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This is the first in-depth study of Chinese bridal laments, a ritual and performative art practiced by Chinese women in premodern times that gave them a rare opportunity to voice their grievances publicly. Drawing on methodologies from numerous disciplines, including performance arts and folk literatures, the author suggests that the ability to move an audience through her lament was one of the most important symbolic and ritual skills a Chinese woman could possess before the modern era. *Performing Grief* provides a detailed case study of the Nanhui region in the lower Yangzi delta. Bridal laments, the author argues, offer insights into how illiterate Chinese women understood the kinship and social hierarchies of their region, the marriage market that determined their destinies, and the value of their labor in the commodified economy of the delta region. The book not only assesses and draws upon a large body of sources, both Chinese and Western, but is grounded in actual field work, offering both historical and ethnographic context in a unique and sophisticated approach. Unlike previous studies, the author covers both Han and non-Han groups and thus contributes to studies of ethnicity and cultural accommodation in China. She presents an original view about the ritual implications of bridal laments and their role in popular notions of "wedding pollution." The volume includes an annotated translation from a lament cycle. This important work on the place of laments in Chinese culture enriches our understanding of the social and performative roles of Chinese women, the gendered nature of China's ritual culture, and the continuous transmission of women's grievance genres into the revolutionary period. As a pioneering study of the ritual and performance arts of Chinese women, it will be of interest to scholars and students in the fields of anthropology, social history, gender studies, oral literature, comparative folk religion, and performance arts.
