Different Worlds of Discourse is a collection of essays exploring a wide range of questions about gender, literature and the new print media in late Qing. Most focus on a period that had been understudied until recently, the Reform era (1895-1912). Traditionally this has been represented in the historiography of China as “either a ‘transitional’ period between the death of the ‘traditional’ Confucian imperial order and the enlightened embrace of ‘modern’ ideas in the ‘New Culture Movement’ or as the first stage in a process by which Chinese political and social values were challenged and eventually replaced by Western ideas” (p. 2). More critical studies that have emerged since the 1990s have tended to emphasize the state-sponsored reform movements or the influence of famous reformers, such as Liang Qichao or Kang Youwei. This volume makes an important contribution to this body of scholarship because it draws on a much broader range of sources and voices and complicates the view that reformers, intellectuals and writers of the Reform era were caught between tradition and modernity, the Chinese and the Western. The collection as a whole shows that cultural discourse was vibrant during the late Qing and most participants were actively absorbing and experimenting with new and old ideas.

Moreover, Different Worlds of Discourse focuses on gender. The late Qing was an important period as women began to emerge into the public space, as writers, scholars, heroines in literature, as well as objects of male gaze in pictorials. The collection shows
that women took up new roles in literature, society and the cultural world, demonstrating that gender is an indispensable category of analysis for revisiting the Reform era as a period of cultural vitality. This is reflected in the wide variety of literary genres and forms in which women participated, including poetry, biography, narrative literature, scholarly commentaries on the classics, as well as periodicals and pictorials.

Part I, Transformations of Gender Roles, starts with Harriet Zurndorfer’s examination of the Qing female scholar, Wang Zhaoyuan (1763-1851), and Liang Qichao’s refusal to acknowledge her as a kaozheng scholar. By doing so, Zurndorfer shows that while Liang was generally regarded as an early political advocate of women’s rights, he dismissed the contribution of women in the realm of scholarship. Hu Ying’s chapter discusses Wu Zhiying (1868-1934), a close associate of the anti-Qing revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin (1875-1907). Unlike most cainü, who were skilled in writing, or revolutionary heroines such as Qiu Jin, Wu used calligraphy to express her artistic talents and engage with spiritual needs. Grace S. Fong studies another associate of Qiu Jin, Lü Bicheng, who was a famous poet of the ci genre and one of the first women to use travel writing to explore subjectivity, modernity and space. Both Hu Ying’s and Grace S. Fong’s chapters demonstrate that female subjectivity was not restricted to political activism, but also exhibited in literary and artistic practices. Xiaoping Cong’s chapter traces the development of female teachers and female normal schools in the late Qing. She argues that female education evolved from the nurturing of talented women among gentry families, which was an important role assigned to mothers.
Part II, Transformations of Genres, examines the construction of women’s images and the way in which these were tied to changing literary genres in the late Qing. Joan Judge’s chapter shows how foreign women’s biographies were introduced in new-style textbooks, women’s journals and compilations to inculcate ideals of heroism, patriotism and social commitment among literate women. Most of the biographies were translations based on Japanese texts, and Judge argues that they were “new creations, products of the Chinese cultural imaginary as much as the result of foreign borrowing” (p. 148). In her chapter, Jing Tsu discusses the development of the image of the female assassin, which shaped visions of radical female political heroism in a variety of late Qing fiction genres, including nation-saving, idealist and science fiction. Ellen Widmer’s chapter continues her work on the novelist, Zhan Kai, who used the penname Siqi Zhai. Widmer analyzes his 1907 novel, Bihai zhu (Jewels in an Azure Sea), which tried to depict the character of a courtesan as a modern-minded patriot to inspire imagined elite women readers during the late Qing crisis.

The focus of Part III, The Production of Gender and Genres in New Print Media, is the emergence of the press and its relationship with women. Rudolf Wagner’s chapter discusses the Shenbaoguan Publications, which included one of the most important Chinese-language newspapers at that time, the Shenbao, and their influence on women’s education and rights. Wagner argues that between 1872 and 1890 these publications reflected many Scottish Enlightenment ideas because of the influence of the Shenbaoguan’s manager, Ernest Major. Nanxiu Qian contends in her chapter that the 1898 Nü xuebao was eclipsed by its daughter publication because of the change in discourses on women’s political roles. The earlier journal reflected a preoccupation with women who stressed the importance of knowledge acquisition above national
strengthening, whereas the later journal (published in 1902) emphasized a more militaristic style of patriotism. *Xia Xiaohong* discusses the late Qing feminist He Zhen’s (1884-?) transformation from a critic of sexual inequality to an uncompromising anarchist, who condemned any practical approaches to women’s liberation. In her chapter, *Chen Pingyuan* traces changes in social attitudes towards women’s education and the public appearance of women through the portrayals of female students in pictorials. Finally, in her essay, *Siao-chen Hu* examines the construction of gender and genre in *The Ladies’ Journal* in the 1910s. She shows that while male writers and editors tried to preserve the spirit of tradition because of their own nostalgia, women writers were eager to transcend the conventional women’s literature by exploring old and new trends.

Overall, this *Different Worlds of Discourse* succeeds in showing the vibrant cultural scene and the diversity of discourses in the late Qing. It makes an important contribution to our understanding and opens up new terrain for further investigation. This work breaks new ground in gender studies, literary and media studies as well as social history. It is also easily accessible to readers who are not experts on Qing China. Each chapter is fascinating in its own right and would be of interest to readers from a wide range of disciplines. Given the broad spectrum of the collection and the innovative studies included, I think it should be considered one of the standard works on gender discourse in the late Qing.

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