Prologue

To rescue from oblivion the ephemeral intent of worthy beings . . . those whose action may not have borne fruit.

—Sima Qian

Implicated in an antigovernment uprising, Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907) was arrested on July 13, 1907, and beheaded two days later. On that hot midsummer day her body lay at the market square in the old town of Shaoxing, a potent symbol of contamination and the terrifying power of the state.

Death by beheading signaled the ultimate punishment for grand treason; to have her dismembered corpse displayed at a bustling market further broadcasted the public humiliation deemed appropriate by the state for such a political criminal. Cognizant of the Qing legal code of lianzuo 连坐 (punishing relatives of convicted criminals) and the official persecution suffered by family members of other revolutionaries, her family would stay in hiding for months afterward, running at night and taking shelter in remote temples during the day. Distant relatives left behind to guard the family compound understandably ignored the official notice to collect the body. By the end of the day, the remains were gathered by a charity organization and roughly interred in the foothills of nearby Fushan, as was usually the custom for unclaimed bodies of paupers and executed criminals. Conducted by the impersonal hands of

3. Legends differ with regard to the actual circumstances of her first burial. Some
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total strangers who did not perform even basic mortuary rites, the hasty burial carried all the signs of impropriety in the context of Chinese traditional practice. From antiquity the Chinese placed heavy significance on mortuary rituals because of the belief in the continuity of kinship links between the living and the dead, manifested in such culturally central concepts as filial piety and ancestor worship. Without a proper home for her physical remains, a place to rest her soul in the afterlife, or even a plaque to mark her burial place, Qiu Jin was to be an abject ghost, forever cast out of the orderly continuum of the human and the spirit world.

What officials did not anticipate was the immediate public outcry over the execution. Many protested in the newspapers, and still more published elegies and commemorative couplets. In time two people emerged as Qiu Jin’s chief mourners as they began preparations for a proper burial. Unlike most sympathizers, who wrote under pseudonyms, they were identified. Indeed, to be effective in cleansing Qiu Jin’s name, they needed to use their own good names. Wu Zhiying 吳芝瑛 (1868–1934) and Xu Zihua 徐自華 (1875–1935) were both of considerable social standing: Wu hailed from Tongcheng of Anhui Province and was known for her calligraphy; Xu came from a literati-merchant family in Shimen of Zhejiang Province, was known for her poetry, and was at the time headmistress of a women’s school. Through their own good names, Wu and Xu began the process of redeeming Qiu Jin’s reputation. Early in 1908 an auspicious site was chosen by the West Lake of Hangzhou, and the remains were safely transported from Shaoxing. In front of the newly constructed tomb, a black stele announced: “Alas, here lies Qiu Jin, Swordswoman of Mirror Lake” 呜呼鑒湖女俠秋瑾之墓 (fig. 0.01). With a proper name and a proper tomb, this life had now become publicly grievable. On the back of the stele was an epitaph, composed by Xu Zihua and carved in Wu Zhiying’s famed calligraphy. After the requi-

claim that there was a thin coffin made of poor material that burst open soon after; others contend that there was not even the minimum requirement of encoffining. QJYJZL, 133, 571, 573; Qiu Jin shiji, 81.

4. For the link between death ritual, filiality, and ancestor worship, see Rawski, “A Historian’s Approach,” in Watson and Rawski, Death Ritual, 20–36. The subject will be treated more fully in chapter 5.

5. For a pioneering study of Qiu Jin in English, see Rankin, “Emergence of Women.” For a well-documented study of contemporary response to Qiu Jin’s execution, see Xia Xiaohong, “Wanqing ren.”
site biographical sketch, the epitaph ends on an invocation of the popular hero Yue Fei 岳飛, a military general who defended the Southern Song against the Jurchens in the twelfth century but was put to death by the Song court. The explicit reference to his posthumous exoneration broadly hints at the hope that, before long, official judgment of Qiu Jin would also be overturned.

Although the tomb was soon torn down by Qing soldiers, and the chief mourners found themselves on the government’s wanted list, this stele survived the many upheavals of the twentieth century and can still be seen by the West Lake today. Encased in the tomb-pedestal of Qiu Jin’s monument, rebuilt in 1981, the finely carved epitaph is barely legible now. What catches the eye is the bigger-than-life sculpture of Qiu Jin standing atop the tomb-pedestal, all white marble in her untouchable serenity, beyond the reach of life or death.

