including not only “witches and crones” but nuns. Similarly, nuns were discouraged from allowing gentry women to visit them. And just as *guixiu* were expected to have finished all domestic labour before picking up the brush, nuns were not to intone or write poetry until after they had finished their meditation.

Siao-chen Hu relies on her expertise on *tanci* 彈詞—women-authored verse novels that are the feminine counterpart of *xiaoshuo* 小說—to offer an interpretive reading of the often highly idiosyncratic descriptions of war, violence, and the metaphor of blood in this genre of writings. The specific texts she explores in her chapter, “War, Violence, and the Metaphor of Blood in *Tanci* Narratives by Women Authors,” include *Liuhuameng* 榴花夢 (Dream of the pomegranate flower, prefaces dated 1841, completed 1935). Reputed to be the longest existing Chinese narrative work, *Liuhuameng* has not been subject to scholarly analysis to date. Hu reads this text in the context of more familiar *tanci*, including the late eighteenth-century *Zaishengyuan* 再生緣 (Karmic bonds of reincarnation) and the lineage of texts that preceded it; *Tianyuhua* 天雨花 (Heaven rains flowers) which was allegedly written by a late Ming woman loyalist; and two late Qing *tanci*—*Jingzhongzhuan* 精忠傳 (Story of the loyal), a feminine retelling of the tale of Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142) written between 1868 and 1895; and *Siyunting* 四雲亭 (The Pavilion of the Four Clouds, preface dated 1899). These texts commonly feature talented heroines who operate on the battlefield, with parallel plots that unfold in the domestic realm. While the *tanci* authors discuss war in various modes—more symbolic in the late Ming and more realistic in the late Qing—only *Liuhuameng*, *Jingzhongzhuan*, and *Siyunting* treat warfare seriously. In *Liuhuameng* in particular, war serves as the backdrop for discussions of love, passion, and possibly homo-erotic attraction. Ultimately, however, Hu concludes that in the *tanci* genre more blood is shed on the battlefield of love than the battlefield of war.

Part IV: The Personal Is Polical: Responding to the Outside World

Susan Mann’s “The Lady and the State: Women’s Writings in Times of Trouble during the Nineteenth Century,” opens this final section of the volume on women’s most direct engagement with politics. She deftly traces a shift in women’s consciousness—and in elite consciousness more broadly—in the nineteenth century. This shift is the product of the devastating events of the period: the Opium Wars and most dramatically, the Taiping Rebellion which Mann convincingly argues became a crucial generational marker. The importance of this new mode of consciousness has not yet been fully grasped by

historians in part because it was not highlighted at the time: late-nineteenth-century male anthologists failed, either purposefully or unwittingly, to include politically-attuned writings by women in their collections.

The texts Mann has excavated include writings by a number of “the talented women of the Zhang family”:⁵ Zhang Xiying 張縉英 (1792–after 1862) who commented passionately on the Opium War and the government’s exile of Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785–1850) to Xinjiang 新疆; and Zhang’s niece Wang Caipin 王采蘋 (before 1823–1893) who wrote politically-informed, historically grounded poems about the Taiping Rebellion. They also include Chen Yunlian 陳蘊蓮 (c. 1800–after 1860) who wrote of her experience as a refugee following the Opium War; the Yang 楊 sisters of Hunan 湖南 who poetically described their trials as refugees from their native Changsha 長沙 at the time of the Taiping Rebellion; and Zhang Yin 張印 (1832–1872) who commiserated with the common peoples’ social and economic hardships. Mann traces the textual sources for these women’s writings which range from classical biographies, most notably the *Lienü zhuan*’s 列女傳 (Biographies of exemplary women) woman of Lu from Qishi 魯漆室女, to late Ming biographies of woman warriors such as Qin Liangyu 秦良玉 (1576?–1648). She further discusses the themes in this writing, from poignant laments to angry calls for action.

In “Imagining History and the State: Fujian *Guixiu* (Genteel Ladies) at Home and on the Road,” Guotong Li excavates a very different kind of female “political consciousness” from two collections of poems by “genteel ladies” from Fujian 福建 province. Rather than comment on the tragedies and complexities of historic events like the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, the poems included in the *Minchuan guixiu shihua* 閩川閩秀詩話 (Remarks on poetry by Fujian *guixiu*) compiled in 1849, and its sequel, compiled in 1914, reveal women’s awareness of the spatial reach of the empire and the position of their native place within it. The authors convey this awareness through their descriptions of local scenery that stand in for their sense of home, their reactions to sojourning in far flung places from Beijing to Taiwan Island, and their celebrations of honours bestowed on the clan by male kin serving in the official bureaucracy. In a now familiar argument, Li concludes by using these women’s writings to refute Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 critique of late imperial writing women as solipsistic creatures with no awareness of life beyond the boudoir.⁶

Nanxiu Qian counters Liang’s argument ever more forcefully in “Xue Shaohui and Her Poetic Chronicle of Late Qing Reforms.” Xue Shaohui’s 薛紹徽 (1866–1911) marriage intimately linked her to the technological developments and Western influences central to the turn of the twentieth-century reforms she chronicled. Both her husband,

⁵ The reference is to Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

⁶ Liang did not, however, use the term *xin nüxing* 新女性 in this critique as Li alleges.

