



The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph)

Yenna Wu

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Drawing from literary, historical, dramatic, and anecdotal sources, Yenna Wu conducts a rich exploration of an unusually prominent theme in premodern Chinese prose fiction and drama: that of jealous and belligerent wives, or viragos, who dominate their husbands and abuse other women. Focusing on Chinese literary works from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, she presents many colorful perspectives on this type of aggression, reviewing early literary and historical examples of the phenomenon.

Wu argues that although the various portraits of the virago often reveal the writers' insecurities about strong-willed women in general, the authors also satirize the kind of man whose behavioral patterns have been catalysts for female aggression. She shows that various elements of these portraits constitute a subversive form of parody that casts a revealing light on the patriarchal hierarchy of premodern China.

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