I can’t recall a time when I didn’t know the name Qiu Jin. Like most twentieth-century Chinese, I grew up on a steady diet of stories about patriotic martyrs in textbooks, youth readers, operas, and films. I had
paid the obligatory visit to her tomb by the West Lake, had committed to memory her poetic last words: “Autumn wind, autumn rain, fills me with melancholy.” And yet, when a friend invited me to contribute a paper on Qiu Jin for a conference some years ago, I found that I knew nothing about her, that is, nothing distinct. I delved into the readily available tomes: editions of her poetry, two full-length chronological biographies, several compendia of research material, and voluminous records of the 1911 Revolution. But the archives and histories seemed to reveal little. For some time Qiu Jin stayed only in my peripheral vision, a figure in white marble—when I turned to take a closer look, I couldn’t see her.

Then I came across several letters exchanged between Wu Zhiying and Xu Zihua. Written in the months after Qiu Jin’s death, these letters are mostly about the practical matters of how to conduct a proper burial for their mutual friend, where to purchase a decent gravesite, and how best to transport her remains. At the same time the letters also contain details about Wu’s and Xu’s own lives, the kind of “extraneous details” usually excised from scholarly accounts or historical narratives. One letter by Xu apologizes for missing a meeting with Wu as she had just received word that her daughter, Rong, was acutely ill. After a lapse of two months, her next letter informs Wu that she has found a perfect burial plot for Qiu Jin by the West Lake; also mentioned in this letter, briefly, is Rong’s death—the brevity belies her barely contained grief. Wu wrote back immediately, offering words of condolence from one mother to another (“How inhumane is heaven to rob you of your beloved?!”) and giving her consent to Xu’s choice of burial plot. The letter ends with an apology for delaying a meeting, as Wu herself was bedridden with illness.

Everything suddenly came alive: no longer was Qiu Jin a revered martyr far removed from common mortals but someone’s real friend. Real enough that, as Wu and Xu dealt with their own lives and misfortunes, they spoke of missing her teasing voice and the physical presence of her scintillating personality; they spoke of their own palpable pain in imagining her vulnerability at the last minute. And, across a century, I felt their intense sense of responsibility to her. The loss of Xu’s daughter is a private tragedy, her name long forgotten by others. In a way her death belongs

to the “nongrievable deaths” because it could not be considered publicly significant. Yet, when mentioned in the same breath as Qiu Jin’s highly politicized death, the pain of a private tragedy made Qiu Jin’s death painfully real in a way that the standard archives and histories could not. After all Qiu Jin at one time also belonged to the “nongrievables” because she was condemned as a criminal. Had it not been for Wu’s and Xu’s initial efforts of burial and commemoration, Qiu Jin’s name might never have become so well known. Her body, unclaimed after her execution, was merely a criminal body discarded anonymously. What came into focus as I read Wu and Xu’s correspondence was the powerful friendship between these women, a friendship that had a transformative effect, personally and historically.

This book is a study of three lives, a linked biography of Qiu Jin, Wu Zhiying, and Xu Zihua. Rather than attempting to tell the full stories of their lives, I follow the (much too) grand precedent of the great Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–86 BCE) and attend to the linkedness between the lives. In such a linked biography (hezhuan 合傳), as one Sima Qian scholar aptly observes, each life story “is not to be read as a single document providing a single focus of interest but as part of a larger design.” The “larger design,” for my purpose, is the study of an enduring friendship. Thus the intersections of their lives are at the heart of this book, particularly the poignant expressions of their friendship found in Wu’s and Xu’s mourning for Qiu Jin. Even parts of the book that deal with individual stories, when their lives diverged from one another, are intended to be read as parallel story lines, their different choices as revealing as their unexpected similarities. Through the cross-references of comparison and contrast, each life is illuminated by the others, revealing dimensions not otherwise visible. Thus their friendship provides us precious insights into how Wu, Xu, and Qiu experienced and responded to the seismic shock of cultural transformation brought by the onset of modernity.