Chen Shoupeng 陳壽彭 (1857–c. 1928), and her brother-in-law, Chen Jitong 陳季同 (1851–1907), studied at the Fuzhou Naval Academy 福州船政學堂 (founded in 1866), and both lived for sustained periods of time abroad (Jitong spent fourteen years in Europe from 1877 and returned with a French wife, Shoupeng joined him in 1886). It was Xue's own qualities that make her an exceptional figure, however. Among these qualities, her intellectual openness is most evident in her increasingly sophisticated understanding of “the West” which Qian carefully delineates from Xue's early reductive view of Europe as a barbarian land, to her later appreciation of Western law, education, and social mores. Her social generosity is apparent in her charitable treatment of the courtesan-cum-diplomat's concubine-cum-controversial diplomat in her own right, Sai Jinhua 賽金花 (Fu Caiyun 傅彩雲, d. 1936). Her political sophistication is revealed in her complex assessment of polarizing events at the turn of the twentieth century from the 1898 reforms to the New Policy Reforms. Xue publicly shared these assessments—together with her disputes with her husband on interpretations of recent events—in her poetry and in polemical writings published in the first Chinese women's journal which she was instrumental in founding, *Nüxue bao* 女學報 (Chinese Girl's Progress). She has left us with an invaluable poetic legacy and Qian's meticulous, contextualized, and learned study of her poetry is a critical contribution to our study of the era.

Conclusion

Maureen Robertson offers an excellent summation of the import of the volume and the questions it raises about the place of women's writing in the Chinese literary tradition in her concluding chapter, “Literary Authorship by Late Imperial Governing-Class Chinese Women and the Emergence of a ‘Minor Literature.’” She goes on to suggest that while studies of Ming Qing women's writing that have blossomed since the 1980s have generally been valued for providing a deeper understanding of women's experience and subjective concerns, it may be time to place this writing in a broader theoretical framework. The framework she proposes is that of a “minor literature,” a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Understood as a site for realizing the potential of historical change, this notion of a minor literature has been fruitfully applied by scholars of post-colonial writing. It has three characteristics, some of which can be more readily applied to the Chinese case than others. First, a minor literature is voiced in the dominant language rather than in a language that is of its own creation. Second, it is inherently political because it is not the natural outgrowth of an existing tradition and gives voice to themes—like boudoir yearnings—deemed valueless within the dominant tradition. Third, it immediately takes on collective value. In the Chinese case, this is evident in the tendency to anthologize Ming-Qing women's writing as women's writing, rather than include it in non-gendered collections.

Ellen Widmer explains in the epilogue, “*The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing and Its Deliberations on a ‘Minor Literature,’*” that the authors did not engage Robertson’s theoretical intervention because her chapter was written well after their own essays were conceived. She concludes that while requiring further reflection, the theory of a minor literature is both illuminating and limited in its applicability to the Chinese case. It does not, for example, make room for women’s engagement in non-literary artistic pursuits such as embroidery and painting.

Coda: The Late Imperial Period and Beyond

In challenging received notions of history, literature, culture and society in the late imperial period, the volume also raises critical questions about what followed. What is the arc of this “minor literature,” if we so name it, once we enter the twentieth century? How was women’s writing affected by the new genre and print forms it assumed with the rise of the periodical press, such as editorials (*shelun* 社論) and women’s journals? Several of the authors in the volume have already observed qualitative changes in women’s textual production as we reach the turn of the twentieth century: writing on illness became more detailed in the later period according to Fong, and accounts of war more realistic according to Hu. Has our focus on women who not only wrote but acted like the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin caused us to overlook other modes of historical witnessing of the 1911 Revolution or the chaos of the early Republic that may be akin to Wang Caipin’s poems on the Taiping Rebellion or Xue Shaohui’s reflections on the 1898 reforms? Could the countless poems “buried” in literary columns to women’s magazines that few to date have studied provide us with a new level of insight into early Republican consciousness? Can Wai-ye Li’s linking of political engagement and gender dissatisfaction in the late Ming productively complicate ongoing discussions of the tensions between nationalism and feminism in twentieth-century China? What happens to the collective value and political nature of a minor literature as it becomes increasingly fragmented and politicized?

The richness of this volume thus ultimately lies not only in the texts it has carefully interpreted, the lives it has meticulously retraced, and the arguments it has forcefully made, but in the plethora of historical questions with which it leaves us.

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