Abstract

Even as a child, Qiu Jin (1877-1907) had a melancholic disposition. Hers was an angry grief, as may be surmised from her pseudonymous: “Jingxiong” which means “bravery adversary” and “Jianhu Nuxia” or “Woman Warrior of the Clear Lake”. The stubborn nature, which she displayed as a young girl, remained with her all her life. Uninhibited, quick-witted, diligent as an eloquent poet, she eschewed the study of embroidery and went about with unbound feet. She learned horse riding, sword dancing and Chinese boxing in place of conventional feminine arts. After she witnessed and experienced the unjustified treatment by the then highly conservative society, her sorrow was reserved for the servile status of women in Chinese society. Her distress deepened when she witnessed the subjugation of China by foreigners, aided by a corrupted Qing government. She saw the way foreigners abused their power and the contemptible weakness of the Chinese government. Therefore, she set her heart to bring about a change in the political, social and cultural aspects in her beloved country.

Apart from unveiling Qiu Jin’s outer world, which is her life story, this academic exercise also seeks to explore her inner world through her poetic works, which were largely left undiscovered for almost a century. This paper thus also attempts to establish a correlation between her poetic composition with her inspirational life experiences. These influences include her family background, accumulation of knowledge, the corrupted society that she lived in and several phases of her life when she witnessed the sufferings of her people in her motherland. In addition, her unhappy marriage life, her life acquaintances who deeply motivated and influenced her, her life in Japan as a female Chinese student, as well as the activities which she indulged during the period after her return from Japan until her death, also form part of her aspiring influence. All these factors attributed to the change in her literary compositions, where she emerged from a suppressed individual to a female warrior of the 20th century.
The center of this study will revolve around the discussion on Qiujin’s poetic works—her poems as well as her poetry *ci*. They will also be discussed in accordance to 2 different time frames—her earlier and her later poetic works in the next 2 chapters and then be further divided into 8 literary themes. After browsing through her collection of works, her major poetic characteristics and writing style will be unraveled in the following section. The unique style and flair that she possessed, makes her stand out from the many male and female poets during her time. Besides her commendable literary talent, her contribution as a female revolutionist is also well received and highly regarded by many famous political figures and literate in her country and beyond, even after her death. Finally, in the concluding chapter, Qiujin’s contributions will be highlighted. She led her life as a reigned revolutionist who was concerned with the plight of her nation and a feminist who devoted her efforts to elevate the status of women in China. Other than that, she was also an outstanding poet who is known to produce famous and influential poems and poetry *ci*, to express her inner feelings and great anxiety for her nation’s future. Hence, Qiujin is deserving of her reputation as one of the peerless females in the history of modern China.