The format of a linked biography is particularly well suited to address the challenges presented by writing Qiu Jin’s life. In the chapters to come, readers will find that I do not try to reconstruct her life seamlessly, nor

8. The concept of the “nongrievable death” comes from Butler, Precarious Life.
have I followed the Grand Historian's example of “bringing to life people of the past with their feelings, words, and deeds intact.” My choice is not chiefly based on a postmodern suspicion of the inaccessibility of inner lives but stems from my wariness of the web of hagiographical conventions that surrounds Qiu Jin’s story in which my own narrative may become inextricably caught. For death elicits a eulogistic response from survivors; when a death is as horrendous as Qiu Jin’s, it demands a sublime response commensurate with the intensity of the trauma. Like the proverbial black hole, it draws all the energy that comes close to it, absorbing the gaze of bystanders, friends, and later students of history, obscuring the rest of her life as well as the presence of those around her. This eulogistic tendency is further compounded by Qiu Jin’s exalted status as a patriotic martyr, as her commemoration has been closely tied to the history of modern China. In most accounts her life has been retroactively accorded a causality and coherence consistent with later versions of the larger historical narrative. Even the very chronology and basic details of her life exist in heavily edited form: the martyr, singular in her enlightenment and exception to her own kind, her life an inexorable drive toward its heroic end.

To avoid reproducing this familiar legend, I approach Qiu Jin obliquely in the following pages. Seen in the company of her close friends, her life takes on a shape considerably different from the legend found in countless history books, not yet adorned with the halo of sanctity that she would later acquire. From this oblique angle, her life is a bit less neat and somewhat less exceptional; her friends’ affection toward her renders Qiu both more tangible and less singular. In their company it is easier to see where Qiu Jin came from, her aspirations and disillusionments, the resources that enabled her unconventional choices, as well as the price she paid for them. Wu’s and Xu’s powerful devotion to her commands us to see Qiu Jin in flesh and blood again, stepping out of the marble sculpture, as it were.

Yet even here my attempt is not entirely successful. As we will see in later chapters, there was already a mythologizing tendency in Wu’s and Xu’s memoirs, which were written soon after Qiu Jin’s death with
the intent of serving as correctives to the official record. Violent death and official condemnation compelled Wu and Xu to become eulogists, making them the first authors of the Qiu Jin legend. Their words would be quoted time and again by later writers, not always with attribution, and usually taken as straight fact rather than the counternarratives that they originally were.

A still more oblique angle is to approach Qiu Jin not through her presence, but through her absence. It is an absence of such significance that one is tempted to say that her life, like that of the tragic hero, “unfolds from death.” Thus our main story line begins with her death, climaxes in Wu’s and Xu’s works of mourning, and concludes with seven more burials of her remains throughout the twentieth century. In this unsettling chronicle of her long afterlife, we see Qiu Jin’s continued utility and special efficacy in the malleability of her legend as the narrative of her life was deployed by different people at crucial moments in modern Chinese history. Her commemoration reveals the pattern of changing political tides in modern China, as her legacy migrated from close women friends to local elites and then to national leaders such as Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925), Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), and Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898–1976), all key players in the political arena of twentieth-century China. Each advocated a particular kind of public memory for Qiu Jin, hitched to a particular vision of the modern Chinese nation.

Aside from providing the historical arc, Qiu Jin’s story serves a special purpose in this study as it propels the lesser known lives of Wu Zhiying and Xu Zihua into my narrative scope, “like fleas riding on the tail of a swift horse,” as the Grand Historian said of his subjects Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊. At a different time and place Virginia Woolf was concerned with a similar question: “Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life worthy of biography—the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious?” The modern American historian Susan Dunn continues the inquiry by asking a rhetorical question: “Do insignificant lives on the margins of great events merit their own memorials?” Whereas Woolf’s answer may be yes, Dunn’s is a qualified no. The principal objection is that small lives lived under severe limita-

