

## **Historical Figures Encyclopedia Entries**

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### Qiu MiaoJin

#### Introduction

Qiu MiaoJin was born in Changhua, Taiwan on May 29, 1969 (Zinamon, 2022a). She attended Taipei First Girls' High school and then National Taiwan University where she studied Psychology (Zinamon, 2022a). The political climate while Qiu was in university coincided with the government ending Martial Law which allowed for the Taiwanese people to have more access to free speech (Alice, Irene, & Eli, 2022). The underground groups of queer, feminist and political nature that had formed before sprang forward quickly with the new ability to meet and write visibly (Alice, Irene, & Eli, 2022). Qiu MiaoJin began working after university and wrote for some local newspapers as a hobby which won her a couple of awards. She soon moved to Paris to pursue her graduate degree in psychology and feminism (Zinamon, 2022a). While in Paris, Qiu wrote two novels which are her most popular and renowned works which were explicitly queer. She is known as the "first 'out' lesbian in modern Chinese literature" (Zinamon, 2022b). Her writings were not directly autobiographical but mirrored her life and the time in which she lived (Alice, Irene, & Eli, 2022). She wrote and commented on the struggles internally and socially of the Chinese understanding of "T-po" which is the complex idea of lesbian gender expression, identity, and romantic relationship structures. Eventually, Qiu MiaoJin died in 1995 at 26 by suicide before her second novel was published (Alice, Irene, & Eli, 2022). Since her death, there have been documentaries and sets of her diaries released by friends and fans to commemorate her life and work (Leung 2018; Zinamon, 2022b).

#### Works of Importance

In the late 80's to early 90's Qiu MiaoJin wrote short stories for local newspapers that were mostly political in nature (Alice, Irene, & Eli, 2022). Her first openly queer writing is called "Platonic Hair," a short story that reveals the two main characters were women at the end (Zinamon, 2022a). Qiu's most notable works are *Notes from a Crocodile* and *Last Words from Montemarte*. *Notes from a Crocodile* is a novel about the way queer people and lesbians live in society while still hiding who they truly are so as not to be caught. Its release was around the same time as a media scandal where a reporter outed several queer women publically which tragically resulted in some of those outed dying by suicide (Zinamon, 2022a). *Last Words from Montmartre* was released posthumously and can be read in any order as it is twenty letters from the character's perspective (Zinamon, 2022b). This novel became a cult classic of sorts after Qiu's death since it is her last work left behind at such a young age (Zinamon, 2022b).

### **Impact**

Qiu MiaoJin's writings served as a commentary on her own inner workings and the social conversations of lesbian identities at the time. A quote from her novel translated by Bonnie Huie, *Notes from a Crocodile*, featured in *Turning Points: Women Writers from Taiwan*, revealed some of the tension of her wrestling with gender expression, gender identity, and sexuality:

"Two very different types of people, mutual attraction. And for what reason? It's hard to believe, this thing beyond the imagination of the chess game known as the human condition. It's based on the gender binary, which stems from the duality of yin and yang, or some unspeakable evil. But humanity says it's a biological construct: penis vs. vagina, chest hair vs. breasts, beard vs. long hair. Penis plus chest hair plus beard equals masculine, vagina plus breasts plus long hair equals feminine. Male plugs into female like key into lock, and as a product of that coupling, babies get punched out. That product is the only object that will fill a square on the chessboard. All that is neither masculine nor feminine becomes sexless and is cast into the freezing cold waters outside the line of demarcation, into an even more precisely demarcated zone. Man's greatest suffering is born of his mistreatment by his fellow man." (2016).

Qiu wrote boldly about the Taiwanese concept of “T-po” in her works, writing down what many were grappling over mentally. In the simplest explanation, the “T” in “T-po” represents masculine presenting lesbians and “po” is the Chinese word for wife which represents femme presenting lesbians. “T-po” can represent much more with the “T” being seen as a signifier for trans men as well as the heteronormative gender binary placed on queer relationships and presentation. In *Queer as Fact* (2022), the three hosts discuss the way that the West’s concept of butch and femme also tries to limit the gender expression and identity of lesbians today. Qiu’s writings seem to leave the reader wrestling with their own relationship to society and queerness.

After Qiu’s death there was a uniting of the LGBTQ community that extended her recognition and influence beyond Taiwan through documentaries and translations of her works (Leung, 2018). In the end of the documentary made to honor her life a quote from a former professor states that she “intentionally left the world with her aesthetic creation and had invented life in death and life after death” (Zinamon, 2022b). It is clear to see that many people still revere Qiu’s work and are invested in learning more about her short but meaningful life.

## References

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