tion cannot be made to explain how and why major historical changes occur. Sima Qian answered the same question from a different angle. Not so much wishing to give voice to the voiceless as modern historians are wont to do, he had wanted instead to “rescue from oblivion the ephemeral intent of worthy beings . . . those whose action may not have borne fruit.” Thus he wrote the biographies of Boyi and Shuqi, whose lives and deaths admittedly did not affect the course of history but whose tenacity in holding onto ancient principles made them worthy. Wu and Xu are worthy subjects for my study for their brave action in rescuing their friend’s name from oblivion, but still more they are worthy of study for their audacious use of tradition and innovative response to the challenges of modernity. Hardly voiceless, Wu and Xu deployed traditional cultural resources to create powerful voices of their own in responding to the beginning of a century of revolution. In the shifting landscape of Qing literature, they can be said to belong to different camps—Wu aligned with the Tongcheng School, known for its orthodox Confucian morality, its practice of the “classical essay,” and its preference for Song dynasty poetry; Xu closely associated with the Southern Society, with its revolutionary ethos, preference for parallel prose, and advocacy of Tang dynasty poetry. And yet, rather than paying obeisance to the high cultural institutions as male preserves, Wu proclaimed herself the rightful heir of the Tongcheng, and Xu played a key role in the development of the Southern Society. Even more significant, both broke with the narrow confines of their respective “schools” to create their own literary voices. In their company the iconoclastic Qiu Jin can be seen dipping into a wide range of cultural reserves even as she fiercely denounced certain parts of those traditions. Thus, in examining the arc of these three lives, we are revisiting the very premises of Chinese modernity, the role of women in that process, and the utility of the multifaceted tradition in its unfolding.

Understanding the meanings of Wu’s, Xu’s, and Qiu’s public intervention depends on a restoration of the historical specificities of their world and their frame of reference, which in turn requires a suspension of our habitual dismissal of “traditional” cultural modes as irrelevant to discussions of modernity.

Wu, Xu, and Qiu were born within a few years of one another in the late 1860s and 1870s. Growing up in the years immediately after the Taiping
Rebellion (1850–64), they were the heirs of an elite culture vividly portrayed in Susan Mann’s study of three generations of the talented Zhang women. As cherished daughters of literati families, they learned to wield their brush in poetry and calligraphy with ease as literary women had done for hundreds of years in late imperial China. Continuing the trend of the gradual expansion of women’s learning, their education went well beyond the basic moral primers for women to include the Confucian classics, history, poetry, and even the high scholarship of the *Book of Changes*. Like the young students instructed by the last of the Zhang women, our protagonists received “this culture of ours” with an added urgency as their forebears redoubled their efforts at preserving tradition after the destruction of the Taiping years.¹⁴

But the world of the Zhang women was no more, buried in the rubble of the Taiping Rebellion; the world of the New Woman would not arrive for another generation, that of the daughters of our protagonists. Although in their upbringing and education Wu, Xu, and Qiu may not have been much different from generations of literati daughters, in adulthood they faced tremendous upheaval and change, a world that would have been unrecognizable to their forebears. Theirs was a time of great anxiety as well as tremendous hope: fear of large-scale chaos, of China’s dismemberment by Western powers, but also hopes for a new political and social order and a new historical era. In her twenties Wu Zhiying experienced in 1898 the Hundred Days Reform that ended in a coup d’état; in 1900 she personally witnessed at close range the Boxer Uprising and the ensuing yearlong foreign occupation of the capital. It was in response to Russia’s 1903 incursion into northeast China that Qiu Jin took on the persona of the swordsman, a role she would faithfully play to the end of her life. From cosmopolitan cities to provincial towns, new schools were being established. By the turn of the century, even scholars bent on preserving traditional culture would proclaim that “the entire world is in a state of such turmoil that a person who does not have western learning cannot be called talented.”¹⁵ To acquire Western learning, Qiu Jin joined the waves of young people who went to Japan, leaving

¹⁴. I borrow the term from Peter Bol’s translation of Confucius’ term describing the shared culture of the Chinese elite and its changing definitions. Bol, *This Culture of Ours*.

behind her husband and two children. She returned to teach at a newly opened women’s school, where she met Xu Zihua as a colleague.

This was also a time of unprecedented explosion of new information and new ideas. In 1897 Yan Fu’s translation of Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* shook the literati world with its social Darwinist theory and implications for national and racial survival. The recently imported news media carried daily reports on such events as Russia’s incursion into northeast China, the partition of Poland, and the Philippine Revolution. Leading intellectuals such as Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) made impassioned pleas for the reformation of Chinese citizenry and pointed especially to women’s lowly status as a major hindrance to national strength. Periodicals ran lengthy sketches (often accompanied by images) of such Western female icons as the Russian anarchist Sofia Perovskaia (1853–81), famous for her assassination of Tsar Aleksandr II, and Madame Roland (1754–93), leader of the Girondists in the French Revolution, later put to the guillotine by the more radical Marat. Womanhood was in the process of being imagined anew, and our protagonists each tried out different models, some imported from the West, some inherited from generations before them, some nebulous ones they themselves were in the process of creating and that later generations would call the New Woman, the woman revolutionary, or the woman professional. In editorials in her feminist magazine *Chinese Women’s Journal*, Qiu Jin called for Chinese women to emulate new Western models as well as women warriors from China’s past. Soon enough she herself would join the pantheon and become a new icon, incorporated into the founding legend of the Republic.

Even more than in letters and newspaper articles, it is in poetry that we hear the voices of Wu, Xu, and Qiu most distinctly. Poetry was an integral part of education for generations of literati women in late imperial China, and poetic composition marked Wu, Xu, and Qiu as high achievers in the cultural sphere: cainü 才女, or talented women. This tradition, however, was beginning to draw fire around the turn of the century. When the influential reformer Liang Qichao called for a “poetic revolution,” he targeted cainü verse as the embodiment of “feeble” tradition. Many at the time advocated the invigoration of traditional poetry

17. See Liang, *Xiaweyi youji* (Travels to Hawaii), in *Yinbing shi heji: zhuangji*, 22, and “Lun nüxue” (On women’s learning), in *Yinbing shi heji: wenji*, 1:37–44. For a discussion
through an infusion of modern sentiments and foreign vocabulary.\textsuperscript{18} In Qiu Jin’s most anthologized poems, those on the sword or against foot-binding, we see evidence of her effort to address current issues and to distance herself from styles that may appear “effeminate.” When the late Qing “poetic revolution” was succeeded by the still more effective call for vernacular poetry in the 1920s, such new values as lucid diction, absence of allusions, and nonconformity to convention came to dominate the evaluation and reception of modern and traditional poetry alike.\textsuperscript{19} Against the context of this powerful discourse, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that, to Wu Zhiying, Xu Zihua, and to a large extent Qiu Jin as well, the practice of poetic composition meant more than technical competence and normative cultural literacy. It also signaled their unwillingness to relinquish poetry’s historical roots. These roots tapped into a vast intellectual and aesthetic tradition, including the more recent development of the “poet-historian” persona prominent in Qing poetry.\textsuperscript{20} Drawing on a rich stock of poetic voices, our protagonists wrote themselves into being, creating selves that were sometimes uncertain, sometimes conflicted, but searching and vibrant overall. At times of personal and national crises, and their lives witnessed plenty of those, poetry provided them an invaluable means of effective aesthetic response.\textsuperscript{21}

Even as poetry functioned as a kind of technology of the self for our protagonists, their self-realization or transformation was significantly accomplished with each other’s help. Contrary to the Romantic notion of the solitary poet whose lyric “is overheard,” a popular Western notion

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\textsuperscript{18} For a study of the most successful practitioner in this tradition, Huang Zunxian, see Schmidt, \textit{Within the Human Realm}.
\textsuperscript{19} See Owen, “End of the Past.”
\textsuperscript{20} Irving Lo and William Schultz identify “historical-mindedness” as one of the three major characteristics of Qing poetry. See their introduction to \textit{Waiting for the Unicorn}. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that this characteristic applies to women poets as well. See Wai-ye Li, “Women Writers”; Mann, “Lady and the State.”
\textsuperscript{21} Recent scholarship has made a trenchant argument for the relevance of traditional poetry in responding to modern experience. See Shengqing Wu, \textit{Modern Archaics}; Kowallis, \textit{Subtle Revolution}.
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that would gain currency in twentieth-century China, our poets typically wrote with a distinct sense of readership. Many of the poems in the following pages were letter-poems written expressly for a particular addressee; others were sent to multiple readers or reworked at different times for different recipients. When they first began their acquaintance—as wives of sojourning officials for Wu and Qiu, and as teaching colleagues for Xu and Qiu—composing verse “in harmony” (changhe 唱和) was in itself an exercise in getting better acquainted, each change of rhyming scheme a polite challenge to the other woman’s versifying skill, as if testing each other’s ability in performing the highly stylized steps of a courtship dance. As their friendship matured, occasional poetry functioned like a more elaborate form of social media that accompanied and cemented various aspects of a developing friendship, including gatherings and parties, the exchanges of presents, and the rituals of sworn sisterhood. In its author’s expectation of a specific audience, a poem is thus not unlike a letter or a group letter, or perhaps a modern-day blog. In contrast to the notion of a poet’s spontaneous revelation that the reader somehow “overheard,” a poem on missing a friend was likely sent to the absent one, and even a poem lamenting a lack of true friends might have been written for actual friends, where the lament acted to confirm the unique value of the recipients. Indeed, such a poem might be said to apostrophize the true friend/perfect reader into existence. Even when the poet appeared to be most inward looking, when she was deeply involved in constructing a self-identity in her lyric, her audience was not far away. The lyrical and the social existed side by side, as the poet’s adoption of a given identity was announced in poetry and thereby enacted in front of her friends/readers as she strived toward a communally recognized identity.

Like poets of the past, our protagonists also wrote many verses on leave taking, a much favored motif within the tradition of friendship poetry. Yet their friendship did not have the luxury of mellowing with age: at the time of Qiu Jin’s death, Wu had known her for five years and Xu, just over a year. Indeed, with their ominous oath and pledge well ahead of Qiu Jin’s execution, their friendship seemed to have been preparing for parting, including the ultimate parting. And it is in the

22. The locus classicus of this notion can be found in John Stuart Mill’s 1833 essay “What Is Poetry?” in which he distinguishes poetry, which is “overheard,” from “eloquence . . . which supposes an audience.” Mill, Essays on Poetry, 12.
elegies by Wu Zhiying and Xu Zihua that we find the most poignant expression of their friendship. Filled with grief and anger, their elegies turned mourning into trenchant social and political protest. These works of mourning thus defied the finality of death and preserved Qiu Jin's name in history. Having earlier witnessed Qiu Jin's choice of public personas, Wu and Xu honored this choice by interpreting the outcome of her life and transmitting her story to posterity according to these personas. They thus fulfilled the call of friendship in the two senses delineated by the Grand Historian: to rescue from oblivion the intent of one whose action may not have borne fruit and to be the necessary intermediaries who record the ephemeral intent.

Although our protagonists belong to the last generation of women educated solely in traditional Chinese culture, they were not “lame-duck” inheritors of this tradition but gave it a brilliant flowering. When Wu Zhiying contended for women's vital part in grand historical transformation, for example, her extensive references to the *Book of Changes* legitimized Qiu Jin's life and transformed classical scholarship at the same time. Even as she appeared to defend vigorously the orthodoxy of tradition, she claimed her right to this tradition with a forthrightness rarely seen before and plundered it for unconventional uses. Her own daughters, girls born around the turn of the twentieth century, would study such Western-imported subjects as geography, chemistry, and world history in their early education and acquire an entirely new vocabulary and, perhaps more important, a different organization of knowledge. They would grow up to be the first generation of New Women, like the more famous Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–99) and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–84) of the May Fourth era. The new system of knowledge would rapidly become the dominant frame of reference for all cultural discourse, making it increasingly difficult to understand how, barely a decade or two earlier, women of their mother's generation had made highly creative, even audacious, use of tradition in response to radical historical changes.23

What makes our protagonists unique is their simultaneous closeness to and distance from us, another two or three generations after the New

23. Several recent studies of women of the late Qing generation make similar observations. See Qian Nanxiu, “Poetic Reform,” 1–48; Fong, “Alternative Modernities,” 12–59.
Women. Trained in a culture whose framework was fundamentally different from our own, Wu, Xu, and Qiu are, on the one hand, in many ways closer to us than the generations of literati women that preceded them because they had to wrestle with issues and problems particular to the modern world. On the other hand, what to us are routine activities—such as public education for women and the ease of traveling in China and abroad—were to them brand new phenomena. Still weightier issues confronted them: revolution or reform, democracy or constitutional monarchy. To see how they responded to these challenges is to observe modernity from a perspective formed before modern times and according to different values and different conventions. The writings they left behind provide a vivid picture of how individuals at the time understood the concrete experiences of modernity, how those experiences were articulated through traditional art forms, and how individuals transformed the cultural traditions they invoked even while maintaining deep cultural roots.